

A Good Obituary

by Mike Tucker *

In 1866, Swedish chemist Alfred Bernhard Nobel invented dynamite, which earned him both fame and the majority of his wealth. At one point in his life he held more than 350 patents, operated labs in 20 countries, and had more than 90 factories manufacturing explosives and ammunition. Yet today he is most often remembered as the name behind the Nobel Prize, the most highly regarded of international awards for efforts in peace, chemistry, physics, literature, and economics.

In 1888 when Alfred's brother Ludvig died while staying in Cannes, France, the French newspapers mistakenly confused the two brothers, reporting the death of the inventor of explosives. One paper's headline read brusquely: "The Merchant of Death is Dead."

What must it be like to read your own obituary? I remember laboring over an assignment in high school in which I was required to write my own obituary. We had to write as if we had died that year. As in the case with Alfred Nobel, my premature obituary suggested headlines I did not want to live with.

In a very real sense, I am still the writer of my own obituary in a life well lived or a life wasted. In order to leave a positive reputation, I must write a positive obituary with my everyday life.

The writers of Scripture seem less concerned with the reputation we leave behind than they are with the reputation we are moving toward. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1)

There is the sense that our hearts hold the words of an obituary that no one here will fully see. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

The headlines we write on earth are printed on pages that will eventually fade and crumble. But there is one who reads the words imprinted across our hearts, engraved on the lives we have affected, stored up as treasures in a greater kingdom. As He stood with His tempter high on a mountain, taking in the kingdoms of the world and all of the splendor that was being offered to Him, Jesus considered the reputation of God and not His own. As He hung on the cross, scorning its shame, He took death instead of glory; He bore the disgrace of man instead of the splendor of God. His obituary was insignificant to all but a few. And then, He rose from the grave, forever rewriting the headlines of all who would believe.

With Love,
Mike

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