

I Can Only Imagine

I really don't follow the contemporary Christian music scene, so I was completely unaware when *I Can Only Imagine* by MercyMe rocked that world in the early 2000s. In fact, it only hit my radar recently when I saw the film of the same title, based on lead singer Bart Millard's life. Bart had seen his dad miraculously transformed by God from an abusive "monster" to a man totally in love with Jesus. By the time of Arthur Millard's early death from cancer, Bart considered his father his best friend and "the Godliest man I'd ever known." The song (condensed below) later grew out of imagining what his dad must be experiencing in heaven, in God's presence:

I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by Your side. I can only imagine what my eyes would see, when Your face is before me... I can only imagine when that day comes and I find myself standing in the Son. I can only imagine when all I will do is forever, forever worship You. Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for you, Jesus, or in awe of you be still? Will I stand in Your presence or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

These thoughts and images came back to me this past week with the news that one of the oldest and dearest members of our congregation had quietly passed away in his sleep. He was a life-long Christian and a Lutheran pastor for several decades, staying active in ministry one way or another until the day he died. We are sad for our loss, but we rejoice for him having passed into the presence of his Lord and Savior.

Pastor Paul and Arthur Millard took very different paths through life – one faithfully serving God for 90 years and the other, but a few. And yet both left a legacy of faith behind, and both receive the same reward (see Mat. 20:1-16). In His generosity, God chooses to give all those who trust in Jesus a place in the kingdom of heaven, even those who come to faith at the last moment. As Jesus told the repentant criminal crucified at His side, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise," (Luke 23:43). Which means it's not too late for you.

I never knew Mr. Millard, but I can picture Pastor Paul, with young legs again, dancing before the Lord and singing hallelujah! He no longer has to be content, as we must, to *only imagine* the glories of heaven; he is there!

S. Johnson