

An Attempt To Listen To God

Meditations On The Death Of A Believer

Part 2

By

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A continuation from "The Death of A Believer - Part 1"

The Death and Resurrection of Christ

Knowing that I am saved from the penalty of my sins is a great and comforting blessing, but I thank God that He was not totally satisfied with such a rescue mission. He knew that as long as I was under the headship of Adam I was under condemnation and would eternally have sin in me. Something more was needed, and the answer to both is that Christ had to enter death. It was only by His death and resurrection that I could be put under His headship and ultimately "sin" in me utterly abolished. By His resurrection Christ:

- a) Abolished death (2 Tim. 1:10). The word for "abolished" signifies "to do away with", "to make no more". What a blessed truth that is. Here we are in the land of the dying going to the land of the living, and living in fulness of life that shall never end and never diminish. This is the word used when Paul writes: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26), and in the words of Hebrews, that by His resurrection He "destroyed" him that had the power of death, that is the devil (Heb. 2:14).
- b) Concerning death it is prophesied of Christ: "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" (Hos. 13:14). The Lord says concerning His people: "I will ransom (redeem, rescue) them from the power of the grave, He will be the plague (pestilence) of death and the destruction (exterminator) of the grave. While this was to be interpreted to the Assyrian, yet it is applied to the physical death of a saint (1 Cor. 15:55).
- c) It is a truth far beyond human comprehension that Christ was never a dying man! Furthermore, there can never be a medical reason on why Christ died and say His death was due to lack of blood, etc. Three times over the Lord says: "I lay it down".
 - i) "I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Jn 10:17)
 - ii) "I lay it down of myself" (Jn. 10:18)
 - iii) "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn. 10:18)

Death for Christ was a deliberate voluntary act of going into the strong man's house (Matt. 12:29) and having bound the strong man (Satan) (Heb. 2:14) He spoilt his goods, and in triumph exited death (Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15) and is "alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:17-19) and lives in the "power of an endless (indissoluble) life" (Heb. 7:16). He has the keys of "hell (hades) and of death" (Rev. 1:18). His body never saw corruption (Acts 2:27), reverently speaking, God had no alternative but to raise Christ from the dead, His justice and morality demanded it.

By His resurrection the Lord brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10). In bringing immortality to light He provided the means by which we could know the glory of that which lies within the veil. Because of that which He has done:

- a) All the redeemed will have a body like His in its constitution, abilities and perfections. (Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2)
- b) We have a living hope knowing that our bodies will be changed whether we have died or are alive. (1 Cor. 15:51-52)
- c) They will be bodies that can live as comfortably on earth as in heaven, just as our Lord did. (Acts 1:3, 11)
- d) They will be bodies that cannot be curtailed by material structures as our Lord showed. (Jn. 20:19, 26)
- e) They will be bodies which will never know weakness or decay. (1 Cor. 15: 53-54)
- f) In that sphere, there is no sorrow, no crying, no pain, no tears, and that for all eternity.

By His death and resurrection the Lord took away:

- a) The penalty for our sins. (1 Cor. 15:3)
- b) The power of sin over us. (Rom. 6:11-14)
- c) The fear of death, but not necessarily the fear of dying. (Heb. 2:14)
- d) But the death and resurrection of Christ did not take away the fear of how we shall die, nor the sorrow of death (1 Cor. 15:51-55), but he did take away the sting of death, in that we know there is the assurance of eternal life beyond the grave.
- e) The fulness of grief. (1 Thess. 4:13)

The Intermediate State

We know that we are at this moment on earth, and for all eternity we shall have glorified bodies and be with the Lord, **BUT**, what is it like right now for those saints who have died? It is almost two thousand years since Paul, Peter, James and John died. What are they doing, what is it like “over there”?

There are several passages which tell us of the intermediate state and what a glorious prospect they describe. It is a place of being comforted (Lk. 16:25); rest (Rev. 14:13); being present (at home) with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8); to be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23); a place called “the third heaven” and “paradise” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4); a place of blessedness (Rev. 14:13) where he heard things which human words could never describe.

One of the passages which reveals life in the intermediate state are the words of John: “I saw under that altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God . . . and they cried . . . How long O Lord” (Rev. 6:9-10). These are saints who have suffered unjustly at the hand of man, and for their faithfulness to God have paid the ultimate price. Their cry is not for vengeance but for God to justify them, and show they were right in that which they believed and stood for.

Yet, they have not received their salvation in its perfection for they are waiting for the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23) being in an “unclothed state” (2 Cor. 5:4).

Avenues By Which The Death Of A Believer Is Viewed

God is exceedingly compassionate, consequently, as we stand by those whom we love who are going into that valley, God has sought to make available to us comforting words by assuring us of the hope of the resurrection. He is opening up to us, in a small degree, that which lies beyond this side of the veil. God gives us at least thirteen different perspectives on the death of a saint. They are:

- a) A Dissolving (2 Cor. 5:1)
 - i) The word translated “dissolved” means to “loosened down” with the idea of taking down a tent. The cords are loosened, but it is not the dissolving of the body via the ravages of time, but the tense indicates an action over which I have no control.
- b) A Gain (Phil. 1:21)
 - i) Paul write: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”. The metaphor indicates that of a business. An investment is made, or a trust, awaiting the time of termination, then the investment will show its reward. When a saint dies suddenly, especially when doing a work for God, it is sometimes intimated that it is so sad for the brevity of life is over! Paul would have stood up in strong disagreement at such a teaching. He would have said: “To die is gain”! The whole purpose of life here is not to serve the Lord as an end itself, but to know God and Christ (Jn. 17:3), to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18) and to serve with that motive and goal. Ideally, for the believer, life finds its deepest fulness in Christ, He is its goal and horizon and to die knowing Him more fully, and gaze on His loveliness. Surely it is gain to be perpetually in fellowship with Christ (Phil. 1:23); being “present (at home) with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), seeing the fruit of His labors, it all being worthwhile (1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Jn. 2:28); of being ultimately honored by receiving of the crown of life (2 Tim. 4:7-8), and of Christ being magnified (Phil. 1:20).
- c) A Decease (2 Pet. 1:15) Lit. My exodus.
 - i) The term used concerning the death of our Lord. (Lk. 9:31)
 - ii) The term used for the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt (Heb 11:22), to a land their eyes had never seen, leaving for their promised inheritance, and what an inheritance we enter into:

1. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11)
2. "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (Eph. 1:14)
3. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:12)
4. "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." (Col. 3:24)
5. "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." (1 Pet. 1:4)

d) A Putting Off (2 Pet. 1:13-14)

- i) "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me" (2 Pet. 1:14); "Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Pet. 1:15); "Shortly I must put of my tabernacle" (2 Pet. 1:14), Lit. Quick is the putting off of my tabernacle / the putting off of my tabernacle comes swiftly; as a garment, being unclothed as in 2 Cor. 5:3-4.

e) A Reaping In Maturity (Job 5:26)

- i) "Thou shalt come to thy grave in full age, like a shock of corn cometh in in his season." This to me is a beautiful picture, the winds and storms of life have not destroyed its growth nor hindered it's fruit bearing. Now is the time for it's harvest, and at the peak of it's spiritual maturity it is reaped for the glory of God.

f) A Gathering To His People (Deut. 32:50)

- i) God spoke to Moses and said: "thou shalt die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people."

g) An Entrance Into Rest (Isa. 57:2) – The righteous perish yet they waken and walk.

- i) "There the wicked cease from troubling: and there the weary be at rest (Job 3:17). They have known the blessedness of resting on Him for salvation (Matt 11:28); for justification of their beliefs (2 Thess. 1:7), and now they rest from all their works (Rev. 14:13).

h) A Falling Asleep (Acts 7:59, 60)

- i) "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Like others, I often look at the little children, they have boundless energy and life is exciting, but there comes a time during, or at the end of the day, when they fall asleep. What a lovely picture of death, all the energy has been expended and they fall asleep in the arms of the Saviour.

i) An Entrance To Comforting (Lk. 16:25)

- i) "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted." For many saints life is very hard, void of the many comforts we have. Some are languishing in dirty prisons, some for the sake of the gospel are living in poverty strewn countries. Earth has no comfort for them. I have no idea what it will be when the Lord calls them to Himself and they are comforted, but being eternal it will make the afflictions of this life as little things. (2 Cor. 4:17-18)

j) A Departing (Phil. 1:23)

- i) "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better. In Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare wrote: "parting is such sweet sorrow". For the child of God death is a departing for which the only sorrow is the concerns one has for others. But, how immeasurably sweet it is, and Paul having tasted it, uses cumulative expressions so that literally

the passage reads: "It is much more the better, that is, it is much much better, by far better". Therefore, at death the saint goes to a far better place, and for the sufferings endured on earth receives a far more excelling glory (2 Cor. 4:17). The wording is that of a ship being loosed from its moorings, it has weighted its anchor and is released from all hindrances. Nothing now to impede that homeward journey, nor to restrain my onward way to my Heavenly home.

k) An Absenting (2 Cor. 5:8)

i) "Absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). To be absent means to vacate, no longer knit together. What a prospect, to have left this body of clay, of mortality, of weakness, and susceptibility to sin, and to be forever with the Lord. No wonder we can in truth sing: "Forever with the Lord, Amen so let it be".

l) Death To The Believer is The Door To Sight (2 Cor. 5:7)

i) Here we are boxed in by the five senses and their limitations. Our eyes can only see so much, ears which can only hear so much, and a voice that can only reach so far. When lifted to a spiritual level then there is the recognition that we cannot always see that which God is doing, and on Sunday we look at the emblems of His body. At the moment of death we will see Him in His beauty, and for the first time there will be a clear understanding of what Calvary really means. No longer will we sit at a table and remember Him, but while seeing Him in His glory, our hearts and minds will worship and our tongues will praise in adoring wonder.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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