**Of Human Mortality… and Denny Crane**

I keep a file of quotes that either highlight some truth in an interesting way, or at least provoke deeper thought. Yesterday, I ran across a few that I had jotted down, but not yet entered into the file. I even shared one of them online. But after additional reflection last night, this morning I deleted the post…

It was a quote from the fictional character, Denny Crane, on the television show, Boston Legal. For those who didn't see it, the quote was, **"You can be 'larger than life,' just not 'larger than death'."** (Season 1, Episode 16). In context, Denny was postulating about the inevitably of human mortality. With this basic concept the Scriptures agree. After Eve and Adam’s sin in the Garden, God pronounced the following judgment on mankind forthwith (among others), *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return,”* Genesis 3:19. The psalmist adds of humankind, *“…they expire, and return to their dust,”* Psalm 104:29. This sounds pretty bleak, and perhaps even somewhat depressing, but such is the path we all must trod, knowing full well at least *where* it ends- though not *when* or even *how* it does so. But back to the additional reflection on the quote of which I spoke earlier…

From the purely *worldly* perspective, of which Denny Crane’s character would surely epitomize, death is the culmination of each person’s existence. Therefore, all the “living” that can be crammed in before the inevitable end is the goal. But from that *worldly* perspective, the kind of “living” prescribed is filled with carnal delights and sensual fulfillments- anything and everything that makes one feel pleasure or some sense of delight, however momentary and fleeting. Even a general reading of Ecclesiastes manifests the *foolish* and *futile vanity* of such a course. There has to be more to “life” than living that way… and there is!

While it is true that all must die, and in that sense Denny Crane was correct, it is NOT true that we can’t live “larger than death.” In fact, that is precisely how we are supposed to live- “larger than death!” Hebrews 9:27 is often quoted in this connection, *“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment…”.* Though the principle is, as we’ve seen above, certainly true, it is not really the point of the passage. In context (which is always critical), Jesus- having taken on humanity (cf. Hebrews 2:14-15; 9:11-14), *died* or *“was offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation,”* Hebrews 9:28. Think about what the rest of the sentence, begun in v.27 and so often quoted only partially, implies:

1. How shall Christ appear a *“second time”* after death? He was/is resurrected to a new, spiritual, and eternal life, 1Corinthians 15:20.
2. Regarding those who *“eagerly await Him,”* does it only apply to those physically “alive” at the time? 1Thessalonians 4:13-17 clearly says otherwise.
3. Given these things, exactly of what kind of *“salvation”* is the verse speaking? Physical? Can’t be that because v.27 says all must die. Spiritual? Of course, but how so unless *all who die* are also *resurrected?* The Scriptures clearly affirm as much, John 5:28-29 and 1Corinthians 15:22.

So what’s the point of all this, and what has it to do with Denny Crane’s quote? Though the world, through its ways and means, surely **cannot** “live larger than death,” those who *“walk by the Spirit”* (according to Its direction in the Word) rather than merely fulfilling *“the desire of the flesh”* (cf. Galatians 5:16-25) **do “live larger than death”!** They live in such a way that physical death, though surely experienced, is only the passageway to resurrected eternal life. The only question remaining is, “Are **you** living “larger than death”? I hope so! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)