

A Precious Death

by Dr. Walter L. Wilson

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

>Death may take the Christian down, but it cannot keep him down. Death enables the saint of God to leave his body that he may be present with his Lord. Death is God's porter to open the door, so that the trusting child may go home to the Father and to the Father's house. Death is a "grim monster," but for the believer death is a conquered foe. Death comes to the saint to permit him to pass safely from the scene of suffering to the place of singing; from the shadows of earth to the sunshine of heaven.

In this remarkable passage our Lord reveals how precious to His own heart is that which brings such deep sorrow to the human heart. Of course, the question arises at once in our minds, "Why is death, the death of the saint, precious in His sight?" We must look through the Word to find the answer.

The Lord watches at the bedside of His suffering child. He sees the anguish of heart, and the sadness of the dear ones. He hears their prayers, but provides some better thing for them. He watches the life as it ebbs away. He sees the strength gradually leaving the body. He sees the ravaging effect of the disease as it consumes the vital forces of the dying saint. All the sufferings in the sick room are in His sight.

As the candle flickers in its socket, and the shadows of the valley fall athwart the path of the suffering child of God, He watches, He sees, He permits. It is all done in His sight. Then as the eyes fail, the eyelids droop in death, and the spirit takes its flight, He is still watching and says to us that it is "precious."

When God says that such an event is "precious," it is not without good reasons. Let us try to discover the reasons for this blessedness in the sight of God. Let us consider seven reasons why the death of the saints is precious in His sight.

1. It Brings His Child Home

If the Lord has purchased you with His precious blood, then He will want you home with Himself. When any article is purchased at the store the buyer desires to have it for himself, and so he takes it home.

No matter how insignificant the article may be, whether it costs ten cents or ten dollars, the buyer will take it along for his own possession and use.

In His high-priestly prayer, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, the Lord Jesus prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou has given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (v. 24). By this we discern His desire that all who have believed on Him unto salvation shall be with Him and behold His glory. He would never be satisfied if one of His sheep was not in the fold. He delights in each one. They are precious in His sight.

It may be that you have felt that you are quite obscure and of not very much value and really very inconsequential. Do not think so, my Christian friend, the Saviour paid a great price for your redemption, and He will surely have you in the Father's house with Him. If He does not descend from the skies in glory, He will permit death to take you through the valley, and thus enable you to go to His glorious palace. He will not overlook the least of His children. He will take the smallest and the weakest as well as the greatest and the strongest.

2. The Training Days Are Over

All through this life our Lord is looking after His sheep, training and preparing them for His eternal kingdom. Here He must teach them many lessons, for this is the "schoolhouse for glory." Here He must bear with our dull minds, our slow intellects, and our poor comprehension.

Our Lord is not weary of training us, but it must grieve Him that we are so slow to learn all that He has to teach us, and that we must learn the same things over and over again. He must instruct us about Himself, so that we will not meet a Stranger when we go home. He must teach us heaven's ways, so we will feel at home among the saints when we arrive there. He must inform us about ourselves, so we will not be surprised at that which arises in our own lives. He must teach us about others, so we may know how to wisely act towards them. He must show us how to employ our time for His glory, so we may win a reward and a crown.

All of these training days are ended when death takes the spirit home to the Father and the Saviour. It is a precious time in His sight when the "school days" are over and the "home days" begin. He would not have us always working, nor always studying, nor always fighting on the battlefield. He would have us come home for a lovely vacation. He

would have us enjoy to the full the "secret place of the most High." He would have us put into practice to the fullest extent the many things we have learned to do down here. There may be stars to rule over. There may be great celestial kingdoms which require wise leadership. Who knows what our Lord has prepared for those who love Him and who know Him! He has not seen fit to tell us fully. There will be many surprises.

"But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9). And while these things are revealed to the child of God by the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, yet their full revelation to eye and ear and heart is still future.

It is a precious thing to our God when His child graduates from the schools of earth and takes his place in the Courts above, a product of His workmanship.

3. That the Lord May Exhibit His Workmanship

We are the products of God's "mint," and therefore should bear His image and superscription. We are the result of His handiwork, and therefore should be a joy to the angels and the heavenly hosts to observe us. We are the out-turning of the "Master Potter," and therefore should be a vessel which is delightful to Him in every respect.

Our Lord molds us in earth's furnaces. He trains us in the schools of tribulation. He teaches us in the college of strange experiences. His is a life-long task, and we are the product of the months and years of His workmanship. Circumstances and events have much to do with the character of the finished article. For the honor of His blessed Name He must do a good work in us, else we shall be ashamed when the final inspection takes place. Death ushers us out of the factory into the show-room, where we are put on display for our Maker. What a joy it must be to His heart when He makes an exhibit of us to His Father, to angels, and to the heavenly hosts!

Through all eternity He will show the exceeding riches of His grace and the exceeding greatness of His power and the exceeding wonder of His knowledge, as He shows off His children whose lives He has transformed. As He presents us to His Father, He will say, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." The children will be the result of His workmanship and will reveal in themselves the power of Christ as a Saviour, as a Teacher, as a Molder, and as a Shepherd.

His sheep should come home covered with much wool. His child should come home well taught in the Word. His pupils should come home well trained for His service. We should accept all of His ministry that we might be well-developed specimens of His handiwork when we appear for the final review.

4. The Worst for a Saint Is Passed

Saints die. Godly saints die. Precious saints sicken and suffer and fade away. But they are *His* saints. He could prevent it if He wanted to. He could shorten their days of suffering if He desired to do so. He sees the suffering. He beholds the tears. He hears their prayers, but His answer is "No!" He may take His saints out of the springtime of life, or in midsummer, or at the golden harvest. The oak outlives the ash, the ash outlives the willow, but they must all die. Death does not deal with seniority, but sometimes sends them first to the burial who came last from birth. The body's death to this earthly sphere is the soul's birth to that heavenly realm. Our Lord decides the length of time that His child shall endure the storms of this life. The Master Pilot determines the length of the voyage and the weight of the cargo for each of those who sail the sea of life.

Our blessed Lord will permit only as much trouble in our lives as will be for His glory and for our profit. He rules the raging of the sea, and will not permit it to go farther than it should. He may permit the boat to be filled with water, but He will not allow it to sink. He will only polish the precious stones purchased with His blood as much as is necessary to make them properly reflect the light of His glory. He will only crush the flowers of His garden sufficiently to bring forth the sweetest perfumes of their hearts.

It is a precious thing to our Lord when the sadness is turned to gladness. He is pleased when the crushing is changed to crowning. He rejoices when the sighing is changed to singing. It is His plan and purpose that His child shall walk no more among the thorns and thistles, but shall walk the street of gold amid the gardens of God. It is not His desire that the sheep shall always be threatened by wolves, but that they shall be safe home in the heavenly fold of the Father. The ultimate goal for the child of God is the "Haven of Rest." There will be only those storms that are necessary, and those perils which provide an opportunity for God to show His watchful kindness.

The final destination of the golden grain is the garner of God. The heat and the cold, the winter and the summer, the shadow and the sunshine will only be sufficient to ripen the grain and prepare it for the Master's

use. Our Lord will rejoice when the grain is garnered, the harvest is passed, and He and His chosen ones shall be together forever.

5. Satan Is Fully Defeated

The devil is opposed to Jesus Christ. He does not want any soul to be saved. He does all he can to prevent the heart from responding to the gospel. After the soul is saved he does his utmost to wreck that person on the sea of life, and cause him to come limping into port with the cargo gone, the sails torn, the railings wrecked, and only a battered hull for the Owner. It is a precious sight to our Lord to see His child safely anchored at last in the harbour-home. What a joy it must be to His heart when the vessel enters port fully rigged, unhurt by the storms, and with all of its precious cargo on board!

There is a constant conflict between Christ and Satan over the child of God. Sometimes our Lord permits Satan to have his way, in order to prove the caliber of the Christian. Though Job was terribly assailed by Satan's forces and afflicted by Satan's malign schemes, he sang the praises of God and came forth from the fiery trial as pure as gold. Think of that wonderful day when Job was presented to God as a glorious testimony and a magnificent exhibit of the manifold grace of God!

Paul suffered greatly at the hands of men, tormented by every form of persecution, afflicted at the hands of Satan and of sinners, but he entered the final port with flags flying and the song of praises rising to his Lord. Many martyrs have suffered from Satan's wicked designs, and have laid down their lives under his persecution. These have had an abundant entrance into the presence of their Lord, and have become eternal testimonies to the defeat of Satan and the victory of Jesus Christ.

Satan's malice against Job, David, and James made them famous. Satan did his worst and released God's best. Satan's deep, dark design against the Lord Jesus sealed his own doom and gave to the world the mighty Redeemer. So at the end of the life of a saint, the work of Satan against him reveals the life and desire of the saint, and those blessed characteristics which the Holy Spirit placed in his heart, and brings glory to the name of our Lord.

6. His Protecting Care No Longer Needed

There are many evil influences at work to harm and hurt the saints. False doctrines present plausible arguments. Clever teachers with persuasive words offer cunningly devised fables about the Scriptures.

Satan has many religions in which he cleverly uses the Scriptures to deceive the child of God who is not well taught. Satan allures and attracts the mind by beautiful words and by deceitful reasonings. Our Lord must preserve the minds of His saints.

The world seeks to draw the child of God away from Christ. The mirage of fame and fortune beckon to the saints. The attraction of pomp and power present themselves to the child of God from the social world, the field of politics and the realm of finance. Even religion offers position and place which the human heart naturally craves. The Lord must preserve His child from all such evil influences.

The heart is deceitful above all things and very hard to satisfy. It craves satisfaction from anything that is available. It does not question the wisdom of it, but grasps eagerly after its own desires. Men will part with health and comfort in order that they may gratify the desires of the flesh. Our Lord must needs provide a way of escape and furnish the means of protection for His child from these dangerous enemies.

At the home-going of the believer, the shelter of His wings is no longer needed. Sin cannot enter that heavenly abode. The Christian is safe from the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the protecting care of his loving Lord is exchanged for an eternity of sweet and precious fellowship. The Lord Jesus assures us, "In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

7. His Name Is Glorified Thereby

How wonderful it will be for our wonderful Lord Jesus when He points out the glorified bodies of drunkards and lawyers, of doctors and street-sweepers, of college professors and railroad engineers, who have been saved and sanctified because of His own wonderful work. What glory it will bring to Him when the witnesses appeal before His throne and confess that once they were atheists, murderers, gamblers, religious hypocrites, empty professors, and dupes of Satan, but now they are washed by the precious blood, saved by God's grace, and brought home by the power of the Son of God.

The presence in heaven of those who were once sinners will bring eternal glory to the Man who died upon Calvary. He only is the Door, and by Him they entered in. He only is the Way, and by Him they came to the Father. He only provides the garment of righteousness, and thus clothed they appear in the presence of God. Our presence in heaven will bring eternal glory to Christ Jesus our Lord. How precious it is to Him whenever His saint comes home singing His praises!

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