

The Faith That Taught Me Joy Was Dangerous and Death Was the Goal

A reflection on funerals, fear-based salvation, and the loss of joy in the name of faith.

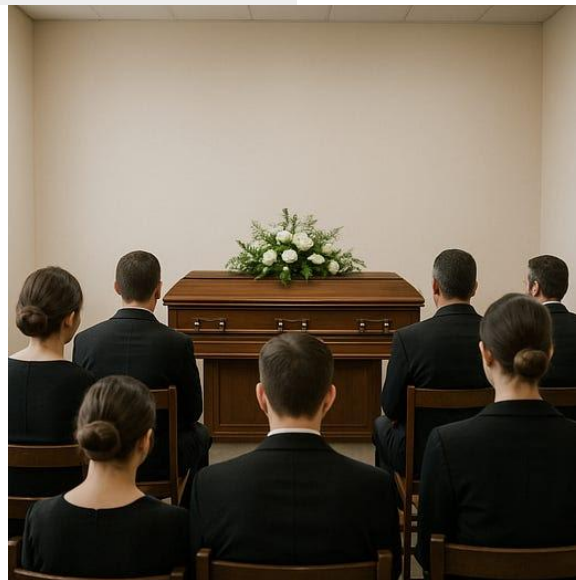
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There's an odd obsession with death in the 2x2 church. It's subtle, and so ingrained in the culture that I never really thought anything of it until the last few years—but it's kind of weird, to be honest.

For example, the Iowa and Minnesota workers set up a newsletter that was meant to provide information about a variety of things, including the CSA crisis and general updates about the workers and what was going on in their fields, if they had prospects, etc. And that was its function for a very short while—maybe two or three emails. And then it quickly turned into the death notification service announcing funerals for anyone associated with the 2x2 church in both Iowa and Minnesota.

Maybe an occasional email from the overseer, but beyond that—death announcements.

But here's the thing: the people want to know about the funerals because they will attend any funeral they can, whether they knew the person or not. They go to hear workers preach and to socialize. Funerals are a big social activity for the 2x2s.

People will travel far and wide to attend a professing person's funeral, especially if the worker speaking is highly respected. If it's a worker's funeral, you can expect people to travel even further, and they'll generally rent out a school gym so they have enough room to accommodate.

However, I must specify that people only travel for funerals if the person who passed away was within a certain hierarchy in the church. I have found it incredibly sad how every worker in the state (and surrounding states) will travel miles to attend a funeral of someone well-known and highly respected (probably rich), but sometimes you might only see the two workers having the funeral at a service for someone who wasn't as high up on the totem pole (and probably not wealthy). Love is not equally distributed in the 2x2 church, and that's very sad.

Many times, the workers preaching at the funerals don't even know the person who died. For some reason, it seems that there always must be a brother worker leading the service, even if there is a highly capable sister worker who knew the person well, and he didn't at all. She will have the smaller part of the service at the beginning. And maybe this is common at funerals in general, with the preachers not having known the deceased at all. I'm not sure. But it makes for some odd sermons that just feel cold.

I've noticed a common theme in the funerals in the last while. They always praise the departed for their accommodating nature towards the workers. How they opened their home, how they served them, and made them feel at ease.

In one shocking sermon, the brother worker spoke about how this person laid up treasure in heaven for welcoming God's true servants into her home and serving them coffee. They equated the treatment of the workers with what this person has done to earn salvation. It seems so self-righteous to speak of oneself in this way, as if

anyone who serves the workers (the one giving the sermon about this topic) is serving God himself.

Workers are generally excited about funerals because they give them an opportunity to preach the gospel to outsiders in a vulnerable state of mourning, where they are open to considering “the seriousness of life.” I’ve been to funerals where very little is said about the person who has passed on, and instead, the service is filled with fear-mongering about death and whether or not we have done enough to earn salvation. I have never left a 2x2 funeral feeling hopeful of eternity because of Jesus.

But the obsession with death goes beyond funerals. I have heard many people talk about this life as if it is a period of time where one must wait to die. I’ve known people who have refused medical treatment at a relatively young age because they “weren’t living for this life” and knew that “eternity would be better.” While these statements may be true, it makes me wonder what they think the purpose of life is.

God hasn’t given us a life to make us trudge through it and make it to death in victory. He has given us a life to live it fully and to honor Him. If we’re living, which we all are if we’re reading this, God still has a plan for our lives that involves living, not just awaiting death.

Perhaps this thinking comes from the gospels where it states, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it until life eternal.” This doesn’t mean that loving life is bad; it means that prioritizing earthly life and possessions over God will ultimately cause one to lose out on eternal life.

It’s how we live our lives that matters.

It’s not bad to have a desire to live and cling to life. In fact, God made us with this desire to survive.

Yet, in the 2x2 church, there is a strange pride in not enjoying life too much. Getting joy out of earthly things is a spiritual red flag. Joy was only acceptable in narrow forms—meetings, conventions, and worker visits. Reading your Bible and praying were acceptable ways to spend your time, as they should be—but on the other hand there was a subtle message that time spent on anything else was wasted.

But Jesus didn't come to show us how to die. He came to show us how to live.

His words were a call to abundant life—a life that reflects the goodness of God through relationships, love, creativity, expression, enjoying the beauty of His creation in nature, rest, and so much more. Knowing God and living life fully is what brings true joy. Seeing God in everything and acknowledging Him.

We don't need to shrink our lives into a mold of compliance, where we're simply waiting all the time. Waiting to be "faithful until the end," or waiting for the next meeting or funeral. Waiting for eternity. It's not that we aren't waiting for these things, but they shouldn't keep us from living now.

As humans, we are meant to glorify Him by walking in freedom and the fullness of life, made in His image, and redeemed by His grace. And there is great joy in the living, even though we know that the joy of eternity will be greater.

Let's not let a fixation on death numb us to the gift of the present.