

Tuesday, July 12, 2016 – What about the End of Life?

The city of Dallas hurts. North Texas and many of its residents hurt. Police officers and their families hurt.

At a time like this, the human design causes our emotions of sadness and grief to dominate our reactions to the news of someone's death. The emotions are much stronger when it involves the death of someone who made such an impact on so many people's lives or lost their life protecting others. Sadness and grief are good; they are required for us to process what has occurred and it will allow us to move on.

I feel helpless at these moments when I watch funeral services where the false impression is given that there are many ways to eternal salvation and that those who have passed are at peace because they had their "own relationship" with God. This is simply NOT biblically correct! Make no mistake, Christ said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." That disqualifies those who discount the Deity of Christ or who believe in any God other than Jehovah. It also disqualifies those who refuse to submit their lives to the commands of Christ and live in obedience.

As Christians, we push through the sadness and grief, knowing the joy that is found when someone goes home to be with the Father.

Psalms 16 - "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust. O my soul, you have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You." As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight." Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, Nor take up their names on my lips. O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance. I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

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.

We grieve at our loss. Grief is a natural reaction to death. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:1 that we should not lose heart when faced with death. In death there is comfort; comfort in the fond memories of this dear loved one and how he has touched all our lives, and there is comfort from the Lord.

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 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we read, "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

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.

The child of God never needs to fear death, for Jesus Christ came to earth to grant us victory over it. Jesus tells us in John 14:2-3, "In my Father's house are many mansions; 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 come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also."

Every day in our world, we see tragedies that, in the blink of an eye, bring about a finality that was never thought of only minutes earlier.

James warned us in James 4:14, "whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." We need to understand life is precious.

Life is precious because our time on this earth is short. Job 14:1-2 states, "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue." We do not know the number of days we are going to be given on this earth. That is why Jesus has always warned us that our purpose is not to put stock in the things of this world, but to prepare ourselves to meet God (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16). Parental responsibility in raising our children is so important because our kids will learn about life somewhere and from someone; it needs to be from their Christian parents. Even if they live with us until adulthood, we have very little time to "...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Life is precious because death is sure. Hebrews 9:27 tells us, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." We must be ready to meet the Lord at whatever time he may come. We have no idea when that will occur. Peter reminds us, in 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

Life is precious because souls, all souls, are important. In Ezekial 18:4 we are told, "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die." Christ reminds us in Mark 8:36, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Wayne Jackson correctly reasons when he says:

*"There are some exceedingly erroneous ideas regarding justification in the community of "Christendom.*

*The Roman Catholic dogma of justification on the basis of meritorious works does not conform to the teaching of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). On the other hand, the reactionary doctrine of Protestantism, that justification is on the ground of "faith alone," is equally spurious (Galatians 5:6; James 2:14; esp. v. 24). Incidentally, if the passive form, "being justified," eliminates all human response, then faith itself would be excluded from the plan of redemption.*

*Biblical justification involves the following elements:*

*(1) Because all accountable people are sinners (Romans 3:10, 23), and therefore deserving of condemnation (Romans 6:23), if there is to be any hope for fallen humanity, a process of justification must be divinely extended.*

*(2) No person can earn justification (Matthew 18:21), or merit it (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

*(3) Justification can be extended only on the basis of Christ's death as the sinless sacrifice for man (1 Peter 1:19; Romans 3:24-26).*

*(4) Justification will be bestowed only when man responds to God's plan of redemption by faith (Romans 3:26; 5:1). It is the nature of that "faith" that is crucial to this issue."*

For those who survive, we need to use occasions, such as this, to reflect on our relationship with God. Am I truly His or do I try and manipulate God's commands to justify the way I want to live? It is a time to understand that I do NOT know when my time on earth is done and the condition I find myself in at the moment of my final breath is the condition, which I will stand before God. I will stand before Him without excuse.

The death of a Christian, instead of being a senseless end to a futile existence, is really the crowning of a life lived in faith and obedience. This is the great hope of Christianity.