

Tuesday, July 17, 2012 – Dying is Gain

My father is dying. The demise of his health is not surprising. In the last 20 years he has suffered a heart attack, a stroke and several bouts with cancer. Writing these words does not help me come to grips with the fact that the man I have admired my whole life will, in the near future, not be on the other end of the phone when I call to seek his counsel. He will not be there to rehash the same stories for the hundredth time. He most likely will not be around to see my daughter marry next summer. I could continue the list of things that won't happen.

He's a very intelligent man. He was a farmer and rancher for over 60 years. He turned down a job at IBM in the early 50's because it would have taken him away from his family for 6 months. It would constantly amaze me how he could take apart, and put back together, a tractor engine simply from memory. He always seemed to know what needed to be done when it came to crops, cattle, etc. He invented implements to use on the farm that were years ahead of their time. His occupation seemed to suit the man that he was for many years.

My dad is a Christian. There is no one I have met who knows (or knew, in better days,) more Bible than my father. I remember when I was growing up as a kid he never started his day without studying God's Word. He was an elder in the Lord's church for over 15 years and was respected by many people who would seek him out for counsel and advice. One thing I admire most is the fact he would not compromise his beliefs, regardless. Please do not misunderstand me. My father is not perfect. There are attributes he possesses that I constantly fight to keep from becoming part of my character. He knows better and I believe that he tries to do what is right. When he fails, I know his prayer life has always been earnest. These thoughts are what help me deal with the frailty that is seen now in his body.

Humans see death as a separation from those we love and from earthly companions. In it we experience pain and sorrow because of that separation. However the Bible assures us of the fact that man is more than just physical. At death the spirit lives on.

Death is a gain for those who are faithful. We gain release from the pain and sorrow of this world. **Ecclesiastes 7:1** tells us that the day of one's death is better than the day of their birth. We all understand that life here on earth can be filled with many wonderful moments but it can also be mixed with sorrow and pain. We understand that all sorrow and distress ends at the death of one who is faithful. **Revelation 21:4** tells us, "...he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall

there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away.” We will be in the presence of God for all eternity.

In death, Christians gain a new, incorruptible body. Paul told the Corinthians, “For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.” (2 Cor. 5:1) Death is not something to be feared. The Christian knows that death is going to occur but that an eternity with the Lord lies beyond. Christians realize we have victory over death through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This world is not and never was intended to be our permanent home. The Hebrew writer states, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that [country] from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better [country], that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.” The death of a Christian is not the end of the voyage but the beginning of a more wonderful journey. Remember Paul’s words to Timothy, “For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing.”

Death truly brings rest from all of life’s bad times. We read the comforting words of John in **Revelation 14:13**, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.” The day of death is when we enter into the presence of holiness, awaiting the time we will be presented faultless before the father (**Jude 24**).

For the righteous, Paul wrote of death being a blessing from God. We need to value what death means to the righteous. Death holds no terror to God’s saints. It is not a going out of existence. It is a departure for a better world and a new life.

In this life we are faced with sin, sorrow, sickness, and pain. In death we are released from a world filled with the things that cause sorrow to a better world where there are no more tears, no death, no crying, mourning or pain. Anna L. Barbould wrote a poem that sums up beautifully the thought of a Christian’s death:

How blest the righteous when he dies!  
When sinks a weary soul to rest,  
How mildly beam the closing eyes,  
How gently heaves th' expiring breast!

So fades a summer cloud away;  
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er:  
So gently shuts the eye of day;  
So dies the wave along the shore.

A holy quiet reigns around,  
A calm which life nor death destroys;  
Nothing disturbs that peace profound  
Which his unfettered soul enjoys.

Farewell, conflicting hopes and fears,  
Where lights and shades alternate dwell:  
How bright th' unchanging morn appears!  
Farewell, inconstant world, farewell.

Life's duty done, as sinks the clay,  
Light from its load the spirit flies,  
While heaven and earth combine to say,  
"How blest the righteous when he dies!"