

**NEWS AND VIEWS**  
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*“Southern Baptists with the Full  
Gospel for the Whole World”*

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A few months ago I wrote a newsletter article chronicling the various specimens of dead animals that I saw while riding on a journey one morning. To quote myself in the article, *I could not escape the reality of those dead things along the way, silently testifying to me in my reality. Death is ever present on this road of Life.* No truer words were ever written. This week I had another one of those days on the road.

As I traveled early one morning towards Wilmington on 40 Highway (*that's what the locals call I-40 East*) I observed *Buzzards on Billboards* at three separate locations. I had this thought that if I was writing a story, *Buzzards on Billboards* would make a good title...but would the title convey a cogent and compelling thought?

As I began to reflect on what kind of theme would buzzards on billboards communicate I had this thought about those buzzards. In comparison to the dead animals by the road in the previous newsletter, these buzzards represented life that was occupied with death. The billboards are also an interesting piece of the puzzle. For centuries of human history, billboards as we know them were non-existent. But in our modern times they have become quite a common, and to some folks all *too* common, method of high-speed, as well as high tech notifications. As we hurtle by the billboards through time and space, the messages they send out are remembered until we see the next one. Most of these messages are brief and to the point. And these three *buzzards on billboards* began to give me a message that was hard to miss. The buzzards seem to say without speaking DEATH IS REAL. This is a message we often want to keep from talking about. Even when some of our friends or loved ones die we try to change the language. Instead of announcing that Cousin Clem just died, we often say that *Clem passed away, Clem passed on, or Clem just passed...* Along with our hesitancy to talk a lot about death, we often try to change its inevitability. Death is real...and Death is coming.

I've been reading an interesting book lately called *The Oracles of God* by Richard Wurmbrand. In the context of discussing the writings of William Shakespeare, he declares they seem to reflect a common theme. He makes a statement that *in all great dramas - as in real life - everything ends in death.* Having recently read this passage and still pondering about the buzzards on billboards, I was intrigued with what I saw on the next leg of my journey. In between Wilmington and Fayetteville I passed by a sign that caught my attention. The sign read *Majestic Funeral Home and Crematorium.* I immediately wondered...what is majestic about death? Researching the definition of majestic I settled on *something having or showing impressive beauty or dignity.* Some synonyms that describe the word majestic are *stately, dignified, distinguished, solemn, magnificent, grand, splendid, resplendent, and glorious.* Now all of these resonate with me when I'm thinking about something being majestic...like a King in a castle...but not when I'm thinking about death. When I put that morning's message all together I get something like...*Death is really coming...and it is not majestic...or is it?* The last synonymous word is *glorious.* Can death really be glorious? Let's hear what the Lord has to say about it:

*Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Hebrews 2:14-15)*

What I hear the Lord saying is that He Himself has put death to death...and that *is* glorious. So let's put the message all together...*Death is really coming...and it is only majestic when we trust that Jesus has died in our place so we can live in His place.* To quote Mr. Wurmbrand again, *Worms, fire, or the sea might consume my body. But my spirit will live in a world with no more wanderings and trials. I do not have to pass through many painful incarnations. Beyond death lies paradise.*

Perhaps one of the Lord's motivations for driving sinful mankind out of His garden, besides His infinite mercy, was to preserve the integrity of Paradise. Paradise was made to contain living, not dying, things. So as far as I understand there will be a day when buzzards will need to find other things to feed on...and our Resurrected and Majestic King will be the testimony of what it took for us to be in glory. Hallelujah...Jesus is Lord and the Lord He is God!

Blessings to you,  
Pastor Sam