



“So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” **I Corinthians 15:54-55.** Death is awkwardly talked about in our society, if at all, or it is lightly glazed over and shadowed by the cost of the funeral, grief counseling, making sure it’s with dignity and a celebration but rarely confronted as the last enemy everyone will face. Throughout the lives of our characters Christian and Hopeful and the last chapter where they’re in Beulah Land, it would seem like it would be a quick transition from life to death, something easy and nothing to be overly concerned about. King David along with many others in the Bible though shares something quite different. **Psalm 55:4** says; “*My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.*” **Psalm 88:3-9.** The Bible is clear that even though Jesus conquered death at the cross, it is still the last enemy that even Christians will face. Death will be put to death at the Great White Throne Judgement according to **I Corinthians 15:25-28** “*For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For ‘He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*” Please also read **II Corinthians 5:1-8.** As a believer in Christ Jesus though, we have victory through death through faith in Jesus Christ and the sting of it is gone.

The death of every Christian is quite different, and here in this allegory we see death symbolized as a river that they need to go through, in essence going from one side to another. We must realize that Christian and Hopeful are not ‘dead’ yet, but are in the ‘death process’. What is the hope that Christians have in death? Jesus said in **John 14:19** “*A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.*” He conquered death, hell and the grave - that is our hope that we will live also! He gave it up willingly; “*Therefore My father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.*” – **John 10:17-18.** For some death is quick and for others it is long and drawn out whether they are old or young. **Job 14:5** says our days are numbered, “*Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.*” For some it’s seemingly painless and for others it’s painful. Prime examples of the latter would be the first apostles and early disciples of the church, although there are countless thousands of Christians around the world today that are being severely martyred. Stephen was stoned to death, **Acts 7:55-60**, Matthew was martyred by the sword in Ethiopia, Mark was dragged through the streets in Alexandria, Luke was hanged on an Olive tree in Greece, John was put into a cauldron of burning oil but didn’t die and was hence sent to the Island of Patmos, Peter was crucified upside down, James

was beheaded, Bartholomew was flayed alive, Jude was shot to death with arrows, Paul was beheaded in Rome, and the list goes on. These, who are our heroes of faith died unimaginable deaths of great pain in the physical body, others simply closed their eyes in their sleep. You, like Christian and Hopeful have probably seen people go through the death process but now at the close of their lives, these two valiant men have to face their fiercest enemy personally, and although it's portrayed in the story that they're going through this together, death is very individual and you can't ride on anyone's coat-tails to get through it.

Heaven's blinding brilliance shining on Christian and Hopeful, may be similar to that of Stephen when he had an open vision of heaven when he says in **Acts 7:55-56** that he "...gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'." The two trials that the Shining Ones – angels - tell them about could very well be the crossing of the River of Death and also their spiritual credentials at heaven's gate as to whether they are legitimate or illegitimate in their faith in Jesus. **Revelation 20:11-12** says; "*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.*" Death isn't convenient to anyone. It interrupts and disrupts families, friends, careers, hopes, aspirations and your personal predetermined time line and agenda. It can seem that's its inopportune, untimely and a pity and yet in the bigger picture of our life, our earthly existence is but a brief breath of air. Death for the Christian is everlasting life with Christ Jesus, our heavenly Father and the other saints that have gone on before us! So with the radiance of heaven shining on them, Christian and Hopeful reluctantly enter the River of Death, there is no shortcut, bridge or other way to get to the other side.

I love where the Shining Ones say to them, "You shall find it deeper or shallower according to your trust in the King of the place [this region]." Throughout our life we're confronted with the stark reality of our faith or lack of it. Jesus continually rebuked his disciples for their lack of it and yet praised the ones for their greatness of it. It's the same in death. Don't kid yourself, the devil doesn't just silently sit back and watch Christians go to heaven without a battle for their souls; his fiery darts and flaming missiles in your thoughts don't end because you're on your death bed. He wants to send daunting threats, lies, confusion, despair, anxiety, fear, accusations of the past, insults, getting you to doubt your salvation, to ultimately to get you to doubt that Jesus has conquered him, that you'll eternally live in heaven with God Almighty and that there is no sting in death! But your faith in Christ will conquer as it says in **I John 5:4** "*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.*"

Hopeful gets it! His example should be that of all Christians, to be bold in faith when facing death. He's walking on firm ground in the river with his gaze on heaven and his faith is deflecting the fiery darts of satan whereas Christian is losing his faith and is succumbing to the lies, taunts and doesn't feel the ground beneath him. It reminds me of Peter when he gets out of the boat and walks on water in the midst of a dreadful storm at Jesus' beckoning. But when he lost faith, he started to sink, yet Jesus rescued him and lifted him up. Christian, the man of faith is becoming a man of the flesh, very carnal in his final battle and loosing the faith. He forgets the grace of God that saved him. Hopeful tells him to 'be of good cheer' and points ahead to the Shining Ones on the other side to receive them! Christian finally looks up, not down or inward to the flesh, and sees through the eye of faith Jesus Christ calling him to come. **Isaiah 43:1-2** is quoted here and says; "*...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.*" Christian is reaffirmed that he does belong to Jesus Christ and his salvation is sure. It says then that "*then they both took courage, with the result that the enemy then became as still as a stone, until they had fully crossed over.*" What silences the devil in your life? Faith does! Even Paul at the end of his life says in **II Timothy 4:7** "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" **Romans 5:2**; "*through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*"

Christian and Hopeful have now crossed over into eternity as they leave the banks of the River of Death; their last earthly battle has been conquered! "*So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"*" **I Corinthians 15:54-55.**

If you are going through death or know someone who is, keep standing in faith, speak the word, surround yourself if at all possible with people of faith who speak life, encourage and pray with you. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ and set your mind on things above, not on things of this earth. Do you know Jesus personally as your Lord and Saviour so that you can cross the River of Death into heaven? If not, pray this prayer today, “Jesus, I ask that you forgive me of my sins. I believe you are the only Son of God and I ask that you come into my heart to be my Lord and Saviour so that I can live eternally with you in heaven, amen.”

