

Dear Brian,

I am typing this because my handwriting has not reach 'Clark(e) Haney' level yet—still working on it. So please forgive the impersonal nature of a typed letter.

It was very good to see you and I am heartbroken at your condition and your prospects. I know that there is little that I can say that can ease your pain. I can only hope to ease your apprehension. This I will try to do and pray to the LORD that I can offer some solace and hope.

Brian, you must know that you are going the way that all of us will go. What you face is what all mankind has faced in the ages past and will continue to face in the time left before the Lord returns. David, while talking to Solomon said, 'I go the way of all the earth.' David knew that what he faced he was going to face and could not avoid it. Cathy and I perhaps have known this in a personal way having lost our own two sons, Michael and Nathan. Even that though, I know, is not the same as when someone faces it for themselves personally. I did that about a year ago. Not so much the cardiac incident that I experienced but what I went through afterwards. I was told by the doctor that I had the possibility of an aortic aneurism. From the time that he told me that I lay awake each night listening to and feeling absolutely everything that my heart did, expecting at anytime to suffer a massive eruption of my aorta and suffer what John Ritter had done a couple of years ago. I came face to face with my own pending death. One night my heart began racing unlike anything I had ever encountered and I was utterly convinced that I was about to die that very night. Obviously I was wrong about that time but it forced me to look closely about what I truly, deep down believed about myself and my relationship to my mortality and to my God.

I came to the conclusion that one of two things were true. Either we are truly just highly evolved animals and at the last closing of our eyes that would be it, not even enough time or consciousness to realize what had happened—it would just be over and my existence would be utterly done. I would have lived my life as any other animal on the planet, an extraordinarily brief existence in the scheme of things (50+ years on a time line of aeons—not even worth considering) and to no point other than I had existed.

The other possibility, and as I see it, there is only one other possibility, I would close my eyes and then the next instant open them again to face my creator and judge. I say that this is the only other possibility because of the resurrection of Jesus. That event was extraordinary in any sense of the word. It meant everything to those who knew, loved, and followed him and his teachings. It was also as catastrophic an event for those who reviled him, the Jewish leaders and the Romans. The historically amazing thing is that those two groups of people were very capable of refuting the resurrection and were very motivated to do so. Both the Jews and the Romans were in charge of the area, both of them were very literate and could easily have disproved the resurrection and could have written about that disproof immediately and could have easily have seen to it that their proof that it did not happen was given extremely wide dissemination. They would very much have wanted to discount it and they could have very easily have done so and done so so that everyone in the Roman empire knew that the resurrection of Jesus did not happen or was a hoax. They did not do this. They did not do this because they could not. It remains a fact of history to this very day that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. No other religion or

philosophical school can make such a claim and nothing that they teach can come anywhere near the importance of that claim of Christianity.

Why is this important for us, and particularly for you? Brian (and I know that I am more than anything else reminding you of things that you already know) that event was and is the absolute proof of what he taught so that you and I and everyone who believes in him can have solid assurance of the veracity of his teachings even as they face what you are now facing. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 based the whole of his teachings on the fact of the resurrection. He even challenged his readers that if they did not believe his testimony he could provide them the names of over five hundred people still living that could verify and attest to the resurrection of Jesus Christ! This is the type of testimony that will stand up in court, the kind of testimony that has stood the test of history, the kind of testimony that you and I can place our faith in and our confidence in that we too will one day be raised from the dead after having gone through what everyone (with a couple of exceptions that you know of) from Adam to Jesus himself went through. They knew the fact to be so true that they died for that fact rather than deny it.

Our confidence lies in the proof of the resurrection of Jesus as the capstone to his teachings. As you know his teachings centered on justice, mercy, and love. I place justice first because that is the reason for his coming in the first place. So many people know John 3.16 but fail to notice 3.18 where Jesus himself stated clearly that ‘he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.’ Paul in Romans 3 followed up on that point when he wrote that ‘all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.’ Sin separates us from a God who is Holy, a God who demands perfection, a God who demands utter righteousness. And in the grand scheme of things, God, in his perfect system of justice, could have told all of those of us who ‘have sinned and come short’ to go to hell—that is what we deserve as a matter of justice and there is no requirement of him to do anything but to consign us to hell, to the judgment we deserve. God is not one who can overlook injustice—he has shown that he will deal with it, that he is in all ways a God of justice. That is of first importance to know—God does not wink at sin or immorality, or injustices on our part—he takes such matters very seriously and does not waffle when it comes to justice.

But, while maintaining that strict sense of justice, thus maintaining righteousness, he loved us. He loved us to the point that he sent his son to maintain that justice by paying the penalty of our sin and shortcomings himself by dying on the cross for Brian and for Shawn and for all of the world. That is the part of John 3 that everyone knows, that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.’ Believing, it seems such an easy thing but in reality it has to be the most difficult requirement of all. We are only asked to believe, but in reality we are strongly charged to place the entire faith of our existence in what God has done for us through his son. As you know, it is not a surface acknowledgement of who he is, remember James, ‘even the devils believe (and tremble!) that there is one God.’ Rather it is a full blown heart and life commitment to that great truth, that great merging of justice, love, and mercy shown us by the grace of God and made available to us by our faith—that wonderfully simple but oh so demanding requirement.

I know that you know this and believe it with your whole heart—I just want to encourage you and remind you of this great truth. What amazes me every time I look at the text and the issue of

God's grace is that he came up with it, approached us with it, and offered it to us without us even thinking about it! It is not a matter of us saying, 'here God, here is something I did to draw near to you' but rather God, while reminding us that there is in fact nothing that we can do to draw near to him to achieve the justice that his righteousness demands, brought to us—sent to us his son, the one being in the universe who could be considered sinless and able to perfectly provide the offering that God himself demanded, to pay the price that we could not and to achieve for us the glories and riches that we cannot even begin to imagine but will someday behold!

In Psalms 17.15 David wrote that he would behold God's face in righteousness; he would be satisfied when he awoke from his death to the very presence of the person of the LORD! Cathy was talking to a professor that she had worked for who has been blind all of his life. She told him that she had realized that the very first thing that that professor would see would be the face of his lord! They cried together for hours over that realization! But that is what awaits you Brian, and me, and all of those who place their faith and trust in the righteousness, love, and mercy of God through his son Jesus Christ. We will close our eyes one moment and open them in the next to his wonderful face!!

My dear, dear Brian. I know that my words are inadequate compared to what you are now facing. But remember my dear, beloved brother (in mom and in Christ!), you are loved greatly by God, he will give you the strength and peace to finish your journey, a journey that your brothers and sisters are following you on. Be at peace Brian, the LORD is with you and will not abandon you—he is right there, rest in him, even when it is hard. Be still, know that he is God, the God of your salvation.

I love you very much Brian.