

FUNERAL MESSAGES FOR BELIEVERS

by Various

A collection of funeral sermons and messages for Christian memorial services, including addresses on the hope of faith over fear, Christ's comfort from John 14, death as the door to eternity, and other consoling themes from Scripture.

24 Chapters

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00.00. Funeral Messages for Believers

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S. A Hope Which Exchanges Fear for Faith

A Hope Which Exchanges Fear for Faith

Study By: admin

Psalms 23:1-6 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. For all of us gathered here today, the kindness and goodness of Mrs. Smith is the source of both our present grief, for we shall now be deprived of the benefit of her life. The goodness and kindness of Mrs. Smith is the source of the warm memories which we have sought to recall and refresh in her eulogy a few moments ago. All of us can both rejoice and grieve, due to the goodness of this wife, mother, and friend. The Christian can do even more than this. Those who have personally trusted in Jesus Christ can also give thanks for the failures and the faults of those who have touched their lives, and have passed on. While we do not focus on one's failures at the time of their death, we must all admit that there are failures. The Christian can be thankful for the failures of those whose lives have touched their own because of the assurance that "God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Because of this, Joseph could not only forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery, he could recognize the good hand of God in this cruel act, providing him with the opportunity to return good for evil, and to spare the lives of his own family, even though they had not spared his (see Genesis 37:1-36; Genesis 38:1-30; Genesis 39:1-23; Genesis 40:1-23; Genesis 41:1-57; Genesis 42:1-38; Genesis 43:1-34; Genesis 44:1-34; Genesis 45:1-28; Genesis 50:20).

It is my privilege to share with you in the grief and the joy of fondly recalling the good things which God brought into our lives through Mrs. Smith. But as a preacher of the gospel, it is also my obligation to remind you that our eternal destiny is not determined by the ratio of our good deeds to our faults and failures, which the Bible more frankly calls sin. At the beginning of the service, a

very familiar passage was read-- Psalms 23:1-6. This psalm is a favorite, especially when one brought fact to face with the grim reality of death. It describes, in poetic terms, the peace and confidence which David has, in the face of adversity and opposition from his enemies, and even death. There is another passage, not nearly as familiar, which informs us that David's sense of peace and security is not natural, but supernatural. Consider these words, from the pen of the unknown author of the New Testament Book of Hebrews:

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:14-15). This passage puts Psalms 23:1-6 into perspective. It tells us that death normally produces fear, and not faith. It tells us that the fear of death hinders and haunts men all of their lives. It tells us that David's faith, as expressed in Psalms 23:1-6 is not natural, but supernatural. As we come to honor the life and memory of Mary Smith, we come also to face the reality of death. We come, knowing that we, too, shall experience death. If we are honest with ourselves, some must admit that facing death today is a fearful experience, just as Hebrews informs us. Others can truly identify with David, and the peace and security which he knew and cherished. In his epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul described these two contrasting responses to death in these words: But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Paul expects Christians to view death differently than the rest. Christians, he tells us, will grieve, but they will grieve in hope. The rest have no hope. What is that hope? What is it that makes the difference? My privilege on this occasion, is to share with you how you can grieve with hope. My joy and delight is to share with you how you can exchange the fear of death for the faith of David. In the next few moments, I want to offer to you the hope which David experienced, and which he expressed in Psalms 23:1-6. The source of this hope is to be found in the texts of both passages which you have heard today. Let me make a few comments about the hope which God offers to all those who face death, a hope which exchanges fear for faith.

David did not fear. He did not fear what his enemies would do to him. He did not fear death. His fear was replaced by faith. The basis of David's faith is expressed in Psalms 23:1-6.

First, David's faith rested in God.

Second, David's faith rested in the fact that God was His shepherd.

Third, David's faith replaced his fear of his enemies, and even of death.

Fourth, David's fear of death was gone because he was assured of God's presence.

Fifth, David's faith rested in the fact that God was present with him, in life, in death, and throughout all eternity. The text which I have just read from the Book of Hebrews expands on David's words in Psalms 23:1-6, explaining how David's faith in God can free him from the fear of death. The writer to the Hebrews gives us two vitally important truths, which explain the faith of David in Psalms 23:1-6.

(1) The Shepherd became a sheep In Psalms 23:1-6, David describes himself as a sheep, and the Lord as his Shepherd. In the Old Testament, the sins of Israel were temporarily atoned for by the

sacrifice of a lamb. Isaiah the prophet spoke of the coming Savior as a Lamb, who would suffer for the sins of men:

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

John the Baptist was a prophet, the prophet whose privilege it was to introduce Jesus of Nazareth as God's Messiah. When John saw Jesus, he cried out, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

David could rejoice because the Lord, his Shepherd, was with Him. We can now see that the Good Shepherd became a sheep (like David).

(2) The Lamb of God died for us, and triumphed over death by His resurrection. Not only did Jesus Christ come as the Lamb of God, to die for those who would be His sheep. Jesus rose from the dead, triumphant over death. And thus, those who trust in Him need no longer fear death. Death was defeated by the Lamb who was slain, and who rose again.

Let me illustrate from the life of Abraham, how the fear of death imprisons us as slaves, and how faith in Jesus Christ frees us. Abraham is perhaps one of the most well-known Old Testament patriarchs. The Jews boasted that they were his descendants. But Abraham, like all men, feared death, and this fear enslaved him.

God had called Abraham from his homeland and brought him to the land of Israel, which He promised to give to him and his descendants. God promised to bless Abraham through his offspring. But Abraham and Sarah were unable to bear children. They were old, and over a period of time child-bearing became a human impossibility. When a famine came to the land of Canaan, Abraham took Sarah, his wife, to Egypt. Knowing that his wife was beautiful, and fearing that the Egyptians would kill him, in order to marry his wife, Abraham instructed Sarah to lie, and to represent herself as his sister, not his wife. This made her eligible for marriage, and it seemed to put the promise of God at risk, because the promised "seed" was to come through the union of Abraham and Sarah. Now, there was the danger that Sarah would become the wife of an Egyptian, and bear him children.

God protected Sarah, and spoke to Pharaoh, who was about to make her his wife. When Pharaoh rebuked Abraham, and asked why he would deceive him about his wife, Abraham admitted that he feared death. One might hope that this painful experience in Egypt would have cured Abraham from his deception, but it did not. On at least one more occasion, Abraham and Sarah lied again. God once again spared them.

God solved the problem of Abraham's lying by dealing with his fear of death. He gave Abraham and Sarah as son, when they were "as good as dead" so far as child-bearing was concerned. Their son, Isaac, was born to them in their old age. He was truly a miracle child. After a number of years, God put Abraham's faith to its greatest test. He instructed him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to put him to death. It was only a test, but Abraham did not know it. From the New Testament, we know why Abraham was willing to obey God, and to put his son to death. He had come to trust in God as the One who was able to raise the dead. God had given them a son, when they were as

good as dead. Now, if he must put this son to death, God would raise him. This was Abraham's faith, and thus it overcome his fear of death. This is the faith of which David is writing, in Psalms 23:1-6. This is the good news of the gospel, of which the writer to the Hebrews is speaking. Man's fear of death is well-rounded. Death is the penalty for sin, and we are all sinners, worthy of death. But the Good Shepherd became a sheep, so to speak. He took on human flesh and lived among men. The Lord Jesus Christ then died for our sins, and suffered the penalty, our penalty, of death. God raised Him from the dead. All those who trust in Him lose their fear of death and find the faith, peace, and hope of which David writes.

Exchanging the fear of death for faith in Jesus Christ is a personal decision. David does not speak of the Lord as "our Shepherd," but as "my Shepherd." Have you come to grips with the reality of death as God's penalty for sin? Have you personally received Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God and as your Good Shepherd? If so, you will no longer be enslaved by the fear of death. The words of David in Psalms 23:1-6 no longer are his expression of faith, but yours as well.

It is with this faith that we can grieve today, but we will grieve with hope, if the Lord is our Shepherd, because He became the Lamb of God in our place. May this hope be yours in this hour of grief.

S. A Message of Hope

A Message of Hope Hebrews 2:14-15

Study By: admin

Mrs. Smith's family wants you to know that while they grieve at the loss of her earthly fellowship, they also rejoice in this time of sorrow, assured that she was a Christian. This message will explain why they can rejoice in her death, and will also how you can rejoice in the face of death as well.

There is a world of difference between the way a Christian views death and the way others view it. For the unbeliever, death is a dreaded foe, something to be avoided at all costs, something so feared that we try to dismiss it from our minds. For the Christian, death is a defeated enemy. But more than this, death is actually a blessing. Two texts in the New Testament will demonstrate the dramatic difference in the way men view death. The first text describes the fear that enslaves all men, apart from the grace of God.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. The inspired writer of this Scripture tells us that men are subject to slavery all their lives because of the fear of death. It further informs us that the one who has the power of death is the devil. Why is death so dreaded that it enslaves men all their lives? In the early chapters of the Book of Genesis we are told that God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. There before them were many trees. Two of these trees were the "tree of life" and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." They were forbidden to eat of only the one tree--the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God told them that in the day they ate of the fruit of this tree they would surely die (Genesis 2:16-17). The devil tempted Eve and she and her husband ate of the forbidden fruit. From that time on they sensed a nakedness, and were not at ease in the presence of God, so that they hid from Him.

Men are not wrong to fear death. It is a dreaded enemy to those who have been separated from God by their sin. The Bible tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It further indicates to us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Death is not an escape from the consequences of sin, for death brings men to the ultimate judgment for sin as they must stand before the God whom they have offended by their sin:

". . . it has been appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 10:27).

Death is a dreaded enemy, and the fear of death hold men in bondage all their lives. Some try to set aside the fear of death by concluding that after death there is neither a heaven to seek nor a hell to shun. Others simply try to avoid thinking about death and its consequences. Still others try to convince themselves that they most certainly would not be condemned to hell. Unfortunately, all are wrong. None of these solutions to the dilemma of death is adequate. We must take heed to

these warnings:

Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts (Proverbs 21:2).

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death (Proverbs 14:12).

These texts warn us against seeking to find our own way, to trust our own ability to deliver ourselves from the fear of death. God has provided a cure for the fear of death. Those who have turned to this solution can say these words with confidence:

"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Allow me to explain how God has made it possible for you to triumph over death, and to claim these words of confidence as your own. In the Garden of Eden, God promised Adam and Eve that the devil would be defeated, and that the dreaded events of their sin in the Garden could be reversed, through a solution which God Himself would provide. He promised a Savior, who would be born of the woman, who would destroy the devil (Genesis 3:15). As time passed, and as God continued to reveal His purposes and promises to men through the Scriptures, more and more details concerning the promised Savior were disclosed to men. The Savior would be the offspring of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), Isaac, and Jacob. He would come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-12). He would be a "king," an heir to the throne of king David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), and would be both divine and human, the Son of God and the Son of man (see Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 11:1-5; 52:13--53:12). God even indicated that the place of the Savior's birth would be Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

It was clear in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Savior that He would save His people by dying for their sins. His sacrificial death was foreshadowed by the blood sacrifices which God required of those who worshipped Him. It was also revealed that the Son of God was also to be the "Lamb of God," who would die for the sins of His people:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, And He will bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:4-7, Isaiah 53:11). The promised Savior was Jesus Christ. When the prophet John the Baptist introduced Jesus, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

While His disciples did not want to hear it or believe it, Jesus often told them that He would die for the sins of men, and that He would rise from the grave.

"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9:22).

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

"And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:13-16).

It was the disobedience of Adam and Eve that brought sin and death into the world. It was the Jesus Christ who brought the solution to sin and death. Jesus Christ was the Son of God, without sin. When He died, He died for our sins, not His own. He suffered the wrath of God, the punishment which our sins deserved and demanded. When He rose from the dead it proved that God was satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. When we acknowledge our sin and trust in the death and resurrection of Christ in our place then we are freed from the dread of sin and death, and enter into the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life. That is what the writer to the Hebrews was saying when he wrote these words:

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:14-15). The "He" of Hebrews 2:14 is Jesus Christ. He took on flesh and blood. The Son of God took on humanity, adding humanity to His deity. He, on the cross of Calvary, "partook of death" in our place. For all who have trusted in Jesus Christ, there is no longer any fear of death, for He paid the penalty for our sins. He also rose from the dead, assuring us of eternal life after death, life in the presence of God.

How, then, can death be a source of fear for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ? The devil no longer has a death grip on us, one which makes us slaves of the fear of death. We now have the sure hope of eternal life. Because of this, death is no longer a dreaded enemy, but a deliverance from the trials and tribulations of this life into the eternal joys of heaven. The apostle Paul expresses the Christian view of death in these words which are recorded in the Book of 2 Corinthians: For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this [house] we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by sight--we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-8). To Paul, and to every Christian, this life is temporal, while heaven is eternal. To Paul, the body in which we now live is temporary and imperfect. The body which awaits us after death is incorruptible and eternal. The Christian does not cling to this earthly life, as though this

was all that there is, but longs for heaven. Death is the doorway to heaven, and thus it holds no fear or dread for all who are in Christ, by faith in Him. Just a few verses later in this 5th chapter of 2 Corinthians Paul writes,

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-18 a).

You may not know for certain whether you are a Christian or not. One way to know is to ask which of these two texts expresses the response of your heart to death:

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:1-18).

"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Jesus Christ came to the earth to take away the dread of death. All those who have placed their trust in Him need not look upon death as a dreaded foe, but as a welcome friend, leading the way to eternal fellowship with God and with those who love Him.

While I did not know Mrs. Smith personally, Sue tells me that she knew the Lord Jesus as her Savior, and thus death was not a dreaded enemy to her. This is why Mrs. Smith's family can rejoice in the death of their loved one. Trusting in God's provision for your sins in Jesus Christ is the way for you to be delivered from bondage to the fear of death into the joyful anticipation of living with Him forever.

Graveside Service As we come to the time when we must commit the body of Mrs. Smith to the ground, we should do so with the assurance of these words of Scripture. They are words of assurance for every person who dies in Christ, as a believer in His work on the cross of Calvary which has accomplished the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). As Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, our fleshly bodies cannot enter into the eternal presence of God. We will gladly set aside our earthly "tent" so that we may possess the new heavenly "building" which God has prepared for us, and which will never be subject to corruption. It is necessary for us to set aside this earthly body, so

that we may put on our heavenly, glorified body. As we place this body into the ground, we do so awaiting its resurrection and transformation. What a glorious hope! As we commit the body of Mrs. Smith to the ground, there is yet another text which I would commend to you, to think about in a way that you may never have considered before. Listen to these words of our Lord:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

I would like to suggest to you who believe in the Lord Jesus, and who loved Mrs. Smith, that we are now "laying up treasure in heaven" as we commit her physical body to the ground. It is in her heavenly body that she will live forever, and in a way that will make her no longer vulnerable to earthly corruption. And as we "lay her up in heaven" we find that in so doing our hearts become that much more fixed on heaven as well. She is a treasure, which our hearts look forward to enjoying for all eternity, in the presence of God.

S. Christ's Comfort

Christ's Comfort (John 14:1-31)

Study By: admin We are here today to say good-bye. Jesus knew what this experience was like.

READ John 14:1-6. Jesus comforted his disciples--and He comforts us--by sharing four truths.

Death is Real 1. We must face it honestly 2. When we accept it, healing begins 3. DEATH to us means GLORY to a believer in Christ

Heaven is Real

1. A real place 2. A prepared place 3. A perfect place - home with the Father Salvation is Real 1. Christ is the only way to heaven 2. Faith is the only way to be saved Christ's Coming is Real 1. It means resurrection 2. It means reunion 3. It means comfort today

S. Death: The Door to Eternity

Death: The Door to Eternity (Luke 16:19-31)

Study By: admin The death of a neighbor, a friend, or a loved one brings us face to face with eternity. We dare not honor the life and death of another without being reminded of the fact that we, too, will die. The Bible teaches us that death is a kind of door leading to eternity. There is much that is mysterious about eternity, but the story which our Lord told in Luke chapter 16 opens the door, and enables us to learn some important lessons concerning the relationship between life now and life in eternity. The story our Lord told was directed toward a hostile audience. It was aimed at a particular group of religious people, known as the Pharisees. Luke tells us that they were "lovers of money" and that they were scoffing at His teaching (verse 14). They were also those who were proud of their knowledge of the Old Testament, thinking they knew much more about their Scriptures than others (John 7:47-49). The story is one which may be familiar to you. It is about two very different men, who in their lives lived in close proximity to each other. The first man was named Lazarus; we are not told the name of the second man, only that he was a rich man in life. Their lives are contrasted in three different ways:

1. In life-- Luke 16:19-21 2. In death-- Luke 19:22 3. In eternity-- Luke 19:23-31 The story has many lessons for us, but I wish to focus on just five:

1. First, eternity is where earthly wrongs or injustices are made right.
2. Second, our eternal destiny is not what most people expect. Eternity will come as a shock and a surprise to many, who think that they are going to heaven, and find themselves in hell.
3. Third, our eternal destiny is not determined by those things by which our society measures "success" and "significance." By human estimates, it would have been Lazarus, the poor and miserable man, who would have suffered eternally, and the rich man who would have lived in comfort.
4. Fourth, our eternal destiny is sealed by a decision we make in life, and cannot be reversed after death.
5. Fifth, the decision involves the acknowledgment and repentance of our sins, and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who died rise from the dead and proclaim the good news of the gospel and warn men of eternal judgment.

S. Deffinbaugh - God the Protector

God the Protector (Psalms 91:1-16) Study By: Bob Deffinbaugh Background: Death of an older believer, who died of cancer. The words of Psalms 91:1-16 are some of the most beautiful words in the Bible. Look at them for just a moment:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper, And from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.

You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; {But} it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes, And see the recompense of the wicked. For you have made the Lord, my refuge, {Even} the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent. For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, Lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and cobra, The young lion and the serpent you will trample down. "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him {securely} on high, because he has known My name. "He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him, and honor him. "With a long life I will satisfy him, And let him behold My salvation."

These are wonderful words of comfort. They speak of God as the Protector of those who trust in Him. They promise that while many will suffer destruction, the one who has trusted in God, who has fled to Him for safety, will be delivered. And yet these words which gave Ann such comfort might seem to have not come true. If God has promised protection from evil and the satisfaction of a long life, why did Ann suffer so long, and then die? Are these words really true? Can we find comfort in them this afternoon? We certain can! Let me show you why they are true, and why they can bring us great comfort as we grieve over the death of one whom we knew and loved.

We have a divinely inspired commentary on these verses in the New Testament, which shed much light on the meaning and application of this psalm to us. In the temptation of our Lord, Psalms 91:11-12 are quoted by Satan to our Lord, at the time of His temptation in wilderness (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). Satan challenged Jesus to throw Himself down from the temple, and to be divinely delivered from death, to show that He was the Messiah. He tried to convince Jesus that since Psalms 91:1-16 promised deliverance from suffering and death, God would deliver Him.

Jesus responded by referring to the Scripture which forbade putting God to the test. There is much more that Jesus could have said, and did not. What Satan would only later learn is that the promise of Psalms 91:1-16 was to be fulfilled through the suffering and death of Jesus, on the cross of Calvary. God could promise deliverance to those who trusted in Him because Jesus would suffer in their behalf, and would rise from the dead, the Victor over sin, and death, and

Satan. Psalms 91:1-16 was not Jesus' excuse for avoiding the cross, but His reason for going to the cross.

Just as Psalms 91:1-16 was no guarantee that Jesus need not suffer. Indeed, the suffering of Jesus was the reason why the saints are protected and removed from suffering. The important question is this: "From what sufferings are the saints delivered? From what dangers and destruction are we delivered?" Psalms 91:1-16 does it promise us that the saints will be delivered from all suffering. Many Scriptures, the experience of many saints (biblical and otherwise) and our own experience, make it clear that Christians do suffer. Let us look more carefully at this psalm to determine what suffering we are promised to be delivered from. The Psalm begins with the strong statement that God is our refuge, our fortress, our place of safety (Psalms 91:1-4). There are two kind of people mentioned in this psalm, and they have two very different destinies. The one group is delivered from destruction, and the other group is destroyed. The all-important need here is to determine what it is that some are delivered from, which is also the means by which others are destroyed. Our text cannot mean that those who trust in God are all delivered from suffering and death, and that those who do not trust in God suffer and die prematurely. The psalm which comes immediately before our text speaks of that suffering and short life which the godly experience, as a result of living in a fallen, sin-tainted world:

Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou dost turn man back into dust, And dost say, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in Thy sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or {as} a watch in the night. Thou hast swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes, and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades, and withers away. For we have been consumed by Thine anger, And by Thy wrath we have been dismayed. Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, Our secret {sins} in the light of Thy presence. For all our days have declined in Thy fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is {but} labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. Who understands the power of Thine anger, And Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee? So teach us to number our days, That we may present to Thee a heart of Wisdom. Do return, O Lord; how long {will it be}? And be sorry for Thy servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Thy lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days Thou hast afflicted us, {And} the years we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear to Thy servants, And Thy majesty to their children. And let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And do confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands (Psalms 90:1-17).

Psalms 90:1-17, written by Moses, speaks of the eternal nature of God and the very temporal nature of man. With God, a thousand years is nothing. For man, 70 years is a long life, and even these years are filled with sorrow and labor. This brevity and painfulness of life is explained by Moses as the result of God's holiness and man's sin. The solution to this problem of pain, and the hope of the believer is not in this life, but in the next. It will come with the return of the Lord. It will come "in the morning". It will come in the future. The solution is not to be found in the deliverance from death, but in a deliverance after death. While it is not clearly stated in this psalm, it would be correct to say that death itself is a kind of deliverance for the Christian, for it removes us from the

effects of sin, from pain and suffering and sorrow, and it takes us into the eternal joy of the presence of our Lord. The destruction from which the believer is delivered is not the suffering and pain and even death of this life, but from the judgment of God, from the "second death" of eternal separation from His presence. This deliverance is so clearly described in yet another psalm, Psalms 73:1-28.

Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, {As} I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; And their body is fat. They are not in trouble {as other} men; Nor are they plagued like mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of {their} heart run riot. They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore his people return to this place; And waters of abundance are drunk by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased {in} wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long, And chastened every morning.

If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children. When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; {Then} I perceived their end. Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, Thou wilt despise their form. When my heart was embittered, And I was pierced within, Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was {like} a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven {but Thee}? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works (Psalms 73:1-28).

Here Asaph, the psalmist, expresses his faith, a faith in God as the Good God, to those who trust in Him. His problem was that while he trusted in God as the One who was "good" to Israel, his experience was that the righteous suffered, while it was the wicked who prospered. He had contemplated giving it up, he confessed, for his piety seemed to be of little profit. This was until he came to see his life through a different perspective--a heavenly, eternal one (Psalms 73:16 ff.). He then realized that the prosperity of the wicked was exceedingly short-lived. Their eternal fate was destruction. The righteous, on the other hand, have all of eternity to enjoy the blessings of God's presence and power. In the light of eternity, the sufferings of this life are but a small price to pay when compared to the blessings of eternity. But even the sufferings of this life are not "evil". They are truly "good" for the saint, for in these times of suffering, God seems even nearer to us, especially as we are drawn nearer to Him. The ultimate "evil" in life is to be separated from God, and if affluence and a life of ease turns us from God, this absence from pain is really an "evil". The ultimate "good" in life is fellowship with Him, enjoying His presence. If suffering in this life enables

us to experience His presence in a deeper way, then it is truly "good" and He is "good" for bringing this adversity into our lives. This is why Ann found comfort in Psalms 91:1-16. Not because it promised her a long, trouble-free life on this present earth, but because it assured her that in Christ she would escape the wrath of God. In this life, she did not need to fear danger or even death, for He will raise her from death to eternal life, in His presence, free from pain and sickness and sorrow. That was her hope, and thus we can rejoice in her sufferings and death. This hope is not for everyone, but only for those who have turned to God for their security and safety. Jesus Christ suffered the wrath of God, and by faith in Him, we may be sheltered from it. If you would share the hope of Ann, you must trust in her Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. May you experience the joy and the hope which she did, even in her sickness and pain.

S. Freedom from the Fear of Death

Freedom from the Fear of Death (John 14:1-6 and Hebrews 2:14-15)

Study By: admin

Background: This was an older man, the father of one of our church members. I met this gentleman when I conducted his wife's funeral service after her death. All along, Mr. Smith had been making preparations for his own death. After he moved to a retirement village, he asked for me to visit with him about conducting his funeral service, as I had done for his wife. Early this year, when Mr. Smith was very ill, I visited him in the hospital. I did not expect him to remember or recognize me. I was mistaken. He not only recognized me, he quickly reminded me that I "had a job to do." Both he and I knew that "job" was to conduct his funeral. I did not wish to assume or to suggest that the time for my "job" had come, and so I responded by saying that I would be glad to do my "job" when the time came. He responded, "We don't live forever, you know."

I would like to speak to you very briefly about a passage in the Bible which I shared with Mr. Smith as we talked about his funeral and his eternal future. I know he would want me to share this with you, today.

Mr. Smith was right. We don't live forever. He was also wise to plan for his death in advance. Death is one of the ugly realities of life, a reality which we must all face. Our gathering here today is to honor the memory of Mr. Smith. It is also to find comfort, not just in his death, but in the certainty of our own death. This comfort can only be found in Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Word of God. I know of no more comforting text than the words of our Lord Jesus, recorded in John 14:1-31. These are the words which I shared with Mr. Smith as we talked of his death. These are the words which I would also share with you today, as we seek to find comfort in the face of death. As Jesus was approaching the time of His own death, He spoke these words of comfort and assurance to His disciples:

"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, {there} you may be also. "And you know the way where I am going." Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:1-6).

There is one great fear common to all men, which is greater than all other fears. It is a fear which paralyzes men all of their lives. It is the fear of death. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of that fear in these words:

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews

2:14-15). The disciples were no different than anyone else when it came to the fear of death. Even though they had been with Jesus, and had witnessed His power over death, the fear of death was always with them, especially when He spoke of His own death. Every time that Jesus told His disciples He was going to die, they were uneasy, and they sometimes even tried to persuade Him to give up His destiny of death.

Jesus was eating the Passover with His disciples, on the night He was to be arrested, and soon after to be crucified. He had just shaken His disciples by telling them that one of them would betray Him, that He would be put to death, and that they would not be able to follow Him immediately, but would follow Him later on.

Imagine for a moment how you would have felt, if you were one of the disciples, hearing from Jesus that He was about to die, and that they would not be able to come to Him to be with Him for some time. The words of Jesus in John 14:1-31 are spoken to comfort His troubled followers. They are words of comfort not only for those troubled disciples, but for everyone who has trusted in Jesus for eternal life.

Just how do the words of Jesus, spoken here, give us comfort? Many people seek comfort from this task by focusing upon the "mansions" or "dwelling places" to which our Lord refers as being in His Father's house. They seem to think of Jesus as the foreman of a construction project in heaven, which has not yet completed. Jesus, they think has to go away, so that He can finish up the project, and so that our dwelling places, now being built, will be completed in time for us to arrive. This misses the point almost completely. The disciples are troubled because Jesus will die, and because they will be separated from Him. They do not care about the heavenly mansions, they care about Him. They see death as the enemy, death as the thief which will snatch their Lord away. Jesus' words are given to His disciples to give them comfort concerning His death. In John chapters 13-17, which is sometimes called the "Upper Room Discourse", Jesus gives comfort to His disciples by telling them two things. First, He told them that His death was to be the means by which they would dwell with Him forever. Second, He told them that during the time of His physical absence He would be even more present with them through the sending of His Holy Spirit, to dwell not only among them, but within them (see John 14:16-31; John 16:7-15). In our text, the "going" of our Lord was directly linked with His "preparing" of a place. More than this, His "going away" He described as the means by which they would "be with Him". The disciples dreaded Jesus' death because they thought that it would separate them forever. Jesus encouraged them by assuring them that His death was the means by which they would dwell with Him forever. The death of our Lord was not the problem, it was the solution. Our Lord's death did not create a problem, it solved the problem. If Jesus had not been separated from them by His death for their sins, they would die in their sins and be separated from Him forever. Jesus' going, His death, paid the price for men's sins, so that men may live forever in the presence of our Lord. The disciples did not understand Jesus at the time, but they did after His resurrection from the dead. They preached Jesus as the One whose death and resurrection brings eternal life to all who believe. They no longer feared His death, as they once did. By their own desire, and in obedience to His command, the disciples, followed by Christians down through the ages, celebrate His death. The death of our Lord is God's way to heaven, and it is the means by which we can live forever with Christ. Death, once our enemy, is defeated. Death does not keep us from God; Christ's death draws us to Him. When the disciples came to understand what Jesus meant in John 14:1-31, they no longer looked on the

death of our Lord with dread, but with joy and hope. But the death of our Lord also changed the way that the disciples looked upon their own death, and the deaths of all who had trusted in Jesus. They understood that death, for them, resulted in their immediate entrance into the presence of our Lord. Listen to these words from the pen of the apostle Paul, which he speaks in reference to his own death: For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better (Php 1:21-23).

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by sight--we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Mr. Smith's death brings us face to face with our own death. We will either face our own death with fear or with faith. It all depends on our response to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus told His disciples that He is the way, not just a way to heaven. Our response to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ determines our response to death, especially our own.

These words of our Lord, recorded in John's gospel, are the solution to the fear of death. I pray that you will, by faith, trust in the Lord Jesus, in His death for your sin and in His resurrection for your own. Death will no longer be your enemy, because the death of our Lord overcame death and its terror, to all who believe in Him.

S. God - A Shepherd to Israel

God—A Shepherd to Israel (Ezekiel 34:1-31)

Study By: admin

Introduction On behalf of (spouse), and on behalf of the rest of the family, let me begin by thanking you for your display of care by being here this morning.

Sorrow and grief are not easy things to face We would avoid them if we could.

We know that even Jesus wept at times. But sorrow and grief do force us to examine life from a different perspective.

We need to be attentive to what God might want to teach us through difficult times;

Things that He may not be able to teach us at other times;

We need to be sensitive to what God would have us learn through this experience.

(Name) was not embarrassed when it came to his faith in Christ. From the jewelry he'd wear, to the way he decorated his house, both inside and out, (Name) wanted others to know where he stood in his relationship with Jesus Christ. He wanted others to know of his love for God's chosen people, the Jews, and his burning desire that they, along with all mankind, would each one come into a personal relationship with the "Eternal Most Gracious Heavenly Father."

Ezekiel 34:1-11

(Name) loved God, and he loved God's Word. This morning I want to turn to one portion of Scripture which was especially meaningful to Him, and share with you in the way in which I believe (Name) would have me share. To use a phrase that's not original, I believe (Name) would desire that God's Word at this moment might comfort the afflicted, but also afflict the comfortable. Might we let God speak to each one of us from His Word. The passage is found in the book bearing the name of the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 34. In the first 11 verses, God uses the prophet to chastize the leaders of the nation for failing to lead the people rightly in their walk with Jehovah God. He suggests that they should have been shepherds, caring for God's flock, but instead had been feeding upon them for their own selfish gain.

Ultimately, God shares that HE would be a Shepherd to Israel. In Ezekiel 34:11 we read: "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them."

Again in Ezekiel 34:15 He says: "I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord." And as a shepherd to His people, we read of His care in Ezekiel 34:12 : "As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness."

Ezekiel 34:13 : "I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land."

Ezekiel 34:14 : "I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel."

God was speaking in this case, directly to His chosen people, the Jews. But, just as today, though, He does not simply care for people as a race, but as individuals. Listen to How He cares for individuals:

Ezekiel 34:16 a I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, Just as real as God's care for individuals, so is His commitment to execute judgment. As a holy God, he will not tolerate sin. Listen to the scriptures as we continue in the same passage:

Ezekiel 34:16 b but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Ezekiel 34:17 "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.

Ezekiel 34:18 Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?

Ezekiel 34:19 Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

Ezekiel 34:20 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.

Ezekiel 34:21 Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, Ezekiel 34:22 I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. In Ezekiel 34:21-30, God is using Ezekiel to speak directly to the Jewish people. He says to them that there will be a time of difficulty for their disobedience and unbelief, but that He will remain faithful to His promises to restore them. This was one of many passages (Name) knew which declared God's love for and future plans for the Jewish people. But to all of us, God has spoken of:

1. His love and care for us, even individually. (Name) would want you to not miss the fact that God cares for you. Whatever your need, sorrow during these days, trouble tomorrow, God cares for you like a shepherd, and
2. He would not have us miss the fact that God in His justice will execute judgment. We need to each expect to face the living God.

He finished his message in Ezekiel 34:1-31 by stating:

Ezekiel 34:31 "You, my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord."

Christ--Shepherd to all Who Trust Him

Briefly, I want to examine the New Testament, and see how Christ revealed Himself as a Shepherd to all who trust in Him.

John 10:11 : "I am the good shepherd. . . . The good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep"

John 10:14 : "and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

We can have an intimate relationship with our shepherd. (John 10:14) It is our shepherd who makes life abundant (John 10:10) The shepherd gave his life for us (John 10:15, John 10:17-18) Hebrews 13:20 : "Jesus, the GREAT shepherd of the sheep" Our shepherd rose from the dead, demonstrating to us that there is a resurrection from the dead, life after death.

1 Peter 5:4 : "And when the CHIEF shepherd shall appear." The shepherd is going to reappear, and we will stand accountable to Him.

1. This gives purpose to life.
2. this gives a standard to life.

Conclusion

(Name) loved His Shepherd. And His burning desire was that others would come to experience this same love relationship with His lord. (Name) was bold, albeit sometimes a little unorthodox in his desire to communicate God's love. I'm convinced he would have me challenge each of you here today, know God, and that is only possible as you trust Christ, the shepherd who gave His life for His sheep. Allow Him to be Master of your life. Submit to His ways, His leadership, and experience the joy of intimacy with the master.

Scriptures leave no room for doubt that those who trust in Christ as Savior, and follow Him as Lord, as (Name) did, are upon death in this life, ushered into the presence of their savior, to forever enjoy Him. Might (Name)'s prayer be answered this morning, that God would comfort each who would trust in the Lord, for He is the loving shepherd who cares for His sheep.

S. God - Our Shepherd

God—Our Shepherd (John 10:1-42)

Study By: admin

Introduction Sorrow and grief are not easy things to face We would avoid them if we could. We know that even Jesus wept at times.

Sorrow and grief do force us to examine life from a different perspective. We need to be attentive to what God might want to teach us through difficult times--things that He may not be able to teach us at other times. We need to be sensitive to what God would have us learn through this experience.

(Name) daughter, _____, told me that her grandmother (deceased's mother) encouraged her, maybe MADE her, memorize the 23rd Psalm as a child. I have a sneaking suspicion that (Name) had the same expectation placed upon him as a child.

I would like to look at how God reveals Himself to us as a shepherd, to see if we can gain some understanding of what God may want us to learn about Him.

God Reveals Himself to Us as a Shepherd John 10:11 --"I am the good shepherd.... The good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep"

John 10:14 --"and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

1. We can have an intimate relationship with our Shepherd. (John 10:14) 2. It is our Shepherd who makes life abundant (John 10:10) 3. The Shepherd gave his life for us (John 10:15, John 10:17-18)

Hebrews 13:20 --"Jesus, the GREAT shepherd of the sheep" Our shepherd rose from the dead, demonstrating to us that there is a resurrection from the dead, life after death.

1 Peter 5:4 --"And when the CHIEF shepherd shall appear . . ." The shepherd is going to reappear, and we will stand accountable to Him. This gives purpose to life. This gives a standard to life.

S. God Works Through Trials

God Works Through Trials (James 1:1-13)

Study By: admin

Introduction As I have reflected over the events of the past few days and months I was drawn to the first chapter of James. In the first 13 verses we are given some understanding of the purpose of trials that come our way. The good that has come from trials. The comfort we can have in trials. So this passage speaks to us to help us in our time of trial when we need understanding and comfort. And yet in a real way I have also thought that the life of our friend and loved one actually was a living example of this passage: As she and her family demonstrated before us the reality of this portion of God's Word.

I shall never be able to read these verses without thinking of (Name) and how her life reflected this passage. So for a few minutes, think with me as we look into God's Word. (Read James 1:2-4) The Lord would first of all have us know that there is. . .

Purpose in Trials

(James 1:2-4)

1. When difficult times come into our lives and we find ourselves unable to comprehend/to understand; the enemy is quick to throw doubts/questions into our minds.
2. We find ourselves questioning God's goodness/God's wisdom in allowing these things to happen.
3. We may even be bitter and angry with God for allowing this to happen to us and wonder if He really understands.
4. But God's word confidently reminds us that God does understand . . .

Things do not just happen haphazardly to the Christian. With no meaning/no purpose.

5. God is in control and as Paul reminds us no one or nothing can separate us from God's love. Romans 8:1-39 --even the most difficult of circumstances.
6. James reminds us that God wants us to trust Him in the trials of life. For as we trust Him in the trials God can use the difficult trial to mold us: To mature us. So that we will be more like Jesus Christ our Savior.
7. Isaiah the prophet said in trying to comprehend God's ways: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)
8. God would have us trust Him in the difficult trials: For even though we cannot understand He loves us and He is in control.

He will use this trial to help us grow spiritually and to help us mature and become more like Jesus Christ.

9. Trust Him! Keep your eyes on Him! And God will use even this trial for His glory.

10. But James goes on to tell us that not only does God have purpose in trials--but also that God gives wisdom in trials.

Wisdom in Trials

(James 1:5-11) (Read James 1:5-6)

1. James recognizes that we may not always be able to see the purpose in trials or see the good that can come from trials.

2. When we find ourselves unable to see the good and the purpose in trials we are to:

Keep on asking Him for wisdom. In faith. And our God who loves to give will respond so that we can see the good and the purpose in trials.

3. Then James illustrates and says: That even a poor man has much good in his trial of poverty if he knows God--the owner of the universe. And a rich man through he lose everything can rejoice in the good of having learned not to place his faith in riches which quickly pass away.

4. God has been very good to us in allowing us to see the good even in this difficult trial. For so much good has already come from this trial: As a church family we are growing spiritually and united together. As individuals we have seen faith in action and we have learned lessons we shall never forget. As we have seen at least three people come to Jesus Christ through faith. (As NAME shared her vital faith with Jesus Christ with others) 5. Yet in the days to come we will continue to need wisdom to see the purpose and the good in this trial.

James exhorts us to keep on asking God in faith for wisdom. And our generous loving God will give us the wisdom needed.

(But finally James reminds us that not only does God have a purpose in trials; and gives wisdom in trials but thirdly there is comfort in trials.) Comfort in Trials

(James 1:12) (Read James 1:12) 1. James here reminds us that this life is not all there is to life. That right will be commended. That due reward will be give for faithfulness.

2. We often live as if we are the living on the way to the dying.

3. But God's word makes it very clear that we are the dying on the way to the living.

4. What is in store then for one who knows Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and passes from this life?

Phil. I tells us that when a Christian departs he is with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:1-21 tells that when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord And 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18 tells us that someday that body which for the present sleeps in the grave will be resurrected and united with our soul/spirit and in this glorified

state we will be with the Lord forever. And there rewards will be given for endurance through trials and for faithfulness to God in difficult times.

5. So today we sorrow - but we sorrow not as others who have no hope.

We have the assurance of the word of God that (name) is with Christ.

(Name) had trusted Jesus Christ as her personal Savior from sin.

6. But I cannot help but think that perhaps some of you are not prepared to face death and you are not prepared to meet Jesus Christ face to face. Nor are you ready to face a trial like (Name) has faced with peace in your heart. The strength that enabled this dear one to face her trial with confidence and assurance was not her own.

It came as she allowed the life of her Savior to live His life through her. It came from a confidence that she was ready to meet her Savior.

She had made her peace with God through faith in Christ and desired above all else to glorify Him with her life.

7. I invite you right where you are sitting to invite Christ into your life as your Savior from sin.

Jesus Christ died as your substitute paying the penalty for your sin. But He asks you ;by an act of your will to trust Him as your personal Savior from sin.

If you do this, on the authority of God's word you are a new creature/born again and prepared to meet your Savior.

Conclusion James (The Holy Spirit of God) in the quietness of this hour reminds us that . . . I. There is purpose in trials:

God is still in control He has not forsaken us but wants us to trust Him so we can mature.

2. God has and will give us wisdom to see the purpose and the good in this trial--As we ask in faith.

3. And there is comfort in knowing that this life is not all there is--that absent from the body means present with the Lord.

4. These truths were demonstrated before us in the life of (Name). (Name) faith in Christ enabled her to face her trial with the peace that passes understanding. Php 4:7

5. And I trust that now as her family as her family and friends we may lay hold of the same Savior and the same truths from God's word to enable us to bear this trial together.

S. God's Encouragement

God's Encouragement (Isaiah 40:1-31)

Study By: admin

Introduction The people of Israel faced difficulties, not unlike many of the difficulties we face in our lives.

Three truths about God are given to encourage the people. These truths are God's encouragement to us at times like this, also. The First Truth:

We are Mortal, Finite Creatures Isaiah 40:6-8 (a) tell us that we all live temporal lives here.

Isaiah 40:15-16 tell us how limited we are, compared to God. The first verse tells us of our humanity in pointing to our sin, and as God as the one able to address our need. (elsewhere Isaiah tells us our sins separate us from God). The last verse speaks also of our growing weak and weary. When we face death--our own or anothers, we come face to face with our own finiteness. Then, he contrasts us with God. The Second Truth:

God is in Control Isaiah 40:12-14 His infinite wisdom and knowledge.

Isaiah 40:21-22 He is in control watching over His creation.

Isaiah 40:23-24 He controls history.

Isaiah 40:25-26 He is sustaining and keeping His creation.

If He's in control, Why does it sometimes seem otherwise?

We experience trials and troubles, we face sickness and death, we seemingly face unanswered prayers.

God comforts Israel by answering these same questions. The Third Truth:

God is Watching Over His People and Meets Their Needs Isaiah 40:11 He cares for us as a shepherd.

Isaiah 40:27 We should never feel as if He's forgotten us.

Isaiah 40:28 He never grows weary.

Isaiah 40:29-30 He meets our needs as we "wait" upon Him. for strength for provisions for salvation--shepherd . . . earlier we read how the good shepherd gave His life for His sheep. facing trials facing death facing grief

S. How Faith Faces Death

How Faith Faces Death

Study By: admin

Background: This man was the father of one of our church members. He belonged to the Church of Christ, and I preached this message in a Church of Christ church.

We have reflected on the life of Jim Smith and sought to honor his life and his memory. If his life brings to mind many pleasant thoughts, his death also confronts us with some harsh realities. Faith is needed in all the circumstances in life, but it is never needed more than in the face of death. In the few moments that we have, I would like to remind you of four truths from the Word of God which describe the relationship of faith and death. These truths are the source of true comfort, hope, and joy, in the face of death. They are truths which are offered to all men, but which are experienced only by those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Faith Faces Death Squarely

Hebrews chapter 11 has often been referred to as the "Hall of Faith". It is a summary of the faith of many of the characters described in the Old Testament. While we find the word "faith" frequently in chapter 11, there is another word (or concept) which is found alongside of faith--it is death. While every one of these members of the "Hall of Faith" had faith, every one of them died without receiving the promises which they believed and acted upon in their lives. We see, then, that biblical faith is that faith which faces death squarely, indeed, which looks beyond death. If men can say, "Where there's life, there's hope", the man or woman of faith can say, "Where there is death, there is hope", for faith is the basis for hope beyond death.

2. Faith Takes Death Seriously

Faith does not deal with death by minimizing it, it deals with sin as a most serious matter. It is, without trying to be humorous, a grave matter. Death is serious because it is the penalty which God has pronounced on sin. Death is serious because it is a certainty for all men. Death is to be taken seriously because, as God says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Death is an irreversible step into eternity, an eternity which is one of eternal bliss in the presence of God, or of eternal agony, removed from the presence of God (cf. Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). The seriousness of death is indicated by our Lord's response to it. One of the few times that we are told the Lord Jesus wept was at the grave of Lazarus, a man whom He was shortly to call forth from the grave. Jesus took His own death seriously as well, as can be seen from His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Death must be taken seriously, for it is the unavoidable consequence of sin.

3. Faith Enables the Christian to be Comforted, even to Worship God, When a Loved One Has Died

In the first chapter of the Book of Job, we are told of the tragic death of Job's children (Job 1:18-22). Job was a man of faith. He did not merely accept the news of his children's death, he fell

to the ground in worship. What was it that enabled Job to worship, when all of his children died tragically, and (from a human point of view) prematurely? Job's faith was evidenced in three ways. Job had faith in the power of God. Job believed in God's sovereignty, in the fact that God was in control. Thus, he did not view the death of his children as a natural disaster (though, in a sense, it was), but as an act of God. He said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:20). Job knew that his children were not his, ultimately, but God's. He knew that just as God had given his children life, God had also taken it away. To Job, it was not "their time", it was "God's time". God was in control, specifically in the manner and timing of the death of his family. Thus, Job could worship. But further, Job had faith not only in the power of God (in His sovereignty, in His control), but in His person. Job's faith was rooted in the character of God. God was both powerful and good. Job, we are told, "did not sin nor did he blame God" (Job 1:22). He did not see God as being in any way "at fault", as doing wrong in the death of His children. He was a God whom Job trusted. Thus he worshipped him, even in this time of tragedy.

There is one final dimension to Job's faith, as I understand this text. It is that Job was willing to trust God in the death of his children, even though he did not understand it. Job knew that God was good, and that God had taken his children in death. Job did not know why. And it would seem that his faith was such that he did not need to know why, at least not then. Time will sometimes reveal those reasons, but it is often only in eternity that they will be known. Faith finds comfort in the power, in the goodness, and in the purposes of God, even though we do not understand them at the moment. As we face the loss of Jim Smith, there are many questions to ask, there are many things we do not, at this moment in time, understand. But if we, by faith, have come to know God as our Savior, then we do know that He is in control, that He is good, and that His wisdom and grace in Mr. Smith's death will someday be evident.

4. Faith Views Death Through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Part of the reason why death is so difficult for men is because they fear death. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ was in order that He "might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:15). Men rightly fear death, apart from Christ. It is a just and certain punishment, and it is the entrance into a life of separation from God, for all sinners. Thus, men who do not have faith in God fear death. They dread it. They live their lives in the bondage of this fear of death.

Christians no longer fear death because of their faith in Jesus Christ. He came to die in the sinner's place, to bear the penalty of death. He not only suffered God's wrath, He was raised from the dead, so that death no longer reigns over the Christian. Death is a defeated foe. Death holds no fear for those who have faith in Christ. Paul looked at death as a deliverance, as a promotion (Php 1:19-26). These triumphant words of the apostle Paul, recorded in the 8th chapter of the Book of Romans, reveal faith's perspective of death:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . But in all these things we

overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).

Closing Prayer

Lord, I thank you for the life of Jim Smith. And I pray that through faith in Jesus Christ, each of us may worship you in his death. May we rejoice in your goodness and power, and in your plans which are beyond our ability to understand this side of heaven. May each one here, through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, experience the joy of being delivered from the fear of death, to the anticipation of death as the entrance into His presence forever more. May your comfort and joy be experienced by those who are here today, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died that sin and death might no longer reign. We look forward to the day when death itself shall be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity. In Jesus' name, amen.

S. How OT Saints Faced Death

How Old Testament Saints Faced Death

Study By: admin Background: Death of a believer. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:28-39).

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36). As we have sought to honor the memory of Sue Smith, so also we wish to focus on her faith, a faith which some of you share, and which I know she desired all of you to share with her. The texts which I have read from the Bible come from the Book of Romans. Sue's favorite text comes from the 8th chapter of Romans, and the second passage which I have read comes from the 11th chapter of this same epistle. Both texts speak of what preachers refer to as the sovereignty of God. Basically, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God maintains that God is in complete control. It is only a God who is in control who can "cause all things to work together for good" (Romans 8:28), and of whom it can be said, "all things are from Him and through Him and to Him" (Romans 11:36). This truth gave Sue great comfort, and it is a truth which can give you great comfort here and now, as you come to grips not only with Sue's death, but with the inevitability of your own death, whether that be sooner or later. For just a few moments, I would like to focus your attention on three men in the Bible, all of whom lived in Old Testament times, and all of whom are said to have worshiped God in the face of death.

Job, we are told, worshiped God at the time of the tragic death of his children.

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord

gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God (Job 1:20-22).

Jacob worshiped God at the time of his own death: By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff (Hebrews 11:21).

David worshiped God at the time of the death of his son, a son who was born as a result of David's immorality, and who died as a result of his immorality:

Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!" But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate (2 Samuel 12:18-20).

I would like to point out that each of these men worshiped God in the face of death, and I would like to suggest that in each case, the sovereignty of God was a significant factor in their worship.

Job was a righteous man, whom God chose as an example of faithfulness to point out to Satan. By divine permission, Satan was able to strike Job's family, so that all of his children died from what appeared to be a natural calamity. When word reached Job that all of his children were dead, we are told that he worshiped God, saying,

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Job was able to worship after hearing that all of his children had perished in a tornado (a wind storm), because he was assured of the truth of the sovereignty of God. He knew that it was a sovereign God who gave life, just as it was the same sovereign God who took it. The sovereignty of God in the death of his loved ones was Job's comfort, because Job knew that the God who is sovereign is also the God who is all-wise and good. Job did not know the reason for the death of his children, but He did know God, and that was enough. Those of us who believe in the sovereignty of God can say, with Job, regarding Sue's death: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Jacob was not a model for all to imitate or emulate, as those who have studied his life well know. Jacob was a deceiver and a manipulator. All of his life he was trying to get ahead at the expense of someone else. He deceived his brother and his father, and he sought to out maneuver his uncle, Laban. Most of what Jacob did in his life would not be what we would wish to teach our children. When the writer to the Hebrews seeks to find an incident in Jacob's life which evidences faith, he calls our attention to the actions and words of this patriarch at the time of his death. It was as he was dying, leaning upon his staff, that he worshiped God, blessing the two sons of Joseph. If you remember the story, we are told by Moses in Genesis chapter 48 (Genesis 48:8-22) that Jacob purposely gave the greater blessing to the younger son of Joseph, rather than to the older son. When Joseph first saw what his father was doing, he was irritated and tried to correct his

father. But Jacob knew exactly what he was doing. He was acknowledging the sovereignty of God. He was, at the hour of his death, finally coming to grips with the sovereignty of God. All of his life Jacob had tried to manipulate God, and his life was filled with heartache and his life with trouble because of it. But in the end Jacob not only acknowledged the sovereignty of God, he submitted to it, worshiping God. It seems that only on his death bed did Jacob come to grasp the hand of the sovereign God through all of the events of his life. And when he did, he worshiped the God as sovereign. Those of us who trust in God as a sovereign God, can find comfort in the fact that all of the events of Sue's life and death, were a part of his plan, a plan which is certain to bring about her good, and our own, while at the same time bringing glory to God.

David was a man who worshiped God at the time of the death of his son, as we are told in 2 Samuel 12:1-31. David had sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then committed murder to cover up his sin when he learned she had become pregnant by him. When the son of David and Bathsheba was born he became ill. David fasted and lay on the ground, petitioning God to restore the child to health. When the child died, his servants were afraid to tell him, fearing that he would become despondent. David sensed that the child had died and inquired of his servants. When he learned that the child had died, David washed his face, changed his clothes, and went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. His servants asked him how this could be. His response is instructive to us.

David hoped that God would spare that child from death, but his hope and comfort was not destroyed by the death of the child. Why not? Because, David tells us, he was assured that both he and the child would be together once again. David believed that he and the child would be together in heaven. The God who is sovereign, who could spare that child from death, is also the God who is able to turn sorrow to joy, and death to life. David expected to see the child in heaven because He knew that the God who is sovereign is also the God who forgives sin. The child died because of David's sin, but he was not doomed to eternal torment. Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the salvation of infants is secured. David knew God would provide a way for this infant to be saved, a fact which should bring great comfort to those of us who agonize over the murder of innocent children by a mad bomber in Oklahoma City. And through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the conscious and willful sins of adults can be forgiven as well. That is why David, an adulterer and a murderer, could be assured of being with that son in heaven.

What a comfort it is for Christians to come to this funeral, knowing that Sue was a Christian, and that she is forever with her Lord. What a comfort it is for us to know that before we were even created, God had numbered our days (Psalms 139:13-16). And what a comfort it is for Christians to be assured that when we die, we will be with Him as well, not because we deserve it, but because the God who is Sovereign is also the God who is forgiving. He who has purposed to save us is the One who will bring that good work to completion (Php 1:6). He who has chosen us, is He who can keep us, so that no one can snatch us from His saving hand (John 10:27-30).

There can be no real comfort for those who face death apart from faith in Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that unbelievers dread death, as they well should. But the good news is that no one needs to dread death, because God has defeated death in the person of Jesus Christ:

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He [Jesus Christ] Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:14-18). The Bible declares all men to be sinners, deserving of the eternal wrath of God. We have rejected His Word and have broken His commandment. All have sinned (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God knew that we could never save ourselves. We can not earn or merit salvation. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to come to the earth to reveal Himself to us, and to bear our sins and their penalty on the cross of Calvary. Jesus overcame death and the grave, because God raised Him from the dead. The good news of the gospel is that although we are sinners, deserving of God's eternal wrath, we may be saved by simply trusting in Jesus Christ, and receiving the salvation which God has accomplished for us through His death, burial, and resurrection. This was the good news which was shared with Sue in 1974, and which she received. The same good news is for each of those gathered here today. The God who is sovereign, before whom every knee will someday bow, is the God who has provided forgiveness for sins and the certainty of eternal life, as you receive the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is our hope and our joy and Christians. This is why we can worship God even in the face of death. The death of Sue Smith will work together for good, for those who love God, and it may be that God will cause her death to work for your good by drawing you to Himself, by faith.

Graveside

Luke 16:1-31

There are certain texts which are traditionally read at the graveside, but I would like to read a text that is not often used as the body is committed to the ground. It is recorded in the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Luke:

"Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame'" (Luke 16:19-24). As you know, the story goes on, and the rich man receives no comfort or privileges, but only eternal torment. The point which I wish to make from this text has to do with the dramatic contrast which our Lord makes in this story between appearances and reality. To some, the rich man appeared to be right with God, and assured of a place in heaven. His funeral must have been extravagant, in contrast with that of Lazarus. And yet while this man's body went into the ground, his eternal soul went into torment. The poor man, Lazarus, did not look like a true saint. His clothing was ragged. He ate scraps from the rich man's garbage. The dogs licked his

sores. His death and burial were surely ugly. In fact, he may not have had a funeral at all. His body may have been cast onto the garbage heap. But in spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we are told something which no one saw, but which we are to believe as true. When Lazarus died, "he was carried away to Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22 a). Sue's death was probably more like that of Lazarus. It was not a pretty sight. But what we should find comfort in as we place her body in the ground is that her soul has already been escorted into the presence of God by the angels. This body, which we commit to the ground, is going to be raised up, transformed, and joined once again to her spirit.

We who are Christian should look at the burial of this earthly body as Paul instructs us in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 --as the planting of a seed. Sue's body will be raised, but it will not be a body like the one we leave here today. We should gladly set this body aside, looking forward to that day when our bodies will be transformed, like the body of our Lord. What a comfort! What hope! May this comfort and hope be yours as you trust in Jesus Christ.

S. Life is not Fair! Praise God!

“Life is not fair! Praise God!” Matthew 20:1-16

Study By: admin Older gentleman who trust Christ a few days before he died from cancer.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. And after agreeing with the workers for the standard wage, he sent them into his vineyard. He went out about nine o'clock in the morning and saw others standing in the marketplace without work. And he said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and three o'clock that afternoon, he did the same thing. And about five o'clock that afternoon he went out and found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why are you standing here all day without work?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go and work in the vineyard too.’ When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and give the pay starting with the last hired until the first.’ When those hired about five o'clock came, each received a full day's pay. And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each one also received the standard wage. When they received it, they began to complain against the landowner, saying, ‘These last fellows worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the hardship and burning heat of the day.’ And the landowner replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am not treating you unfairly. Didn't you agree with me to work for the standard wage? Take what is yours and go. I want to give to this last man the same as I gave to you. Aren't I permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:1-16). As the conflict between Jesus and His adversaries began to intensify, and as the time for our Lord's sacrificial death drew near, He said some very shocking things. Some of these are recorded in Matthew's Gospel, just before the words of our text - which were also shocking. When some parents sought to bring their little children to Jesus, so that He could bless them, the disciples rebuked them for doing so. Jesus was too busy and too important to be interrupted by children. Jesus corrected His disciples, instructing them to allow the children to come to Him, because, He said, “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). The scribes and Pharisees didn't see it that way. They thought that heaven belonged to them, because of their religious efforts, and because of their positions.

Then, Jesus was approached by a man we know as “the rich young ruler” (Matthew 19:16-22). This man wanted to know what it was that he must do to inherit eternal life. Since this man felt that he had fully kept the law from his youth, Jesus had to show him how far he came from measuring up to God's standards. Jesus told this “rich young ruler” to sell all that he owned and to give the proceeds to the poor. That was too high a price to pay, and so the rich young ruler went away sorrowful.

Jesus then turned to his disciples and pointed out how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven. Their love and their trust is in their wealth. When Jesus said that “it is easier for a camel to go through

the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven” (Matthew 19:24), the disciples were shocked. In that day, many assumed that the rich all went to heaven, while the poor went to hell. They believed that wealth was God’s reward for being righteous, while poverty was God’s punishment for sin. Jesus told His disciples that the gospel turned the religion of that day upside-down. He said, “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matthew 19:30).

Jesus then went on to tell the parable that is our text for this funeral service. It is clear that it was meant to explain our Lord’s words, “many who are first will be last, and the last first,” because these same words are repeated at the end of the parable, in Matthew 19:16. The parable went like this. A landowner needed to hire day laborers to work in his fields, and so he went to the labor pool and hired a number of workers. He agreed to pay these workers the standard wage - a denarius a day. Needing more help, he made several more trips to the labor pool, hiring additional workers. But to these workers, he gave no specific commitment. He did not tell them what he would pay, only that he would do “whatever is right.” The last group of workers was hired one hour before the workday ended. The landowner made no specific commitment to them about how much they were to receive. In those days, the workers were paid for their labors at the end of the workday. When it came time to pay, the landowner began with those workers who had labored for only an hour. Everyone was amazed when they saw that these workers were given a full day’s pay, for only one hour’s work. You can imagine how the rest of the workers began to reason to themselves. The ones who worked two hours must be getting paid twice the daily rate, and the ones who worked all day must be getting eight denari. The parable deals only with the “first” and the “last” groups, for rather obvious reasons (“the last will be first, and the first will be last”). It is those who are hired first who protest when they are paid their normal wage, even though this was the payment upon which they had agreed. It is not so much that they had been cheated, by being paid less than the rate agreed upon; it is that the last group of workers were paid more than they deserved. I think Joe would smile to hear me say, “Life isn’t fair.” But by these words, I do not mean to suggest that this landowner has cheated anyone. He was “fair” with those who worked the entire day because he paid them the usual wage, and this was also the amount for which they had agreed to work. No one was cheated here. The protest had to do with the generosity of the landowner towards the late-comers, who worked a mere hour. They hardly broke a sweat, but they were paid a full day’s wage. The thing that angered the early workers was not the landowner’s greed, but his grace. They were angry that while they worked hard for what they got, the late workers received the same reward, but for very little labor.

Here is the point. Angry workers represented the legalists, who thought that salvation came to those who worked the hardest. Earlier in his life, Joe found a certain comfort in the fact that he was better than a lot of folks; he had worked harder than many. But when it comes to getting into heaven, the Bible makes it clear that no one can work hard enough or long enough to earn eternal life. The Apostle Paul wrote,

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:19-20, NKJV). In this same chapter of Romans, Paul makes it very clear that all men are sinners, unworthy of heaven, and deserving of God’s eternal wrath:

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:9-18, NKJV).

It is only by grace that men can be saved, and this grace is available only in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ made on the cross of Calvary, where He took the sin, the guilt, and the punishment for lost sinners. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:21-23, NKJV).

Eternal life is not fair; it is a gift of God's grace. If eternal life were "fair" (that is, a payment to men, based upon the quality and quantity of their good works), no one would ever see heaven. Eternal life cannot be earned, but it can be received as a gift. That is what this parable was meant to convey.

It is not the "righteous" - that is, those who do the most good deeds - who get to heaven; it is sinners, who know that they deserve nothing but God's wrath, but who gladly receive the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. It is not "the first" who get to heaven, but "the last" who get there, by grace through faith.

How blessed Joe is today. Joe was one of "the last," in the sense that he came to faith literally in the last hours of his life. If salvation were the result of works, there would be a lot of very angry people in heaven, wondering why they worked so hard for so long to get there, when Joe arrived in his last hours. God did not save Joe so that He could benefit from years of service. God saved Joe by grace, through the work that Jesus Christ accomplished at Calvary. We can rejoice, with him, that eternal life is not fair, and that it is, instead, by grace.

What an encouraging truth, that God has made salvation and eternal life available to men, apart from works -- and by grace alone -- through faith. What a joy it is to celebrate Joe's life, and death, in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I must issue a final word of warning. It is an offer that is available only before death. Joe was graciously saved hours before his departure from this life. If you are one of those who has wrongly supposed that salvation is something you earn, something that God gives you in payment for your good deeds, let me urge you to recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not work this way. No one will get to heaven because they tried to live a good life, or even because they seemingly lived a better life than others. The only people who will see heaven are those who realize that their works can only condemn them, and that it is the work of Christ alone that saves. I urge you to trust in Him, in what may be our final hours, so that you can rejoice forever in the grace of God.

S. Our Comfort is in Christ

Our Comfort is in Christ

Study By: admin This was the funeral of a very lovely 94-year-old woman in our church, who was a believer. I sought to point out that our comfort (and hers) in the face of death was not based upon her age and physical condition, but rather in Christ.

We have said many good things about our friend today, and to the best of my knowledge they are all true. It would be wrong to leave anyone with the mistaken idea that our friend's good works are the basis for our confidence that she is now with our Lord. Our works are never able to win God's favor or to earn eternal life. For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away (Isaiah 64:6, NASB, emphasis mine).

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:19-20, NET Bible, emphasis mine). For the next few moments I would like to draw your attention to the basis for our comfort and joy in the face of death. Listen to these words, spoken by Simeon when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple:

Now there was in Jerusalem a man named Simeon who was righteous and devout, looking for the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So directed by the Spirit Simeon came into the temple courts, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God, saying, "Now, according to your word, Sovereign Lord, permit your servant to depart in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:25-32, NET Bible)

You may be thinking, "What a strange funeral text. This is a Christmas text, not a funeral text." As strange as it may seem, it is an appropriate funeral text. The occasion is the presentation of our Lord by Mary and Joseph as their firstborn son in the temple. Mary and Joseph were there to present their son and to offer a sacrifice as the Law of Moses prescribed.

While Mary and Joseph and their first-born son were in the temple two people recognized the baby Jesus as Israel's long awaited Messiah. The names of these two people are Simeon and Anna. We know that Anna was an old woman because Luke tells us so:

There was also a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having been married to her husband for seven years until his death. She had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years. She never left the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment, she came up to them and began to give thanks to God and to speak

about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38, NET Bible).

Here was a woman who, in Luke's words, was "very old" (Luke 2:36). While we cannot be absolutely certain about Anna's age, she had to have been at least 84 years old. (She was either a widow for 84 years, or she was a widow who was now 84.) Either way, Luke has committed the unpardonable sin - he has given us a woman's age. Thanks to Luke the whole world knows that Anna is old -- ancient!

We are focusing on Simeon, however. Nearly everyone assumes that he, too, is elderly. He may very well have been old. But it is noteworthy that while Anna's age is given to us, Simeon's age is not. Why not? I think we must reason that it is because Simeon's age was not important to Luke. What is important is what Luke does clearly communicate. Luke tells us that Simeon was ready to die, now that he has seen Jesus. Simeon had been waiting to see the Savior. God's Spirit had informed him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. As soon as Simeon sees Jesus, he says that he is ready to die.

Luke wants his readers to know that Simeon is ready to die, not because he is old, but because he has seen the Savior. Simeon is now ready to die, no matter what his age might be. Being ready to die is not a matter of one's age, but is rather a matter of one's relationship to Jesus Christ, by faith.

Those who knew our friend know that she was ready to die. She was not ready to die because she was old, and her health was failing; she was ready to die because she had come to know Jesus Christ by faith. In this sense, our friend's age has no more to do with her faith than Simeon's age had to do with his faith. Our friend, like Simeon, was ready to die because she had seen the Lord Jesus as her Savior, by faith.

How can this be? How can trusting in Jesus Christ cause one to welcome death, rather than to dread it? The answer to this question is found in the Bible. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden. God warned Adam that they must not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said that if they did eat of it they would certainly die (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and the result was both physical and spiritual death. But God in His grace promised them that He would provide a cure. For her role in the fall of mankind God pronounced a curse upon Eve. She (and all women after her) would bring forth children in pain (Genesis 3:16). But through the curse of pain in childbirth Eve would bring forth a child who would save men from their sins and the curse of death. One of Eve's offspring would be the cure for the curse of death. This coming One would strike a fatal blow to Satan, while Satan would only bruise the Savior's heel (Genesis 3:15). This coming "seed of the woman" is the Savior for whom every Old Testament saint expectantly waited. This coming Savior was the Messiah whom Simeon longed to see. This coming Savior was Jesus Christ.

God provided a remedy for the curse of death by making death the cure, as well as a curse. The coming Savior was the perfect, sinless, Son of God. He had no sin of His own, yet He took our sins upon Himself on the cross. He died in the sinner's place, bearing the penalty for sin, the curse of death. But God also raised Jesus from the dead. He is now in heaven, sitting at the Father's right hand. All those who trust in Jesus as their Savior have the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of eternal life. They no longer need to fear death:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he [Jesus] likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil), and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15, NET Bible).

All those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior no longer fear death, as we see in many different biblical texts:

What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is the one who will condemn? Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39, NET Bible).

Now this is what I am saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. Now when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will happen, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! So then, dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:50-58, NET Bible). This final passage (though one could cite others) is one that our friend designated to be a part of her funeral service: For we know that if our earthly house, the tent we live in, is dismantled, we have a building from God, a house not built by human hands, that is eternal in the heavens. For in this earthly house we groan, because we desire to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed, after we have put on our heavenly house, we will not be found naked. For indeed we groan while we are in this tent, since we are weighed down, because we do not want to be unclothed, but clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment. Therefore we are always full of courage, and we know that as long as we are alive here on earth we are absent from the Lord- for we live by faith, not by sight. Thus we are full of courage and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:1-10, NET Bible).

It was her faith in Jesus Christ which assured our friend of her salvation, so that she was able to welcome her own death. It is not old age, or sickness, which enables one to live joyfully and be confident of eternal life; it is trusting in Jesus Christ as the One who bore the curse of death, in order to provide the cure for the dread of death as the penalty for our sins. That is why we can rejoice in our friend's death, because we know she has gone to be with our Lord. As you consider your own death, do you do so with fear, or in faith? If death causes you to fear, I urge you, like Simeon and our friend, to place your trust in Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and the assurance of eternal life. Just as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, He will also raise us to eternal life. Death need no longer be viewed as something we dread, but rather can be welcomed as our deliverance. May you experience the calm assurance of Simeon, of all the saints, and of our friend this very day. To God be the Glory!

S. Our Hope: The Character of God

Our Hope: The Character of God (Psalms 130:1-8)

Study By: admin

Background: This is the service I performed for an older church member, who died of emphysema as a believer. The message is based upon Psalms 130:1-8, this woman's favorite psalm. Note the graveside service, too. This woman's death was an ugly one, and I wanted to emphasize the reality of the Christian's passing as opposed to mere appearances.

About two years ago it was apparent that apart from a miracle Sara would not have a great deal of time left on this earth, and so she and her husband and I sat at their kitchen table, discussing the arrangements for her funeral. Sara expressed not only the hymns which she wanted to be a part of her funeral, but also the texts which have been read. She did not avoid the reality of her own death, and in the last days which I spent with her, I read to her from texts of Scripture speaking of the Christian's hope.

It was Sara's request that I conduct her funeral. In these last few moments, I would like to share with you the faith which Sara professed, which not only gave her comfort, but which can be of comfort to you as well. Sara's favorite text in Scripture was Psalms 130:1-8. I have chosen to use this text as the basis for the message today, because it not only expresses Sara's faith and hope in God, but also her desire that you experience the salvation in which she delighted and found both comfort and hope.

(A Song of Ascents) Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Thine ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications. If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, That Thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope. My soul [waits] for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities (Psalms 130:1-8). This Psalm was Sara's favorite text, and no wonder. It draws upon the great doctrines of the faith. It expresses her hope and faith as a believer, as well as her desire for each of you.

Psalms 130:1-2 "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Thine ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications."

(1) The believer comes to the Lord from the depths. He calls upon the Lord as his last and only hope. As the final days of Sara's earthly struggle drew to a close, this psalm must have been of greater and greater comfort.

Psalms 130:3 "If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"

(2) While some of the psalmist's despair must have come from external trials and difficulties, the great despair is his awareness of his own sin. As the psalmist falls before God, he does so as an unworthy sinner, before a righteous and holy God, who is without sin, and whose character requires that sin be dealt with in holiness. There is no self-righteousness here. The psalmist knows that if dealt with according to his works, he could not stand before God.

Psalms 130:4 "But there is forgiveness with Thee, That Thou mayest be feared." The psalmist's hope is not in his good works of the past, or any future deeds he might do. His hope is in the character of God. He confesses to God that He is not only holy, He is forgiving. He grants forgiveness so that men might fear and worship Him.

Psalms 130:5-6 "I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope. My soul [waits] for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning."

Psalms 130:5-6 are the psalmist's personal testimony. The forgiveness which God grants is present. The full and final salvation for which the psalmist hopes is yet future. And so he describes God as the One for whom He waits. And until the time of His coming, the psalmist knows that his hope is rooted in His revealed Word. The Word of God is the source of his hope. Psalms 130:6 expresses the yearning which the saint has for the coming of the Lord and the final salvation He will bring.

Psalms 130:7-8 "O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities."

Psalms 130:7-8 are the psalmist's appeal to his fellow-Israelites, to share in the salvation of the Lord. He does not assume that because they are Jews, they are necessarily saints. They, too, are sinners, in need of divine forgiveness. They, like the psalmist, must acknowledge their sin, and trust in God, and in the salvation He alone can give.

What a beautiful expression of Sara's faith. What a comfort to know that she has now entered into the blessings of eternity, that she has left behind earthly suffering and sorrows, and is in the presence of her Lord. Her desire was and is that you should share these blessings with her. The forgiveness of sins for which the psalmist looked forward has now been accomplished by the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament counterpart to Psalms 130:1-8 might be found in Romans 5:1-21 :

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath [of God] through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been

reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:1-11).

Jesus Christ came into the world nearly 2,000 years ago to provide for man's salvation. He was sinless, but He came to die in the sinner's place. Those who trust in Him by faith have their sins forgiven by Jesus Christ, who bore the penalty they deserved. And those who trust in Him have His righteousness, so that they can stand before God justified, forgiven, and righteous, in Christ. This was Sara's hope. It is not the hope of all, but only of those who, like Sara, have trusted in Him. I pray that you make give thought to the words of Psalms 130:1-8 and that you might trust in the salvation which God provided through His Son, Jesus Christ. It is then that you will be able to share the hope of this psalm, and have confidence in the face of death.

Closing Prayer Graveside Service And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. Then the sons of the prophets who [were at] Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; be still." And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets who [were] at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still." Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite[them] at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. Now it came about when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. [Nevertheless,] if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be [so.]" Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, [there appeared] a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. And Elisha saw [it] and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over (2 Kings 2:1-14).

Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp." And the man of God sent [word] to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice. Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us

is for the king of Israel?" And one of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan." And he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria. And it came about when they had come into Samaria, that Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these [men,] that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" And he answered, "You shall not kill [them.] Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel (2 Kings 6:8-23). When we think of Sara Smith, we will unfortunately tend to think of her as she was in the last months and days of her life. We will remember her with her oxygen hose trailing behind her, wherever she went. We will think of her as she lay in her bed, struggling for each breath. We will think of her in terms of her last moments of life. And if we do so, we fail to grasp the full reality of the glory of her exodus, and of ours, if we trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

These two stories, recorded in the Book of 2 Kings, challenge us to look on Sara's passing of the believer from here to eternity as the Bible describes it. Elijah's time of departure had come, and Elisha was appointed to replace him. Elisha determined that he would not leave Elijah until the Lord took him away. Elisha alone watched as the horses and chariot of fire transported him into heaven. Some time later, Elisha was surrounded by horses and chariots, sent by the king of Aram, to capture and perhaps to kill Elisha, because this prophet was making his plans known to the king of Israel. It looked as though his situation was hopeless. His servant certainly thought so. But Elisha knew that the spiritual life has to do with the unseen as well as the seen. He prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened, and that he would be able to see things as they really were. And when his eyes were opened, he saw the horses and chariots of fire surrounding them. Nothing could harm them when God's angelic army was assembled for their defense. The very angels which are assembled about us for our protection in this world seem to be those angels which transport us into heaven when it is time for us to depart from this life. God promised never to leave us nor forsake us. His angels guard us now, so that we are not taken from life one second sooner than God has purposed. And when that time of departure does come, His angels are there to escort us into heaven.

You may think that such treatment is only for those special, spiritual people like Elijah and Elisha. I do not think so. I simply remind you of our Lord's own words, in which he tells of the angelic escort of a poor beggar named Lazarus:

"Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:19-23).

I believe that when Sara's spirit departed from her body, she was escorted into the presence of the Lord in the same way. While appearances would indicate otherwise, her departure was a glorious one. As we leave her body in this grave, to be resurrected and transformed at the return of our Lord, let us rejoice in the fact that her suffering is over, and her departure was triumphant. May we look forward to our day of triumph as well, as those who trust in Him who not only gave His life for us, but Who was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

S. Promises from the Bible

Promises from the Bible (1 Thessalonians 4:1-18)

Study By: admin

Introduction As individuals, I think there is no more difficult time than this to express our true feelings. To find the proper words is so difficult and . . . words seem so inadequate, so incomplete--yet we do our best to express our sympathy/our concern to those left behind. But I am reminded again that what we need at a time like this is revelation, not just words.

We need something that speaks of certainties, not just hopes.

We need something that speaks with authority.

We need something that provides true comfort and gives something and someone to believe in/to trust as we go on from here.

We need more than sincere expressions of sympathy and concern (as wonderful as they are) in a time of sorrow and death We need the authoritative, comforting "Thus saith the Lord!" the revelation of Scripture. And God has not left us without Revelation in a time like this. He has spoken clearly, concisely and with authority. Let's look for a few minutes at what the Bible, God's Word promises the person who dies in the Lord. The passage I want to look at was written especially for those in a time of sorrow -- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The Bible Promises the Believer a Reception in Glory 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

1. Paul was writing to these believers to instruct them about those who had died. The term "fall asleep" refers to those who had died. Paul doesn't want those left behind to sorrow as those who have no hope.

2. The reason they don't have to sorrow as others without hope is given in verse 14 (read). Those who have died in the Lord are with Christ. The souls (immaterial part) of departed Christians are with God and Jesus is going to bring them back with Him when He comes for His Church.

3. The rest of Scripture teaches us the same thing.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 tells us that when we Christians die, we go immediately to be with God. To be "absent from the body-present with the Lord."

Php 1:23 Paul tells us when we depart from this life, we are with Christ.

3. We need not sorrow then as others who have no hope because the authoritative Word of God promises the believer an immediate reception in glory--"absent from the body present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8" But not only does the Bible promise the Christian an immediate reception in glory but . . . The Bible Promises the Believer a Resurrection of His Body 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16 1. These verses promise that the bodies of our Christian loved ones will be raised from the

dead.

2. The Bible teaches the sleep of the body, not the sleep of the soul.

3. These verses teach us that those bodies of Christians that are sleeping in the graves will one day come forth--be resurrected when Christ comes back. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 we see that the souls of the believers (who are now with Christ) will be reunited with their resurrected bodies at Jesus' coming for His church.

4. And that body will be a body described in Revelation 21:3-4 as: free from pain free from sorrow, crying, tears free from sin free from death

5. The Christian's soul goes immediately to the presence of the Lord. The Christian's body rests in the grave until the day the Lord comes back for His church when it will be resurrected into a glorious body and be reunited with the soul.

6. We need not sorrow as others who have no hope for the Christian is promised: (a) an immediate reception in glory; and (b) a resurrection of his body. But there is more . . . for not only does the Christian who dies have the certainty of an immediate reception in glory and a resurrection of his body but . . . The Bible Promises a Reunion With Christ and With Loved Ones 1 Thessalonians 4:17 1. The reunion is actually two-fold, first with loved ones: The Lord may come back today, if He does the believers who are alive will be reunited with our Christian loved ones in God's presence. Our separation is not permanent! (and then secondly there will be a reunion with Christ). One day the Lord will come back and Christians who are alive will be caught up to join the resurrected bodies of those who have died. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

God promises Christians that they will be reunited whether through death - (Review) The Christian who dies has the promise: of an immediate reception into the Lord's presence of a resurrected body of reunion with loved ones (fellow believers)

(Little wonder Paul says that these verses should be used at times like these) for he says, "wherefore comfort one another with these words." those who are left behind can be comforted in knowing the certainties of these verses.

Application/Conclusion

1. But we should not forget that these promises are conditioned on faith in Christ as Savior who died as our substitute on Calvary and rose again (1 Thessalonians 4:14) 2. The reality of death should make us stop and ask whether we could claim these promises if we were to die.

Right now, if you're not sure where you will spend eternity . . . I invite you to ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior from sin by an act of your will; trusting Him to save you from your sin. It was (name's) deep concern that his friends know Jesus as their Savior. Won't you trust Him right now as your Savior?

3. I thank God that (name) knew Jesus Christ as His Savior from sin. It was this faith that sustained him through the trials of illness that he so bravely faced.

4. Because (Name) had trusted Jesus Christ to be her Savior from sin, on the authority of God's Holy Word, I can say that (Name)'s soul is now with Jesus in glory. Her body will one day be

resurrected. We'll be reunited with her and spend eternity together with the Lord.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

S. Ready to Die

Ready to Die

Study By: admin

If Manuel were here, he would be tugging on my sleeve, reminding me that this is more about His Savior, than about himself. I know he would be eagerly waiting for me to tell you about Jesus, as the only means for the forgiveness of your sins and entrance into God's glorious presence. Manuel's life illustrates truths that deal with the most important decision you will ever make. As Manuel and His Lord look down on our gathering this afternoon I'd like to spend these few moments talking to you about eternity.

Only Jesus can make you ready to die. As he told me and others, Manuel was ready to die. One of the Scriptures I read to Manuel as I sat at his bedside the last day of his life is found in 2 Corinthians: But since we have the same spirit of faith as that shown in what has been written, "I believed; therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak. We do so because we know that the one who raised up Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence. For all these things are for your sake, so that the grace that is including more and more people may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God. Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, the tent we live in, is dismantled, we have a building from God, a house not built by human hands, that is eternal in the heavens. For in this earthly house we groan, because we desire to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed, after we have put on our heavenly house, we will not be found naked. For indeed we groan while we are in this tent, since we are weighed down, because we do not want to be unclothed, but clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment. Therefore we are always full of courage, and we know that as long as we are alive here on earth we are absent from the Lord- for we live by faith, not by sight. Thus we are full of courage and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition to please him (2 Corinthians 4:13-18; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9).

Years ago Manuel recognized that he was a sinner, and that Jesus had died to pay the penalty for his sins. Manuel trusted in Jesus, who not only died on the cross of Calvary, but rose from the dead. Manuel enjoyed the presence of God in this life, but he yearned to spend eternity in God's presence. It is true that our earthly pains prompt us to let go of this life, and to anxiously seek the next, but it would not be accurate to say that Manuel simply wanted to escape the suffering and groaning of earthly life. More than anything, Manuel loved his Savior, and wanted to be with him.

Manuel had no fear of death because Jesus took that fear away. In the Book of Hebrews we read,

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil), and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). But more than this, Manuel had a yearning for heaven. He wanted to dwell in the presence of his Savior for all eternity. This is the way the apostle Paul felt, as well, after he came to faith in Jesus: For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Now if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean productive work for me, yet I don't know which I prefer: I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Php 1:19-23).

I cannot know your hearts, my friend, but you know, and God knows. As we remember the life of Manuel and you come face to face with the reality of death, is there fear in your heart, or faith; do you dread death and try to avoid even thinking about it, or do you see death as an escape from this life and an entrance into the presence of God forever? The difference is what you do with the death of Jesus Christ, who died that your sins might be forgiven, and that you might enter into eternal life.

Manuel's testimony calls our attention to a very important truth: **BEING RELIGIOUS IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING A CHRISTIAN.** There may be those here today who are trying to suppress the fear of death with the consolation that they are religious. I must tell you plainly that religion will never save you, only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, by faith.

I am simply telling you what Jesus Himself said, as we read in the third chapter of the Gospel of John:

Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.' The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus replied, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand these things? I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I have told you people about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven-the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." For this is the way God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to

condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God (John 3:1-18).

We are told not only that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a devoutly religious man, but that he was “the teacher of Israel” (John 3:10). He was, perhaps, the most prominent teacher of that day, and yet Jesus told him he must be “born again.” To be born again Nicodemus must trust in Jesus, the one who would soon be “lifted up” on the cross of Calvary. To be born again, Nicodemus must not trust in what he had done - or would do - but in what Christ had done, and in what the Holy Spirit would do - give him life. Being born again meant that Nicodemus would have to renounce his religious good works and trust in Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and raised from the dead.

It would not be long before another Pharisee - Saul -- would be “born again.” He describes his conversion this way: For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials -though mine too are significant. If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more: I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless. But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things-indeed, I regard them as dung!-that I might gain Christ, and be found in him, not because of having my own righteousness derived from the law, but because of having the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness-a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ’s faithfulness. My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (Php 3:3-11). And so, as we come face to face with sin and the reality of its penalty - death - I must ask you this question: “Are you ready to die?” “Are you trusting in your good works or in your religion to save you, or are you trusting in God’s only provision, Jesus Christ?” He died on the cross of Calvary to pay the penalty for your sins. He rose from the dead, so that you can live a life pleasing to Him, and so that you can spend eternity in the presence of God.

Manuel trusted in Jesus Christ. He was ready to die. He was eager to see His Savior face to face. If you are not yet ready, then I urge you to trust in Jesus Christ this very hour.

S. The Goodness of God in Grief and Death

The Goodness of God in Grief and Death

Study By: admin Background: Death of an older man who had trusted in Christ.

Eulogy and Scripture Reading For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done (Matthew 16:26-27). If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9). For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life; he will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).

Prayer In the Book of Proverbs we read: "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children"(Proverbs 13:22).

One of the purposes of this service is to remember the heritage which Alan Smith has left behind. The goodness of a man as a husband and a father will always be remembered by those he has left behind in death. His goodness is also the cause of great sorrow at the time of his death, for now only the memories remain. This service also provides us with the occasion to reflect on the goodness of God. At a time of personal sorrow and grief, thoughts of the goodness of God may be doubted by some. After all, we may reason, how is it that a God who is good can allow a good man to die and his family to be deprived of his presence in life? The character of God thus seems to be challenged by the fact of sickness, suffering, and death. The matter of the goodness of God is of even greater urgency, for not only is the character of God at stake, so also is our hope of eternal life. The Bible is very clear that no man by his own good deeds can merit the forgiveness of sins and God's gift of eternal life. The Bible teaches us that it is only through the goodness of God that any man can hope for heaven.

How, then, can we see the goodness of God in the grief of death? The Goodness of God is Revealed in Death as the Response of His Righteousness to Evil When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden and gave them freedom to eat freely of every tree, save one--the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned them that to disobey would result in death--and so it did. When you and I see what is clearly evil, we expect it to be punished. When an innocent victim is robbed or killed, we expect the guilty to be punished. For government to fail to punish the guilty would be intolerable--indeed, it would be evil. So, too, the goodness of God is to be seen in the fact that He has prescribed death as the punishment for sin. The Goodness of God

is Revealed by the Fact that Death is not only the Consequence of Sin, but can also be its Cure.

1. Death prevented Adam and Eve from living forever in their sinful condition and under the curse of God.

Remember that because of their sin, both Adam and Eve had to live under God's curse. Had God allowed them to live forever, they would have lived as sinners, under a curse. The curse which was pronounced on this couple did not include death. Death was the warning of God which accompanied the command not to eat of the forbidden fruit. God banned Adam and Eve from the garden and guarded it so that they could not eat of the tree of life and life forever, under the curse.

We evidence our agreement that God is good in using death to terminate life which is lived under the curse. While we struggle with the death of those who are healthy and well, we are relieved when one dies whose body has been racked with pain, or whose faculties have been lost due to age or illness.

Death is therefore an evidence of the goodness of God toward those who trust in Him because it terminates living under the curse of sin and its consequences. Death provides men with the opportunity to lay aside the flesh, dominated by sin, and by faith in Christ, to live in the freedom of God's salvation.

2. Death is also the means by which God has dealt with sin and made eternal life possible.

While the death of men terminates life under the curse, it does not make provision for the restoration of man into fellowship with God and the hope of eternal life. Adam's death merely kept him from living forever in a fallen state, it did not offer him the hope of restoration. The good news of the gospel and the goodness of God are seen in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, which has made restoration possible for all men. The Bible tells us that due to sin man lives under the curse of God, unable by his own deeds or even his own death to be reconciled with God. But the goodness of God was evidenced in His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to the earth to die in our place, to bear our punishment, and by His death, burial, and resurrection, to make us righteous and to assure us of eternal life. By what our Lord said and did, we can see that He was the sinless Son of God. By faith in His death, burial, and resurrection our sins are forgiven. Because of His resurrection, those who are in Christ by personal faith are raised to newness of life now, and will be raised to live with Him forever when He returns.

Conclusion Because of the goodness of Alan Smith, we can look back on the days of his life with deep gratitude and fond memories.

Because of the goodness of God in the person of Christ, we can experience the forgiveness of sins, we need not fear death, and we can look forward to eternal life in the presence of God. This hope in the face of death is only found by a personal faith in Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that each of you will come to experience this hope as you personally accept the gift of God's salvation through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and who was raised for your justification.

S. The Joy of Knowing Christ

The Joy of Knowing Christ (1 Peter 1:3-8)

Study By: admin

Introduction

It's interesting, when there are so many different things you want to say at an occasion like this, that in looking at one of (Name)'s favorite Scripture passages, we find--almost in outline form--the very ideas which I believe should grab our attention.

1 Peter 1:3-8 is printed on the inside of your memorial folders. That passage begins and ends so appropriately with a praise to God, and a focus upon the joy of knowing Christ. Between those "brackets" lie three truths which penetrated (Name)'s very being. . . . Three truths which God would have us to rest upon in times like these. The First Truth God, in His mercy, has provided for new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Another passage records Christ's teaching about new birth: John 3:1-36. The key to this first truth is faith in the finished work of Christ. The Second Truth Each believer possesses an inheritance which never deteriorates. The nature of this inheritance is incorruption. This inheritance includes our new bodies.... The receiving of this inheritance is in heaven. The receiving of this inheritance includes the fullness of salvation: freedom from not only the penalty, and the power, but also from the presence of sin.

(Name) is now experiencing the joy of his inheritance. The key to the second truth is also faith in the trustworthiness of a God who has given a pledge of our inheritance by giving the Holy Spirit. The Third Truth Trials and difficult times are often a necessary experience in our attempt to glorify Christ.

Trials are often necessary.

Trials have a purpose in God's plan.

(Name) desired to glorify Christ -- through all the struggles life brought. He kept a diary the last months of his life. One entry particularly stuck out as I read it. In the midst of describing his failing condition, and relating some of the hardest days and worst news yet relating to his cancer, he spontaneously recorded this poem, a song he had memorized:

"How good is the God we adore, Our Faithful, Unchangeable Friend; Whose Love is as good as His Power, And knows neither measure nor end.

'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last, Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;

We'll praise Him for all that is past, And trust Him for all that's to come. That so characterized (Name)'s implicit trust in a God who always was, and is, worthy of our complete trust and

confidence.

God WILL call each of us to face various trials. Our only rest now is in the assurance that God will remain faithful, and that when Christ takes us to be with Him, that then we find complete rest.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 speaks of a struggle: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." A little over a year ago, much of the world watched with amazement as Canadian Ben Johnson easily outdistanced Carl Lewis in the 100 meter dash. I will never forget Johnson's look of triumphant disdain and Lewis's look of amazement as they crossed the finish line. Johnson's victory was short lived. The world's admiration soon turned into revulsion as we learned that Johnson had cheated: steroids were the cause of his triumph. His was a hollow victory.

Even though in the eyes of millions of TV viewers he had apparently won, his victory was not final until it had been proven that he had won lawfully. You see, it isn't enough just to win, you must also win according to the rules of competition. Johnson's moment of glory was quickly overshadowed by his treachery and deception. His name has come to symbolize hollow victory. Paul, the apostle, may have had this in mind when he penned 2 Timothy 4:7. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." There is some debate about the exact meaning of the last phrase, "I have kept the faith." Paul may be saying that he has not diluted or contaminated the pure gospel that he received from the Lord Jesus Christ. But the idea of athletic contest is prominent in verses 7-8. It could be that Paul is thinking of the early Olympic Games. After an event, the judges were consulted to determine if the winner had competed according to the rules. If he hadn't, the prize was awarded to another. In this passage, when Paul writes "I have kept the faith," he may be saying, "I've not cheated. I've followed the rules. I've not been disqualified." His was not a hollow victory.

Today, there are many men in various positions who have been widely admired for what they do and say. But often, theirs is a hollow victory. What they are in public, and what they are in private, differ widely. I think of Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision. He was a serviceman in WW II, and saw the desperate needs of millions around the world. After being discharged from the military, he devoted his life to providing food and aid to the world's starving and homeless -- and in the process lost his wife and family. He spent the last years of his life separated from his wife. His daughter recently wrote a book chronicling her father's obsession with his ministry, and consequent destruction of his family. His was a hollow victory. A good friend of mine shares one of his memories: that of breakfast one morning in a Denny's restaurant with his father and Merrill Unger, a well-known Bible teacher, seminary professor, scholar, author, and conference speaker. His voice was filled with anguish as he said, "I have lost my son, I have lost my son." All of his achievements paled in comparison with his son's rejection of Christianity. His, too, was a hollow victory. The fact that (Name) had an effective career in Panama, and in the military, and a great ministry among many, is a great tribute to him. But it would have been a hollow victory if he had sacrificed his marriage on the altar of ministry or career. (Name) experienced years of productive ministry, and a successful career . . . and with the same wife! That is a greater tribute. But even that would have been a hollow victory if he had sacrificed his children on the altar of ministry or

career. He didn't! Years of fruitful service with the same wife and with seven children who have married well in the Lord, and who are now endeavoring to serve the same God he served. That is not a hollow victory! But even that would have been a hollow victory, if, when faced with terminal cancer, (Name) had cursed God, abandoned his trust in God's faithfulness. He didn't. The Greeks had a unique race in their Olympic games. The winner was not the runner who finished first, but the runner who finished first with his torch still lit. (Name) competed according to the rules, finishing the race not only with a good ministry, but also with a godly marriage, a solid family, and an abiding faith. (Name) finished with his torch lit!

S. The Lord is Our Shepherd

The Lord is Our Shepherd

Study By: admin

SCRIPTURE READING: One of Mrs. Smith's favorite passages of scripture is the text which I have been requested to use for this service:

Psalms 23:1-6 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. By the use of the imagery of a shepherd and his flock of sheep, David describes the care and the comfort which one of God's sheep has in Him. He begins by describing the comfort and care of His Lord for him in life. He sums all of God's care up in one phrase, "I shall not want." There is no good thing that he lacks, for his shepherd cares for all of his needs. In the agricultural imagery of his day, David describes the ways in which his Shepherd cares for him.

He Leads me besides still waters He makes me lie down in green pastures He leads me in paths of righteousness

David's Shepherd does not leave him in death, however, so he goes on to describe the Lord's presence in death. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me."

Passing through death, David says, is like walking through dark shadows. He means to tell us that the experience is not a pleasant one, but that we, if we are one of God's sheep, are to pass through death. He also tells us that the Lord is with us through this passing, so that we are not alone and we need not fear.

WHILE THIS PSALM ASSURES US THAT GOD IS WITH US AS WE PASS THROUGH THE SHADOW OF DEATH, IT DOES NOT TELL US HOW THIS HAPPENS. As I understand it, the death of Mrs. Smith was one that was associated with a hospital and surgery. In our memories we will tend to think of her passing in the context of that hospital bed. I would like to turn your attention to two texts of Scripture which I hope will modify that memory of her death.

2 Kings 6:15-17 In this text in the book of 2 Kings, the king of Syria intended to put Elisha, the prophet of God, to death. He surrounded the place where Elisha and his servant were staying. The servant was stricken with fear. Elisha, however, responded,

"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the LORD opened the

servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17). The lesson is a simple one: What we see is only part of the picture. Elisha's servant saw only the enemy, and they were awesome. But Elisha's prayer enabled this servant to see the larger picture: the unseen host of angels, who were there to protect them from the enemy army which had encircled them.

2 Kings 2:9-12 In this text, Elijah, the prophet of God was about to depart, and Elisha, his servant who was to take his place, knew it, and so he would not leave him. Finally Elijah gave Elisha one last request, to which he responded,

"Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. And Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more (2 Kings 2:9b-12a).

These two passages remind us of a very important truth. There are things going on around us, which are normally not visible to us. In the case of the horsemen and chariots of fire which Elisha's servant was enabled to see, in answer to the prophet's prayer, these were angelic hosts, assigned to protect God's prophet. The servant's fear was based upon his lack of awareness of all that was taking place around him. We are thus all reminded that God's angels are all about us, and that nothing can harm us apart from the permission and will of God. The chariot and horses of fire which took Elijah into heaven remind us of another fact. While it is not normally visible to us, I believe that the angels are also employed in "escorting" the spirits of those who have died "in the Lord" into God's presence. I know that apart from divine intervention, Mrs. Smith's death was not at all glorious. But I believe that this text assures us that there was much more to be seen, just as was the case with Elisha's servant in chapter 6. In the light of these events in the life of Elisha and Elijah I believe that we have a glimpse of how God is with one of His children when they die. We may see a hospital scene, with its doctors and nurses desperately trying to save a life. We may see sophisticated equipment and heroic efforts, but let us also consider the unseen things which can be received only by faith. Let us remember that if the Lord is our shepherd, He is with us as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

There is only one condition, if this is to be our experience as well, and that is that the Lord is OUR SHEPHERD. HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT HE IS OUR SHEPHERD? In addition to the figure of a shepherd, the coming Christ was also referred to as a lamb. This is because it was necessary for the Christ to take the place of His people, to bear their punishment, so that they could share in His blessings. Specifically, He would have to die in the place of the sinner, and then to be raised again. Thus, Isaiah the prophet wrote,

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:6-7). In the New Testament, the writers of the gospels therefore speak of the Christ who came to the earth as a babe in the manger as both the "lamb of God" and the "shepherd." When John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God,

who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). When Jesus referred to Himself as the "good shepherd" He was identifying Himself as the promised Messiah, the Christ for whom the Old Testament saints looked. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). The Lord Jesus did lay down His life. He was nailed to a cross. He was buried in a tomb that was sealed shut and guarded by Roman soldiers, and yet, in spite of this, He rose from the grave, appeared to hundreds, and then ascended to heaven, from which He will return.

Because of this, the apostle Peter could encourage his readers by telling them that the "Chief Shepherd" will someday appear and will reward those who are faithful (1 Peter 5:4). In the book of Revelation, the apostle John spoke of those who suffer in the great tribulation period, yet to come, saying,

"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:14-17). The only question which remains is this: IS THIS HOPE YOUR HOPE? IS JESUS CHRIST YOUR GREAT SHEPHERD? The faith and confidence in the face of death of which the Bible speaks is not the possession of all, but only of those who have personally trusted in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that all have sinned, and that the wages of sin is death. Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. He died in your place, bearing your punishment, so that your sins might be forgiven and you might live eternally in His presence.

S. The Raising of Lazarus

The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-57)

Study By: admin

Background: John was in the process of being recognized as an elder of our church when he died of cancer, still in his 30s. The funeral is from John 11:1-57 and the raising of Lazarus.

John Smith died at the age of 38, leaving behind his wife and three children. I think there is a sense in which we can all agree that this is a tragedy. Perhaps you have come expecting a some kind of apology from God, or at least an explanation. If God were not a God of love we would have no need for any explanation. Russia feels no need to explain her act of shooting down a civilian aircraft, but we have learned not to expect that nation to act out of love or compassion. If God were not sovereign, we could explain John's death as something which was not God's will, but was simply beyond His ability to control. But John and Sue's faith is in a God who is both good and great. Their faith, and mine, is that it is God's will to die what would seem to be an untimely death. When John and I talked about this service, I promised him that I would share with you the truth of the Gospel, which was the basis for John's faith and hope. The portion of Scripture which was read to you from the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel contains a message which is particularly relevant to us today. Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus, was critically ill. Mary and Martha sent an urgent message to the Savior, expecting that He would immediately come to them and heal Lazarus. John informs us, however, that Jesus responded (it would seem to the messengers who had been sent) that the illness of Lazarus was not unto death, but for the glory of God. Then, instead of hastening to Bethany, Jesus deliberately delayed for two days. The disciples were not surprised and did not seem eager to encourage Jesus to return to Judea, for opposition had become so intense that some of the Jews had attempted to stone Jesus (John 11:8). To go back to Bethany, to the disciples, meant almost certain death (John 11:16).

John writes in such a way as to heighten our interest. He tells us what Mary and Martha did not yet know--that Jesus could have been there much sooner, but that He chose not to, so that Lazarus would die. Jesus could have been there sooner, but chose not to. Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus, but did not. Why? That is the question which John intends us to ask. Before we seek to find the answer from this text, let me make three observations which are crucial to our understanding.

(1) The Lord purposed for Lazarus to die.

Let us not attempt to gloss over the clear statement of John 11:6 that Jesus deliberately delayed knowing that Lazarus would be dead (John 11:14). The Lord could have prevented Lazarus' death and restored him to perfect health, just as Mary and Martha believed (cf. John 11:21, John 11:32). The tragic thing about the death of Lazarus, in addition to the fact that it was untimely, was that Jesus could have prevented it. While many attempt to explain death in such a way as to absolve God of any responsibility, John clearly tells us that Lazarus died because our Lord planned it that

way. I wish to be very clear this morning when I say to you that it is the firm conviction of those in this church, including Sue, that John's death was the will of God. John died because it was God's time for him. The God who is sovereign in our salvation is also sovereign in our suffering.

(2) The Lord Jesus loved Lazarus. When Mary and Martha sent news to our Lord of Lazarus' illness, they said, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" (John 11:3). That was not just their estimation, for in John 11:5 we are told that Jesus did love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When Jesus arrived at the tomb of Lazarus, He wept (John 11:33, John 11:35). Those who witnessed the response of the Lord to the grief of Mary and the others remarked, "Behold how He loved him!" (John 11:36). What Jesus did here, he did out of love. We have no doubt that our Lord also loved John Smith and his family. While we may not fully understand how it can be, the death of Lazarus, and John Smith, and other saints, is not inconsistent with His love.

(3) The delay of Jesus and the death of Lazarus was for the glory of God.

Just as some believe that death is inconsistent with God's love, so they also contend that death is contrary to the glory of God. But our Lord told His disciples that the death of Lazarus was the reason for His delay, so that God might be glorified as He was glorified (John 11:4). Do you notice that John made no attempt to apologize for our Lord's delay or for the death of Lazarus. Why should he apologize for what Jesus said was intended to glorify Him. For me, this means that I dare not attempt to apologize for John's death. It, too, is the will of God, consistent with the love of God. But how can cancer claiming the life of John Smith possibly be glorifying to God? Let us look further in John chapter 11 to learn the answer.

What Glorifies God at the Time of Death? The key to understanding the death of Lazarus is directly related to the glory of God. What is it that glorifies God at the time of death which helps explain why our Lord purposed to let Lazarus die when he could have been healed?

First, God is glorified by the demonstration of His power.

Jesus had performed many miracles before the raising of Lazarus, but the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is far greater. After all, which is the greater miracle, to heal a sick man or to raise a dead man? Mary and Martha both believed that Jesus could have healed their brother so long as he was alive, but neither entertained hopes of his being brought forth from that tomb. The power of God was seen on that day to be not only greater than sickness, but even greater than death itself. Our Lord's power over death was vitally important. The raising of Lazarus was to serve as proof our Lord's claim to be "the resurrection and the life," the One who would give life to all who would believe in Him, even though he were to die. Jesus claimed to have power over death itself, so that none of those who believe in Him will be subject to the power of death (John 11:26). Jesus told His opponents that the last and final sign would be His resurrection from the dead (Matthew 12:38-40). It was our Lord's resurrection which proved His claim to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). The raising of Lazarus was proof of the power of the Lord Jesus over death.

Second, God is glorified by the demonstration of our faith.

I believe that our text makes it clear that the glory of God is inseparably related to faith. While in John 11:4 He speaks of His purpose for the death of Lazarus in terms of His glory, in John 11:14-15 He speaks of the death of Lazarus in terms of their faith: "Then Jesus therefore said to

them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe. . .'" When Jesus was met by Martha, she professed her faith in His ability to heal Lazarus, had He arrived in time. But even beyond this, she testified that she knew, even now, that God would answer His petition (John 11:21-22). The Lord Jesus included His ability to raise the dead in the category of faith and asked Martha if she believed this (John 11:23, John 11:25-26), to which she responded in a beautiful confession of faith: "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (John 11:27).

Martha's faith in Christ as her Messiah and her Savior of necessity included faith in His power over death and the grave. To believe in Him as Savior is to trust in Him as the resurrection and the life. Mary's faith was apparently not as great at this moment, but the Lord Jesus encouraged her to believe so that she could behold the glory of God: "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). When Lazarus was raised from the grave we are told that many who beheld believe in Him (John 11:45).

God is glorified when men believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. God is glorified by the faith of men in Christ as their Savior, and as the One who alone has power over death and the grave. Now, when, I would ask you, is our faith greater? When we must trust Him as one who can heal sickness, or when we must trust His power to raise the dead? The answer is obvious. Our Lord purposely allowed Lazarus to die so that He might deepen the faith of those He loved, and so that He might draw to faith, those who had not yet trusted in Him as Mary and Martha had done already. For Mary and Martha, those whom our Lord loved greatly, their faith would not grow deeper apart from the temporary loss of Lazarus. Only when Mary and Martha came to trust the Lord Jesus in the face of death did their faith grow. Those of us who knew and loved John believed that God was able to heal him of the cancer which was destroying his body. The greater act of faith will now be for us to trust our Lord to raise John from the dead. It is in the darkest hours of our lives that our Lord seeks to strengthen our faith and thus to glorify Himself.

You may object that there is a difference between what took place in John chapter 11 and what has happened here. After all, our Lord did raise Lazarus, but He has not done so with John. There are differences. Jesus raised Lazarus only a few days after he died. But I would also remind you that Lazarus eventually died. He was raised from the dead. John, along with all who trust in God will be resurrected from death, never to die again.

Let me point out that the critical time for Mary and Martha to exercise faith in the love and power of our Lord was while the body of Lazarus was still in the grave. Jesus talked with both Martha and Mary about their faith while Lazarus was still dead. That was when faith was most difficult and when it was most necessary. So it is with us. Some day, the Bible promises us, the Lord Jesus will come again for His own. At that time the dead in Christ will return with Him and we shall be joined with our Lord and our saved loved ones in the air. The resurrection of John Smith is just as certain as that of Lazarus--indeed, it is more certain, for now we have the account of the raising of Lazarus, and even better, the resurrection of our Lord. These are the times when faith is most required, and when our faith is forced to deepen. But it is in the process that God is glorified.

Lazarus was dead, and it was the sovereign will of God, consistent with the love of God. Our Lord was glorified by the death of Lazarus because it provided the opportunity for Him to demonstrate His power and it also gave those whom He loved the opportunity to exercise their faith. It was

God's time for John Smith to die. It was no mistake. It was for God's glory, and the Bible tells us it is for John's good, and for the good of his family. We do not fully understand how or why this is so, any more than Mary or Martha understood what our Lord was doing until after Lazarus had been raised. But we do know that it was not enough for them to believe that God could have cured Lazarus from his illness. God was glorified by the demonstration of His power over death, and by the faith of those who place their trust in Him. As we stand, as it were, before the grave, it is the time when we must believe if we would find comfort in these difficult times and if we would experience His presence and His power. John and Sue did not look forward to this moment, any more than Mary and Martha did the death of Lazarus, but they did in those dark hours come to a deeper and fuller trust in the Savior.

John tells us in this passage that the death of Lazarus resulted in the belief of many. It was John's request that I speak very plainly to you in this service to invite each of you to find in his death, just as Mary and Martha did at the death of Lazarus, an occasion to trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior and as Lord. The Lord Jesus is never more worthy of our trust than He is at this moment. He not only raised Lazarus from the grave, but He Himself died for our sins and rose from the dead, triumphant and able to raise all men from the grave. The faith of John and Sue is in the Savior, who is the resurrection and the life.

Unfortunately not all who witnessed to raising of Lazarus from the grave came to faith in the Lord Jesus. We read in the text that from that point on the religious leaders of the nation planned to put Jesus to death. I am certain that in this service there are some who see death only as a dreaded enemy, totally inconsistent with the goodness and power of God. I urge you, as John may already have done, to place your trust in the Lord Jesus, so that even in the death of this loved one, we may glorify God and know that John's death is but sleep. John's desire is that when our Lord returns to raise him from the grave, you will be there too.

S. What Death Means for the Believer in Christ

What Death Means for the Believer in Christ

Study By: admin

Introduction

If we are to find endurance, encouragement, and comfort amidst the pressures, losses, and tragedies of life, man must turn to the Bible, the Word of God. Why?

Because this Book, God has graciously authenticated with tremendous evidence as not merely the Word of man, but as it is, the Word of God to man, God breathed, accurate, and without error. As the Apostle affirms, what has been written in the Bible has been written "that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4 b). As the Word of God, the Bible is the revelation of the sovereign God and planner of the universe. It is the revelation of a God who cares and who is in control of all the affairs of our lives, and who has not left us to ourselves, but has reached out to us in Christ and in the Bible. As the word of such a God, the Bible alone can give man an adequate understanding, meaning, and hope in the face of the facts and realities of life with its complexities, trials, and losses as with death. So today, for a few moments, let us turn to the Bible and let us reflect together on some of its truth and promises that we might find courage, hope, and joy in the Lord in the midst of our sorrow.

First, we might start with a question? Why death? Why was our beloved friend, taken home at this time in her life? We simply do not know the answer to that? That is one of the mysteries of life that Scripture does not answer. But when is death convenient? When is death ever timely for the individual or for the family and friends? When is death not a shock? When is death normal? Certainly, sometimes it is a relief because of sickness or the pains of this life, but who can ever really be thankful for death. So let's ask a question.

Death Is An Enemy

According to Scripture, death is not really normal or natural even though it is a persistent fact of human history. Why? Because man was created by God to be a unity of body, soul, and spirit and in that state to live forever with God in fellowship with Him. This is the natural, normal state that God planned for man. This is why we have the hope and promise of the resurrection (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1-9).

Further, according to Scripture, death is an enemy, the last enemy to be conquered by God, and as such, it is the result of a cause, the result of sin and the fall of the human race. "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

How is death our enemy? It is our enemy:

1. because it separates man from his body,

2. because is the result of sin and Satan's attack on man who was created in the image of God for fellowship with God, 3. because it separates us from our loved ones, 4. because it ends ministries and often makes life seem futile or without purpose, and 5. because, if men are without Christ, it sends them into a Christless eternity, forever separated from God. But dear friends in Christ, there is an answer to death, there is victory and deliverance from this ancient and ever present, stalking enemy.

Victory Over Death

So, the Apostle, in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, declared in the that great chapter on the resurrection: "But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

What is that victory over death? Let's think together and reflect for a moment on some of the great declarations of the Bible:

(1) Because of Christ's victory for us, God assures us in His Word that this separation is not permanent for believers in Christ. For one day there will be a reuniting of believing loved ones in heaven, never to be separated again. Even now, (Name) is enjoying not only fellowship with the Lord, but with other members of her family that have gone on before. In the OT, it is often repeated that a saint who died "was gathered to his people." This was said of Abraham, Isaac, Aaron, and Moses. This does not mean they were laid to rest with their people, for Moses was not. It means their souls and spirits were reunited in a place called Abraham's bosom or paradise. When David's child died, he said "Can I bring him back? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). It was comforting to David to know he would someday be reunited with his child whom he would know and with whom he would have eternal fellowship.

(2) The Word of God tells us that the sting of death has been swallowed up in the victory of Christ. The "sting of death," Scripture says, "is sin," and Scripture says because of this sin "it is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment." But for (Name), the sting, which is sin, has been removed and so also the judgment. For Romans 8:1 says "there is therefore now no condemnation (no Great White Throne Judgment for sin) to them who are in Christ Jesus."

(3) For (Name), this appointment has been canceled because an earlier appointment was made and kept when she received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. Christ's death canceled sin's penalty and its judgment was born by the Lord in the sinners place on the cross.

(4) Because of the victory of Christ, death for (Name) was a departure for home and means being in the presence of the Lord as well as in the presence of other believing loved ones. In 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul wrote to Timothy "for I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand." The Greek word here for departure is *analsis* which is (a) a nautical term used of a ship which pulls up its anchor and sets sail; (b) it also used in a military way of an army breaking camp to move on; and (c) it was used of freeing someone from his chains. Do you see? This, for the Christian, is what death is--it's setting sail, it's breaking camp, it's being freed from this life so we can go home. The anchor is weighed and we set sail for the golden shore of the blessed presence

of God, carried into God's presence. Have you never been away from home and then boarded a plane or train, and as the time to depart approached, experienced that warm feeling and the thought--I am going home. This explains what death is like for the believer--it's a going home experience.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

2 Corinthians 5:8 "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

There is no intermediate state. The Bible teaches us there is no soul sleep, no purgatory, but instant entrance into God's presence and home. So, heaven is our eternal home. Our Lord is there. Our friends and loved ones in Christ are there. There is no sin nor sinful nature there to cause unhappiness.

Death for the believer is not a venture into the unknown, or a strange or alien atmosphere: it's like going home. But it is even more wonderful than that because it is a home in God's presence.

(5) While the ultimate wiping away of every tear awaits the final battle and the resurrection, our victory in Christ means that at death, we are ushered into the Lord's presence which brings joy unspeakable. In this heavenly home there won't be the sorrow, the tears, and the pain that we have here, and certainly, there is no death there (Revelation 21:4). The believer there experiences perfect happiness and all the joys which attend being in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. When thinking of the glories of heaven and being at home with the Lord, the apostle Paul wrote, "I am in a straight between two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, or to abide here." So you can see we should receive much comfort and joy if we think about what death really means to the departed believer in Christ.

(6) Our victory in Christ also assures us that the believer will one day experience a glorious resurrection and a glorified body like that of Christ. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Paul said, "For our manner of life is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Php 3:20-21). This life is so often beset by ailing and painfully sick bodies, but our future body will know no such problems.

(7) The Word of God assures us that the victory accomplished for us by the Lord Jesus means a glorious, eternal inheritance "an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, which is reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3-5). In other words, our heavenly inheritance is everything that our earthy inheritances are not. Our heavenly inheritance is: incorruptible in substance, undefiled in purity, unfading in beauty and joy, and reserved in heaven (kept sure) for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ by the eternal power and love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:39). This means that our work on earth is never forgotten and that the labors of believers will follow them into eternity. So

the Apostle concludes the resurrection chapter with these words:

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

(8) Finally, we can find further comfort in knowing "that precious in the sight of the LORD, is the death of His saints." There are no accidents with God, His timing is perfect, and He works all things together for good, for the one taken and those left (Romans 8:28-29). When a believer is called home, it's because God's purposes for that believer are over. It's because in God's love and wisdom, He wants that believer with Him in glory. The apostle also wrote: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Conclusion The awful pity is when one dies and departs without faith in Jesus Christ. And I only hope that this service, which causes us all to face the realities of death and what lies beyond, will cause you, if you have never done so, to do what (Name) did, trust in Jesus Christ, to consider Him . . .

Further, may this cause each of us to reflect on the meaning of life . . . The Psalmist exclaimed:

Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

Then in Psalms 90:12, in view of the temporality of life, the Psalmist wrote, So teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. That is, that we may redeem the time, that, through the knowledge and application of God's truth, we may glorify god and live for Him. May we think on these things:

S. Why We Can Worship God

Why We Can Worship God at the Time of the Death of Our Loved Ones (Job 1:1-22)

Study By: admin On the remembrance of Jane Smith at this funeral, it may seem strange to speak about worship, especially since, to some, our prayers for her in her suffering did not remove her suffering nor prevent her death. In particular, we find our attention drawn to the many good things about Mrs. Smith, which only makes the matter of her death more painful to us. How is it that we should worship God at a time of tragedy? The answer, I believe, can be found in the first chapter of the Book of Job.

We know from the first chapter of the Book of Job that he was a righteous man, a man who was blameless and who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1, Job 1:8). We know also that he was a man blessed by God, he was rich in the goods of this world (Job 1:3), and he was blessed with a family of ten children (Job 1:2).

We know, as Job did not, that God had chosen to use Job as an example of a faithful man. Satan, however, protested that anyone would worship God when God prospered him for doing so. Let his life turn sour, and then see what becomes of Job's piety," Satan challenged. This scene in heaven is the backdrop for all the tragedy which is to follow.

I do not wish to focus on Satan's folly, however, but on Job's righteous in a time of family tragedy. Our text tells us that wave upon wave of announcements of tragedy quickly were thrust upon this godly man. One messenger reported that all of Job's oxen and donkeys had been stolen, and the servants who kept them slaughtered (Job 1:14-15). Then another came to convey the news that lightning had destroyed all of his sheep, and those who tended them (Job 1:16). Then another came to report that a raiding band had stolen his camels and killed his servants who cared for them (Job 1:17). The most devastating report came last. A wind had struck and collapsed the home of his eldest son, where he and all the other children were gathered, and all were had perished (Job 1:18-19).

Satan was certain that Job's faith would collapse, like the roof of the house of his eldest son, crushing his devotion to God. And there was good reason, in Satan's mind, for such anticipation. After all, Job was a righteous man. Why should God allow tragedy to strike not only his possessions, but his loved ones? Even beyond this, we have been told that it was Job's habitual practice to intercede for his children, asking God's special care on them. The tragic death of his family was surely contrary to Job's righteousness, contrary to his prayers, and contrary to his faith--or so Satan reasoned.

Some of Job's responses were predictable. He tore his clothes and shaved his head--all signs of mourning and grief. But what he did after this is the key to our comfort in the face of grief--Job fell to the ground and worshipped (Job 1:20), and these are his words:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. In these words we find the reason why Job could worship God, even in the greatest tragedy he had ever known--the loss of his loved ones. As I point of the reasons for Job's worship, I want to be clear in saying that Job's grief was not inconsistent with his grief. Job worshipped God with a torn robe and with a shaved head and a tear-stained face--all genuine tokens of his grief. But in his grief, he did not lose sight of his God. Indeed, it was in his grief that God become ever more real. I do not wish you to think that grief is inappropriate this afternoon, for it is altogether right. But in our grief, we will only find consolation as we are able to worship God in the face of tragedy. There are two truths revealed in these words of Job which were the basis for his worship.

First, Job was confident of the greatness of God.

He said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21). Job understood that God was in control of His creation. Whether it be the cruel and heartlessness of a raiding army, or the forces of nature, it was, in the final analysis, God who had given him his riches and his family, and it was God who took them away. Whatever had happened, Job knew that God had allowed it, and that He was still in control. This same truth is true of the death of Jane Smith. God gave her life, and God, in His own time, took her in death. Just as Job recognized this when he prayed for the protection of his family, so Bill and Ida and others recognized it when they prayed for the healing of Mrs. Smith. Just as Job remained confident, though his prayers seemed unanswered, we, too must be confident of the sovereign hand of God in the suffering and death of this woman whom we have loved.

Second, Job was confident of the goodness of God.

It is good to know that we can worship a God who is all-powerful, who controls every aspect of our lives. But it is even better to know that the God who is great, is also a God who is good. When greatness and goodness are both found in God, there is every reason to worship Him. Verse 31 tells us that Job did not sin, nor did he blame God, as though He had done wrong.

While Job did not understand the purposes which God was working out in this tragedy, He did trust in the Person who was in control. Thus, he could worship, even in his grief.

What Job Did Not Know, That We Know

Knowing the greatness and the goodness of God was sufficient basis for the faith of Job, which was revealed more in his worship at the time of tragedy than at any other occasion. These two truths, the greatness of God and His goodness, should be sufficient for our worship, but there is even more for us, for we have been given additional revelation, which was not made known to Job at his time of sorrow. Allow me to briefly mention these.

We have the additional revelation of the Book of Job, which shows us how and why God was great and good to Job. Job not only glorified God by revealing his faith, but Job grew in his faith as he was tested. And, the last chapter tells us that when Job's faith was strengthened, God prospered him twice as much in the end, as at the beginning (cf. Job 42:10-17). The greatest revelation, however, is that of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in the words of the New Testament. Here we discover that the saint not only can have victory in death, but can also,

through Jesus Christ, have victory over death.

During His life, the Lord Jesus raised the dead. In John chapter 11, we have recorded, the raising of Lazarus. There, our Lord assured Mary and Martha that He was the resurrection and the life, and that those who place their trust in Him would never die. The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus staked His authority and the truth His message on His resurrection from the grave (cf. Matthew 12:38-40). They then describe the arrest, crucifixion, and burial of our Lord, followed by His resurrection on the third day. In the New Testament epistles, we are told that it is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ which is the basis for a man's forgiveness of sins, and for his ultimate victory over death, for our Lord will come to receive unto Himself, those who have trusted in Him.

I submit to you, that in the face of the tragedy of the death of Jane Smith there is more than enough reason to worship God. You will only be able to do that when you, like Job, and countless others throughout history, have placed your trust in the God who is both great and good, and who has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in your place, and to be raised to new life, for your deliverance. I pray that because of Him you will be able to worship.

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