

Twenty-Four Hours to Eternity

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“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

~ Hebrews 9:27-28 ~

A question has been haunting me recently and I can't seem to shake it. I suspect this question may have the same effect on you, and you too may feel compelled to share it.

The question: “If I were to die in the next twenty-four hours, where would I spend eternity, Heaven or Hell?”

The question dogs me from perhaps a different perspective than what you may be thinking. It is bouncing between my head and my heart because it drives me to consider the fate of every single living soul, especially those closest and dearest to me. Here's the thing. I do not know who is “saved” and who is “lost” with certainty (including myself). I can only speculate based on the evidence of one's life. I know that it is not my job to pass judgement. However, Jesus has called His followers to be witnesses and advocates for Him in this fallen world. This is a serious and urgent matter.

“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

~ Hebrews 10:31 ~

You may be wondering where the question came from, or who posed it. I have a very good friend who recently shared a true story with me about a man who used a similar question to share Jesus with countless strangers in the mid-1940s on George Street in Sydney, Australia. You may be aware of the story of Frank Jenner, but it was new to me. There is a documentary about Jenner on YouTube¹.

The horror of World War II, especially the images of Japan after the atomic bombs fueled Jenner's sense of urgency to confront people about their standing before God. People that knew Frank said he was generous and warm and quickly inspired trust in others, and that he was a man of persistent prayer. He was not perfect by any stretch. He struggled to overcome a gambling problem that he developed as a sailor. His approach, although direct, was kind and respectful. Frank would stop sailors on George Street with, “Young man, may I ask you a question? If you were to die tonight, where would you be, in heaven or hell?” Over the years, it is estimated that Frank asked this question to nearly 100,000 people. You see, he made a commitment to God to ask this question of at least ten people he encountered each day.

¹ The Frank Jenner Documentary is available on YouTube; running time is 50 minutes

The story takes an interesting turn in the early 1950s. During a service at Lansdowne Baptist Church in Bournemouth, England in the summer of 1952, Rev. Francis Dixon met two British sailors (the two had never met) who shared the stories of their encounters with Frank Jenner while on leave in Sydney during the 1940s. Both men were burdened with Jenner's question and each sought help to address the question when they returned to England. Rev. Dixon had the pleasure of leading one of the men to Christ. Soon after this, Dixon went on a preaching tour in Australia and New Zealand. He met more men who had been convicted by Jenner's question. As he traveled the globe, Dixon met other people who had encountered Frank Jenner while on George Street in Sydney and subsequently gave their lives to Christ.

The question itself is not rattling me. Rather this secondary question is: "How well am I living up to my responsibility as a follower of Christ to share the good news of the gospel?" There are lost people everywhere. These people are destined to spend eternity separated from God in a terrifying place called Hell. Some of these people are quietly hearing the draw of the Father (John 6:44). All they need is for someone like you or me to approach them with what is at the heart of Jenner's question. Don't get hung up on the form of Jenner's question. It may sound confrontational to you. Call on the Holy Spirit to guide you through the encounter using your own voice. Jenner's direct but polite approach proves that the words themselves do not matter, but a heart for the lost does. Most people wrestle with the big questions of life: Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where will I go when I die?

Application: Have your antennae up for opportunity to engage people in this life-and-death matter. Eternity is forever. Be loving and courageous! May God bless you richly as you endeavor to represent Him well.

"He [Jesus] told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

~ Luke 10:2 ~