

C.S. Lewis on Desiring Death

By: Robert L. Withers

In a letter dated November 5, 1954, Lewis writes a friend:

About death, I go through different moods, but the times when I can *desire* it are never, I think, when this world seems harshest. On the contrary, it is just when there seems to be most of Heaven already here that I come nearest to longing for the *patria*. It is the bright frontispiece [which] whets one to read the story itself. All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasises our pilgrim status: always reminds, beckons, awakes desire. Our best havings are wantings.

This reminds me of Paul's words to the Corinthian Church (2Cor. 5:1ff):

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven...so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

Lewis writes, "Our best havings are wantings." Lewis realized that when he experienced joy that that joy was a foretaste of eternal joy. It was, if you will, eternal joy breaking into the realm of the visible with the purpose of drawing us into the invisible in Christ. Our problem often is that we take joy and reduce it to something we consume, rather than asking ourselves, "What does this joy mean? What of the eternal is it communicating to me? What longing in my heart is this joy fulfilling?"

To chase after the experience of joy in the things of this life, thinking that we will be ultimately fulfilled by the things of this world, is as a man or woman in a desert chasing after one mirage after another. But, when touching and experiencing joy in this life we learn to recognize that we are touching something drawing us onward and upward into our eternal joy in Christ; that is when joy is sacramental, that is when joy grows the sons and daughters of God, that is when our desire for Heaven can transform us from glory to glory.

Contra Lewis's experience, there are times when the hardships and sufferings of life also awaken a desire for Heaven; one has to only taste the Negro Spirituals birthed in the pathos of slavery to recognize that; and many of us have had seasons of life in which, sapped of earthly hope and strength, we have longed for Heaven. It is good to know that "this is not all there is".

In a society that emphasizes pleasure and enjoyment, as opposed to joy, it is good to remind ourselves that when we touch true joy that we are touching Heaven; and that we should not profane that joy by thinking it something we can capture, requiring it to serve us; but should rather let it do its perfect work within us, leading us onward and upward to the Lamb who gave His life for us.