

Upstream or Downstream?



When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind.

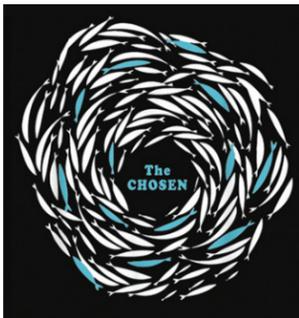
— C.S. Lewis —

Recently I was looking for a C.S. Lewis quote that I particularly like, and which I haven't yet found, but what I did find was the quote above. I love it! It fits precisely the way I see things in this world, and what I try to warn people: don't go with the flow. It's safest to go opposite the flow of human "wisdom", human "progress", human-defined destinations.

Who is (was) C.S. Lewis? you might ask. Many have heard of him, but as the years go by, those of us who did know of him grow older and pass on, and the younger ones aren't being taught wonderful things as we once were.

Maybe you've heard of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (part of the Chronicles of Narnia), or of Mere Christianity. C.S. Lewis wrote those books in the 1940s and 50s, plus many others expressing his Christian faith while helping us with ours. His writings have greatly inspired me personally.

So what does Lewis' quote above have to do with this picture below? This is the logo of the streaming TV series "The Chosen".



The logo itself is called "Against the Current". Most of the fish, the white fish, are swimming counterclockwise. The much smaller group of blue fish are swimming clockwise. They are swimming against the current, and they represent how we as Believers and Followers of God, through Jesus the Christ, by His Holy Spirit, are to live, swimming against the current of the huge majority of the world.

Do you see how they say the same thing? "When the whole world (or the white fish) is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction (or the blue fish) appears to have lost his mind." C.S. Lewis and the writers of "The Chosen" both have expressed one of the greatest truths I know: no matter whether the world views us as crazy, no matter that we are few and far between, no matter that there are "churches" that seem to say we can do both, we must not "go with the flow", over the cliff, to our eternal deaths. We must go "against the current" with God's help and strength, swimming upstream when all others are swimming downstream.

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

(James 4:4 NIV)

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:15-17)

Look deeply inside yourself, right into the center, where your heart is. If you stop your busy life long enough to think about it, you KNOW you were made for something more than this pitiful existence on this earthly ball. You KNOW that a Creator designed all of this and also you yourself, and that something has really screwed it up. *"I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."* (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11)

So what if we look crazy as we run away from the cliff while the rest of the human lemmings run over the cliff to their deaths? So what if people give us funny looks as we swim upstream while they are swimming downstream toward the falls? If you have been awakened by God, tapped on the

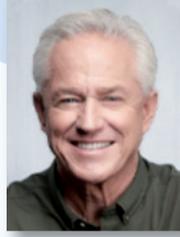
shoulder to become His child, nothing else matters. Don't be afraid to be the blue fish, who are headed to eternal life with our Father. Your eternal life is at stake!

"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31-39, excerpts)

Linda Gimmel

FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

We honor Pastor Ray's life by continuing to share the daily devotions he prepared for you, his precious readers.



Outthink, Outpray, Outlive

Ray Bentley Ministries

"My kingdom is not of this

world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

— John 18:36, NIV

God's Kingdom is neither political nor "of this world." Jesus said of believers, *"For they are not of the world any more than I am of the world"* (John 17:14, NIV).

It's quite a balancing act, living in this world, working, interacting with people, finding enjoyment in the arts, taking advantage of progress, participating in politics, appreciating the world around us—and yet, staying true to the Kingdom of God.

But Jesus says it can be done. We can live in the world, but not be of the world, because the world is not where His Kingdom is. If we live in His Kingdom, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the strength of His Word, then we can achieve what appears to be impossible.

Jesus and His disciples

posed a threat to the established political order. Pontius Pilate was trying to figure out, what kind of king is this Jesus? Christianity ultimately turned the world upside down. Even so, the early believers made no attempt to conquer paganism or overthrow Judaism by reacting blow by blow to others' fears and threats. Instead, they outthought, outprayed, and outlived the unbelievers.

Their weapons were spiritual, not fleshly. They did not hold protests or boycotts; they did not put on a campaign to unseat the emperor. Instead, they prayed and preached and proclaimed the message of Christ crucified for our sin and of His Resurrection. They loved people with the love Jesus taught them.

They impacted their world and generations to come. Where is the Roman Empire today? Not here. Yet the church of Jesus Christ lives and thrives.

They knew, believed, and experienced the message that had the power to change lives.

That is how the world is changed.

Arnold Schwarzenegger and "Heaven"

By Peter Heck, "Not the Bee", 6/8/2023

Yesterday afternoon a friend sent me this link asking if I had thoughts: Arnold Schwarzenegger says heaven is a 'fantasy': 'Anyone that tells you something else is a xxx liar.' (NY Post via Twitter)



I've tried to discipline myself never to react to a headline without first reading the story. As I've come to expect, once I did, reality was a little different than the clickbait title suggested. The 75-year-old Austrian-born actor was responding to a question posed by his "Twins" co-star Danny DeVito, who asked, "What's in the future for us?"

Schwarzenegger likened DeVito's question to the time when shock jock Howard Stern had asked him, "Tell me, governor, what happens to us when we die?"

I said, "Nothing. You're 6 feet under. Anyone that tells you something else is a xxx liar." I said, "We don't know what happens with the soul and all this spiritual stuff that I'm not an expert in, but I know that the body as we see each other now, we will never see each other again like that."

Even though by virtue of my faith in Jesus and His redemptive work on the cross, I would be one Schwarzenegger labels a "xxx liar," I can tell you that I don't feel an ounce of anger or resentment towards the man. As the late Justice Antonin Scalia correctly observed, "God assumed from the beginning that the wise of the world would view Christians as fools, and He has not been disappointed."

No, my concern isn't what Schwarzenegger or anyone else thinks of me. What I feel is a pressing burden to somehow find a way to help this man, this son of an abusive Nazi official, know what I know.

I suppose that last statement could come across as arrogant. There are so many opinions about death, after all:

- The atheist says there's nothing on the other side.
- The universalist says there's paradise that awaits us all.
- The Eastern meditation guru says reincarnation will lead us to perpetual existence.
- The New Age philosopher says we'll take a journey into transcendent light.

Who is to say who has it right? Well, with as disparate as all those conclusions are, they do have one thing in common: not one of them is spoken from a position of authority. None of them know for sure.

Now, that doesn't bother some people. There are those who are content to spin the afterlife roulette wheel and indulge themselves with creative speculations. But that's not good enough for me personally. I'm not interested in guesses; I want answers.

And that's the impression of Schwarzenegger I was left with reading the Post's piece. The thought of dying terrifies him and he is desperate. In one part of his interview with DeVito, the two had this exchange: SCHWARZENEGGER: I know people feel comfortable with death, but I don't.

DEVITO: No. SCHWARZENEGGER: Because I will xxx miss the xxx out of everything. To sit with you here, that will one day be gone?

DEVITO: No! SCHWARZENEGGER: And to have fun and to go to the gym and to pump up, to ride my bike on the beach, to travel around, to see interesting things all over the world. What the xxx?

DEVITO: Life! It's the best! SCHWARZENEGGER: Exactly. What's that all about? DEVITO: Yeah.

SCHWARZENEGGER: I tell you, there's someone that mixed up this whole thing. Think about it. Who can we blame? DEVITO: You mean that we don't live forever?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Yeah. That we have to die. DEVITO: That's tough, man. SCHWARZENEGGER: I don't know what the deal is, but in any case, it's a reality, and it truly [ticks] me off. DEVITO: You don't want to die. SCHWARZENEGGER: No.

That breaks my heart. Not just for Schwarzenegger, but for DeVito, and for everyone else who identifies with that nihilistic sense of hopelessness and despair, because the answers to all those questions are knowable. It's why I want to spend the remainder of my days telling as many people as possible why I'm not among their number.

When it comes to the afterlife, it's true that there are a million different theories, but only one of them comes from Someone who has actually been there and come back alive to tell us about it. Only one man has been where we all are about to go. That makes His testimony far more authoritative, far more reliable than anything else we have.

The word Jesus uses to describe our death doesn't mean "ceasing," "ending," or "stopping." It means "separating." In His word we're that upon death, "the dust" that makes up our mortal bodies "will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."

From the beginning, God breathed an eternal soul into our mortal bodies, animating them. And when those bodies are laid back down into the ground, that spiritual soul lives on. It's what Jesus promised a woman named Martha as she grieved the death of her brother: *"I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."*

Mr. Schwarzenegger, you're right. Someone did "mix up this whole thing" and is to blame for the reality of death. It was us. But our Creator loved us enough to make it right. To make it so that you can sit and talk with Danny DeVito for as long as you want in a place far more "fun" and "interesting" than this. In Jesus you have nothing but sorrow to lose, and an undeserved glory to gain. How can you resist?

On The Lighter Side . . . from the Web



You may not like guns. That is your right. You may not believe in God. That is your choice. But if someone breaks into your home, the first two things you are going to do are...

- 1) Call someone with a gun
- 2) Pray they get there in time

Don't think gender matters? Go buy a rooster for eggs and a bull for milk. You will soon learn that God knew what He was doing.

