



A Far, Far Better Rest

A *Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens has been one of my favorite books for well over 50 years. In addition to its well-known introduction, that begins “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times” one of its most celebrated and widely cited excerpts are the poignant words of Sydney Carton, who said, as he surrenders his life to save his friend, Charles Darnay: “*It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.*”

Carton says these words as he is being taken to the guillotine. Carton has managed to take the place of a friend who would have met the same fate, so he is, as Jesus said, exhibiting the GREATER LOVE of laying down his life for his friend. In this ultimate act of self-sacrificial love, Sydney Carton realizes **A Far, Far Better Rest**.

The character of Sydney Carton is a troubled soul—he is an alcoholic, and he is an arrogant narcissist who seems hopelessly in love with himself.

But as the story develops in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Carton is transformed from his somewhat miserable, self-centered life, and ultimately as he turns his focus toward serving others he does *a far, far better thing than he has ever done and enters into a far, far better rest than he has ever known.*

Transformation, regeneration and spiritual rebirth are constant themes of *A Tale of Two Cities*—through the eyes and perspective of the French Revolution.

The French Revolution is normally dated as occurring between 1789 and 1799, just over

200 years ago. The revolution overthrew the corrupt monarchy and ultimately replaced it with democracy—and then embraced, as the national motto of France: **liberty, equality and fraternity.**

It was a time of far reaching social and political upheaval, so while Paris is the focal point, London is also part of the story, thus *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Sydney Carton of London and Charles Darnay of Paris are two of the main characters in the story. They resemble one another in appearance, and that is one of the keys of the story.

They both fall in love with the same woman, but it is Darnay who marries her. Darnay, however, is a marked man in France because he was a man of privilege and power.

Until the revolution, France had been completely controlled by the aristocracy, but now working men and women, who were impoverished and abused, started a grass roots movement to overthrow the corruption of the aristocracy.

The former corrupt leaders, including the educated class, the landowners and those who have held offices because of being favored by the aristocracy are all being hunted down, imprisoned and executed on the infamous guillotine.

Toward the end of *A Tale of Two Cities* Darnay is imprisoned, primarily for crimes against the new order in France committed by his father and his uncle—but still, he is awaiting execution.

But his friend Sydney Carton, who closely resembles Darnay in appearance, visits him in prison, and is able to bribe a guard so that

Darnay is able to walk out of prison and certain death to be reunited with his wife.

Because Sydney Carton looks so remarkably like Darnay, the prison guards and officials have no idea that they are executing Carton, instead of his friend Darnay.

Sydney Carton longed to transform his own life, he yearned to serve others and through his substitution for his friend Darnay he found meaning in life...he found rest.

“Do You Hear the People Sing?” is one of the great songs in *Les Miserables*, a novel by Victor Hugo adapted in our time as a stage play and movie that also concentrates on this tumultuous time of revolution in France.

Here are a few of the lyrics from the song, which capture the feeling of those who are oppressed, downtrodden and searching for relief from oppression—searching for **A Far, Far Better Rest**.

This stirring song does not move me toward a political solution. In this world in which we live, there is no perfect political solution. These soaring lyrics inspire me to think of the Jesus Way—our Lord and our Savior, who alone can give you and me **A Far, Far Better Rest**:

*“Do you hear the people sing,
singing a song of angry men? It is the
music of a people who will not be
slaves again! When the beating of
your heart echoes the beating of the
drums there is life about to start when
tomorrow comes...”* □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for “A Far, Far Better Rest” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of March 7, 2021.