

## Thanos to Zoe

### Revelation 3:1-3 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

By pretty much all accounts, Robin Williams was a comedian who wanted to make you laugh, brighten up your day. Abruptly and tragically in 2014, he took his own life. The reason: he was battling anxiety and insomnia from Lewy bodies dementia. Although none of us knew him personally (unless someone has a story to share), this shocked people, shocked me, because a person who brings so much laughter and happiness to others, who certainly seemed to enjoy his life and his work and his craft, surely shouldn't be filled with anxiety and want to end his life, right?

Robin Williams had a reputation, a name, for being full of life but he was dying inside. The Greek word for life is Zoe. The Greek word for death is Thanos. Robin Williams had the name, the reputation, for life, for Zoe. However, inside he was dead, Thanos.

This is like the congregation of Christians in Sardis in the book of Revelation. "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." (verse 1)

What does that mean? Outwardly, the congregation at Sardis looked like it was full of life. It was active. People came Sunday to Sunday. Offerings were up. Probably had a nice place to worship. They were active within the community, probably giving gifts to the poor, taking care of widows and orphans, helping at soup kitchens, being good citizens who paid their taxes and didn't cause trouble. They were active enough to have a name with outsiders that these people were alive, that they were Zoe.

However, that was just appearance. Inside, these people had death, Thanos, in their bones. Their faith was dwindling, almost gone. Their faith in God had not been fed. They were trusting in their works and prosperity instead of trusting in their God.

What's your reputation? Do people look at you and say that you are so full of life? If only they knew the dark cloud of depression that hovers over you, that you always put a smile on even though you struggle to ever think of anything that makes you happy. Do you have the reputation of being a good Christian, but you know that you're just going through the motions, that your heart is not in it? Do you do the right things in life, give peacemaking responses and do your job with obedience even though you despise that person and your work? Do you have the appearance of a faithful, loving marriage, but in the dark of night, thoughts of unfaithfulness abound, behind closed doors people don't see the neglectful actions taken or hear the abusive words spoken? Does everyone see Zoe, but you know that you are Thanos?

Maybe today of all days is the day where you and I are visually trying to tell people what we actually are as you have ashes smeared across your forehead. While some people looked at you and wanted to whip out a rag and say, "You've got something right there," you know that you were trying to honestly show people your name. You are Thanos, death. But you're alive, a living, breathing human being, a Zoe. You can't be Thanos, death, and Zoe, life, at the same time...can you?

You and I, we are Thanos because we are sinners. We were born into it. It all goes back to our very first parents, Adam and Eve. God told them not to eat the fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, then they would surely experience Thanos, death. It's a promise found in another chapter 3 of the Bible, in Genesis, the beginning of the end. God had made Adam from the dust of the earth, and he would return to dust by way of death.

And God kept his Word. Adam and Eve ate. Death came to them. Genesis chapter 4 brought about the first human death with Cain killing his brother Abel. In the next chapter, the gong of death kept ringing over and over again through the genealogy from Adam to Noah. Death, Thanos, kept coming and has come to us. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12)

With the ashes on our foreheads and our hands today, we're telling people our name: Thanos, Death. You and I, we are sinners. As such, we are going to die. It's the wages of sin, not Adam's and Eve's sin, but our own sins. We are dead people walking, so to speak.

And the amount of time before our physical death come unknown. If we don't change our name of Thanos to Zoe, Jesus "will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you." (verse 3)

So, what do we do? Can we change our names? Will it just be a superficial thing, like changing a name on a driver's license, that we have a new name, but it doesn't change our reputation, doesn't change what we have and have not done?

No, by the fact that we are still here right now with life, our names can and do change. This is why the angel, the messenger, to the congregation in Sardis wrote: "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent." (verses 2,3) Their name, their reputation, could be changed from Thanos, death, to Zoe, life.

How? It wasn't their deeds that would save them. They could do all the things they wanted, but it wouldn't change their name. Their name would be changed by the one who gave them a new name. They would have their name changed by remembering what they had received and heard from God. They were to remember the one who became death for us.

Paul wrote in Romans chapter 5, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:8-10)

Jesus became Thanos, death, for us so that we would have our name changed to Zoe, to life. We remember this as we look at the image of those ashes on your foreheads and hands today. It's in the shape of a cross. Yes, Christ became death for you and for me so that we would have life, not the life of a dead person walking, but life right now as one who is taken from spiritual death to spiritual life. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were Thanos. But God made us alive with Christ. It is by grace, God's grace, his life given into death for you, that made us alive.

From the sacrifice of Christ flows our life, our Zoe. You are here, and, yes, you're going to die, but you are not Thanos. You are Zoe. God has made you alive. That's why you came to worship today, to remember and to hold fast to his life given into death for you. That's why you care about the people you see in this room today. That's why you care about the people in this world, the other people with the reputation of Zoe but you know that they are Thanos, that they are dead inside as they try to cover their death with a life of works.

There is only one who can change our name from Thanos to Zoe. That is Christ. We wear his symbol on us today. Be who God has made you to be. Be the Zoe, the name of life that God has given you. Go about your deeds in this world, not because you're trying to make a reputation to God or to people, but because this is who you are.

You care about your neighbor. You do good works to them, for them. You smile at them because you know that other people need to know that there is joy in this world, joy even when you have that dark, crippling cloud of depression hanging over you. You want to give to the needy, help take care of the widows and widowers and the orphans because God has life for them too, a life where death is defeated, a life with him because he defeated Thanos and is Zoe, Zoe for all. This is why you strive each day to die to your sins in baptism and arise a new person to love your spouse just as God loved us, that you give all of who you are, all of your life, in service to them as God gave his life in service to you. This is why you work for your boss with all your heart and not just for a paycheck, because you can give him Zoe instead of the Thanos of just a 9-5 grind until you die.

Today, your ashes say that you are Thanos. But those ashes are in the shape of a cross. We remember the one who gave his life into death. He gave us a new name, a new reputation. You and I, we are Zoe because Christ is Zoe for us. We are alive. Wear this new name for all to see. Amen.