

THE SUMMONS OF DEATH

by Larry Ray Hafley

Vernon Grounds has touchingly told the following story:

When John Todd, a nineteenth-century clergyman, was six years old, both his parents died. A kind-hearted aunt raised him until he left home to study for the ministry. Later, this aunt became seriously ill, and in distress she wrote Todd a letter. Would death mean the end of everything, or could she hope for something beyond? Here, condensed from *The Autobiography of John Todd*, is the letter he sent in reply:

“It is now thirty-five years since I, as a boy of six, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word you would give me a home and be a kind mother to me. I have never forgotten the day I made the lone journey to your house. I can still recall my disappointment when, instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your servant, Caesar, to fetch me.

“I remember my tears and anxiety as, perched high on your horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I rode off to my new home. Night fell before we finished the journey, and I became lonely and afraid. 'Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?' I asked Caesar. 'Oh no!' he said reassuringly, 'She'll stay up for you. When we get out of these here woods, you'll see her candle shinin' in the window:

“Presently we did ride out into the clearing, and there, sure enough, was your candle. I remember you were waiting at the door, that you put your arms close about me - a tired and bewildered little boy. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my new room, heard me say my prayers, and then sat beside me till I fell asleep.

“Some day soon God will send for you, to take you to a new home. Don't fear the summons, the strange journey, or the messenger of death. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you were kind enough to do for me so many years ago. At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome awaiting, and you will be safe in God's care” (Freeport Life Line).

Death will indeed be a blessed summons for the righteous. Paul longed to “depart and be with Christ.” He knew that if our earthly body was destroyed that we would

have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1). But those things are only reserved for the righteous, for the ones who have been saved by grace and washed from their sins in the blood of Christ.

When the righteous die, a convoy of angels ushers them into a realm of bliss, blessedness and paradise (Luke 16:19-31). Prepared people will find a prepared place! It

will not be a haven of rest, but a hovel of retribution. 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9). It is God "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon ever soul of man that doeth evil" (Romans 2:6-9).

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalms 116:15). Would you death be a precious thing in the sight of the Lord? Or would God say, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11)?

You need to be a Christian; you need to be saved worse than you need anything else in this world. Death is coming; judgment is certain (Hebrews 9:27). Now is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation. Obey the gospel and live so that, "At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome awaiting, and you will be safe in God's care."