

SUICIDE

How

God

Sustained

a Family

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DALE A. BYERS

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DEDICATION

It is with joy this book is dedicated to

Kevin, Scott, Paul and John,

our four living sons.

They are honorable men

who have brought many fond

and wonderful memories to their parents.

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*And I will give thee the
treasures of darkness,
and hidden riches of
secret places, that thou
mayest know that I, the
LORD, which call thee by
thy name, am the God of
Israel (Isaiah 45:3).*

INTRODUCTION

My heart was rejoicing as the church service closed in that little Jamaican church. It was the first time for me to minister in a foreign culture and, oh, what a blessing! As we stepped outside that primitive little church snuggled under the tropical trees and dense undergrowth alongside the road that winds around those Jamaican mountains, we were aware that this humble spot was precious to God and that we were on holy ground. The pastor turned out the lights of the church and walked toward the parsonage, which sat behind this little sanctuary. I remained stationary, waiting for something that would give me bearings as to my location. Suddenly I was aware of the heavy darkness that surrounded that Jamaican place of worship. There was a noticeable absence of street lights and passing automobiles. There were no flashing marquees or billboards nor even the beams of light that stream from the comforts of home. It seemed totally dark.

Suddenly I lifted my eyes heavenward and was awestruck by the beauties above me. Never had I seen stars so big and so bright; they were like huge gems lying in a case of black velvet. It was almost disappointing when the parsonage lights came on and again we had our earthly bearings. Indeed, there are treasures of darkness.

That same week I walked along the shoreline of the Caribbean Sea with James Chambers, a Jamaican friend. Another pastor had asked if I might talk with James and encourage him spiritually. While we left the prints of our bare feet in the white sand along the blue-green waters of the sea, he poured out his heart to me concerning the utter discouragement that followed the death of his eleven-year-old

daughter. He had been so devastated he felt he could continue no longer. Then his fourteen-year-old son lay down beside him in bed with these words of encouragement and exhortation: “You have to let her go, Daddy. She is in Heaven with Jesus. We have got to let her go!”

James did begin a period of recovery, but it was short-lived. The son who had exhorted him was tragically killed in an accident at school. James had lost two children in a very short period of time!

Later James came to the United States because he was losing much of his eyesight. The American doctors at the clinic told him he should learn to live with what eyesight he had.

If anyone had ever needed the grace of God in his life, James did. He is a believer in Christ, and his love and faith are being measured as few men experience.

I made a feeble attempt to comfort him that day and encouraged him to trust God and to look to the Lord Jesus every day for strength. We have become close friends; and I have called him, written to him and prayed regularly for God’s overcoming power in his life.

Less than a year after my return from Jamaica I, too, was to learn what darkness is all about. God had blessed our home with five sons. The desire of my heart has always been for my children to love the Lord Jesus. It was my joy as a pastor to see all of them profess Christ and follow the Lord in baptism. But our third son became wayward and rejected the principles upon which I attempted to build my home. Kerry’s life was a downward spiral that we could not reverse.

Even though he lived in the same city, he did not live at home. Following a two-year stint in the military, he was divorced and disappointed with life. He then committed suicide on what would have been his third wedding anniversary. We did not immediately realize he was missing; however, after a ten-day lapse of time my two youngest sons found his body in a little woods near the parsonage.

The darkness of that hour and the days that followed have enveloped our family much like the darkness enveloped that little Jamaican church. We have always been a close family, and this darkness—such as we had never known

before—drew us even closer together.

My words to James had come so easily: “Trust God, James, and look to Him for daily strength.” Now I had to learn how hard it sometimes is to look up when we have lost our earthly bearings in the darkness.

May I say at the onset, I do trust God; and whatever has happened, God knew all about it before it came to pass. God has been faithful! His promises remain true, and His people have been wonderfully kind to me and my family. I have no bitterness, resentment or doubt of God. I have only a deep hurt and a new awareness of how dense the darkness can become.

As a young man I was an offset printing pressman. At times while I worked the night shift during the summer months, I never saw the night sky. Those were times when the heavens were always light to me; darkness was something I did not observe. The 6:00 P.M. to 5:00 A.M. shifts sheltered me from the night scenes. But only during the night scenes are we permitted to observe the heavenly beauties above us.

Our great God also has heavenly beauties that we observe only during the dark night seasons of our lives. Only then are we permitted to fathom the fullness and the glories of our great God and Savior.

“I will give thee the treasures of darkness.” This message is not about darkness and death. It is about light and life. It is intended to help those going through the shadow of death to gaze into the heavenly beauties of our glorious Redeemer.

The Soul’s Anchors

The night is dark, but God, my God,
Is here and in command,
And sure am I, when morning breaks,
I shall be at the land.
And since I know the darkness is
To Him as sunniest day,
I’ll cast the anchor Patience out,
And wish—but wait for day.

Fierce drives the storm, but wind and waves
 Within His hand are held,
And trusting His omnipotence,
 My fears are sweetly quelled.
If wrecked, I'm in His faithful grasp,
 I'll trust Him though He slay;
So, letting go the anchor Faith,
 I'll wish—but wait for day.

Still seem the moments dreary, long?
 I rest upon the Lord;
I muse on His “eternal years”
 And feast upon His word;
His promises so rich and great,
 Are my support and stay;
I'll drop the anchor Hope ahead,
 And wish—but wait for day.

O Wisdom infinite, O Light
 And Love supreme, divine,
How can I feel one fluttering doubt
 In hands so dear as Thine!
I'll lean on Thee, my best beloved,
 My heart on Thy heart lay;
And casting out the anchor Love,
 I'll wish—and wait for day.

—*Helen E. Brown*
As published in the
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(May–June 1968)

CHAPTER 1

In the Darkness of Death Shines the Radiance of the Resurrection

After Kerry's death my wife, three of my sons and I began the very difficult task of sorting through Kerry's personal items. We discovered that we had saved many trinkets and mementos of all five boys. Some of the little keepsakes and belongings had to go. For many people, material things are what life is all about; but the Bible reminds us that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

As I picked up some of his belongings, my first thoughts were, "We can't throw that away. He will need it later on." My wife similarly would think for a second, "His children will enjoy seeing this someday." However, time and again we were brought back to reality; Kerry would not need these things, and he would have no children to see these "treasures." Our son's earthly life was completed in only twenty-five short years.

Death is a sobering reality. As finite humans we attempt to reason it away. We pigeonhole it to the lives of others. We do not want to accept death for ourselves or our loved ones. The answer to our reluctance is to see death from God's perspective, not from any earthly point of view. When the

darkness of death is overwhelming, we must lift our eyes heavenward and see the bright hope of the resurrection. Listen to what Christ has promised:

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25, 26).

The world tells us that death is the last note, that there is no more song at the grave. But the place where the world loses all hope and joy is where Christ gives victory.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55–57).

Perhaps it seems strange that this book begins at the resurrection. Why do I not wait until the end, since death is the “last enemy” to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26)? The answer is that the resurrection is the place where we *must* begin. It is the starting place for our comfort, our consolation and the power to climb life’s mountains (Ephesians 1:19, 20). The resurrection is the starting point for our healing, our help and our hope. Death is only a rest in the music. More song is going on right now. Much more song is to follow.

The resurrection of the dead is one of the foundation stones of the Christian faith. It is not until the physical death of a loved one or the threat of death to our own life that we realize how glorious and bright the resurrection is. That truth is not learned in the sunny skies and comforts of life. The apostle Paul’s goal was to learn that truth practically. The desire of his heart was this:

That I may know him, and the power of his

resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (Philippians 3:10).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ sets Christianity apart from every other religion. Buddha, Confucius, Stalin and every other prominent figure on earth has followed the course of the earth and died; only Jesus Christ conquered death. And perhaps no other event in history is as thoroughly documented as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹

But I am not writing a mere apologetic for the Christian faith. I am writing to hurting hearts. Since it is true that Christ arose from the grave, we derive our comfort through the great resurrection promises He has given us.

And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power (1 Corinthians 6:14).

The Lord Himself said, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). As surely as Christ arose from the grave, those who believe on Him shall also live forever.

The Bible identifies the Lord Jesus as the bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16). What a description! After the long dark night, that bright light appears in the heavens. Peter also wrote about his own impending death (2 Peter 1:14, 15) and then recalled the day on the Mount of Transfiguration when he saw Jesus in His transcendent glory:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

Think of it—“A light that shineth in a dark place.” You may now be in a place of awesome darkness that is heavy and

frightening; but the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a bright and glorious light.

The Bible assures us that when Christ appears, a great reunion of those who have died in Christ will take place with those who are still living at the time (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). We are told that while we as believers may sorrow in this life over the separation from saved loved ones, we sorrow not as others who have no hope. There will be a reunion, and what comfort this should give us.

My mind recalls so distinctly the day I picked up our children at the Christian school when we lived in Indianapolis. As usual Kerry was the first of my sons to come rushing out the school doors. He bounced into the backseat with his usual burst of energy. When he leaned over the back of my seat, I noticed tears in his eyes. It was evident he had been crying. Almost immediately he said, “Dad, I know I have said this before, but today I really got saved.” The Life Action Ministries had conducted the chapel services, and God used that group to bring Kerry to know Christ as his Savior. How that day has since been a comfort to our hearts and has encouraged us with hope for that day when we shall meet again.

How vivid is the memory of my son going off to kindergarten. He would walk about fifty yards to the end of the driveway and wait for the school bus. As it would pull to a stop and open its huge doors, Kerry would put down his lunch pail, turn around and look toward the house and then raise both arms over his head and wave like an athlete doing jumping jacks. Then I would step outside and wave back in identical motion. This became our special signal, and it marked our greetings and partings.

Also vivid in my memory is the day Kerry left for the army. I can still see the bus pulling up to the depot and its wide doors opening to take him away. How my heart ached. Just before he entered the bus, I stepped out where he could see me and gave him our old signal.

When he returned home from Germany, our family went to O’Hare International Airport in Chicago to pick him up.

We arrived early and watched as the jets brought people together from all over the world. What a reunion they were having. People from such places as Japan, Norway, Africa, China and Germany were all being delivered to this one spot. How our emotions were kindled as we watched loved ones greet and embrace. Then came the arrival of our son. How eagerly we waited to see him. As he walked up the narrow passageway leading from the plane, I stepped out where he could see me, placed both hands over my head and gave him our old signal. What people must have thought about that weird man waving his hands over his head in such a manner!

The day we left the body of our son at the cemetery I wanted to stop the car, get out and give him our parting salute; but I knew he was not there. A day will come, however, when Jesus Christ, the Bright and Morning Star, shall appear in the clouds and we shall meet again. Somehow, I imagine, we shall greet with that old familiar wave. *One day! One day soon!*

In the darkness of death, how bright and glorious is the promise of the resurrection.

While we walk the pilgrim pathway,
 Clouds will overspread the sky;
But when trav'ling days are over
 Not a shadow, not a sigh.
When we all get to heaven,
 What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus,
 We'll sing and shout the victory.

—*Eliza E. Hewitt*

D. L. Moody was visiting an industrial exposition in Chicago.² On the grounds was a fountain that became a rendezvous for folk. One would say to another, "Will I meet you at the fountain?" The reply would come, "Yes, I will meet you at the fountain!" P. P. Bliss, the gospel hymnwriter, was lured to the place and was inspired to pen these words:

Will I meet you at the fountain,
 When I reach the Glory land?
When you meet me at the fountain,

Shall I clasp your friendly hand?
Other friends will give you welcome;
Other loving voices cheer,
There'll be music at the fountain,
Will I meet you there?
Will you meet me at the fountain,
When I reach the Glory land?
When you meet me at the fountain,
Shall I clasp your friendly hand?
Other friends will give you welcome;
Other loving voices cheer,
There'll be music at the fountain,
Will you meet me there?

*He revealeth the deep and
secret things: he knoweth
what is in the darkness,
and the light dwelleth
with him (Daniel 2:22).*

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand—
All other ground is sinking sand.

—*Edward Mote*