

Death on the Interstate

December 1996

The wreck had happened just minutes before we came upon it. Debris was scattered across I-20; liquid cargo was spewing from the overturned tanker; a blue tarp concealed the lifeless body still trapped in the mangled cab. The sobering scene brought several things to mind:

The message of death was coming to someone's house. The truck driver, identified in the newspaper as Donald Watwood of Hanceville, was someone's husband, father, brother, son or friend. They did not yet know Donald had died. I could imagine the knock on the door that would forever change lives and turn this beautiful autumn Saturday into a date of darkness for friends and family.

This is a terrible message that has been painfully received so often in human history. When told of Absalom's death David agonized, "*O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom – if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!*" (2 Sam 18:33).

The things we see have a tremendous impact upon us. It is one thing to read about a fatal accident in the paper; it is another thing to see it before your very eyes. Likewise, it is one thing to read about the Grand Canyon; it is quite another to see it. Visual encounters are extremely powerful; what we see can make a vivid impression upon our thoughts and emotions. Should we not then be very discriminating in regard to what we see?

Yet too many Christians have a cavalier attitude toward what they see. Some pride themselves on their assumed ability to view filth and violence and not be affected by it. By "affected" they usually mean "tempted." But temptation is not the only concern. If numbed to the violence and gore of movies, will I respond as I should when I see real-life suffering? Some doctors fail to respond compassionately to their patients because they have hardened themselves to suffering. Hollywood is an *expert* in using realistic visual images to manipulate people emotionally. Do not underestimate the power of what you see.

We missed potentially being involved in the wreck by a matter of minutes. In fact, had I not been about seven minutes late in meeting my ride, we would have been very near the site at the exact time of the accident. How often have we barely missed death, sometimes without even realizing it? Each must learn to live with the realization that "*there is but a step between me and death*" (1 Sam 20:3). This would affect many of the decisions we make in life.