

Minister's Message – April 2005

To Live or Not to Live

She died today. A woman, kept alive by a feeding tube for 15 years, had that tube removed by court order and now two weeks she has died. Her husband and millions of onlookers must feel vindicated. According to reports he went to the law court to get an order for the tube to be removed so that his wife might live no longer. Did he want her to be relieved of suffering – or was self-interest involved?

Whatever the reason it was a tragic situation and a situation that stands in stark contrast to what we read in the Bible. Jesus encountered a lot of suffering people as he went through the towns and villages of Israel. But we never read that he pulled the tube out of anyone in order that they might die. He *healed every sickness and every disease among the people* (Matthew 9:35). He came across many people who were suffering terrible diseases and many whose lives were a misery. Not once did he say 'you would be better off dead'. Now as God the Son, Jesus could and did heal all who came to him – they eventually died of course. Despite modern medicine we cannot heal every disease and sickness as Jesus did. But the question of attitude and belief arises when man determines that a person would be better off dead.

There is a belief among many that death is an escape from suffering. Most people who commit suicide would believe this. People who advocate euthanasia would believe this – unless they simply enjoy having the power to kill. But this is not the picture Jesus gives us – at least not for those who die in their sin, who die refusing to believe in Jesus. What awaits those who die without Christ is not escape from suffering but eternal suffering. It will be literally a case of 'out of the frying pan into the fire'. They will be cast into the furnace of fire. There will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth* said Jesus, *for those who practice lawlessness* (Matthew 13:42).

Only in this present life do we have opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ. Since we are all born in sin and are therefore condemned to this place of fire at death, the most important thing we must do in this life is decide where we will spend eternity. Nothing is more wonderful than hearing the words – *there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). Before we think about quality of life in this world we must think about quality of life after death. While ever there is life there is hope. While ever we have life we have opportunity to believe in Jesus and receive the hope, the sure and certain hope of eternal life in the glorious kingdom of God.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ do not of course need extra days to live in order that they might turn and believe in him. But they want to live that they might continue to serve Jesus and be faithful witnesses to his death and resurrection. The apostle Paul wrote *for me to live is Christ and to die is gain – but if I live on in the flesh this will mean fruit for my labour* (Philippians 1:21, 22).

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