

Precious Death

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“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Psalm 116:15

This is one of the many comforting and blessed statements in Holy Scripture concerning that great event from which the flesh so much shrinks. If the Lord’s people would more frequently make a prayerful and believing study of what the Word says upon their departure out of this world, death would lose much, if not all, of its terrors for them. But alas, instead of doing so, they let their imagination run riot, they give way to carnal fears, they walk by sight instead of by faith. Looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance, let us endeavor to dispel, by the light of Divine revelation, some of the gloom which unbelief casts around even the death of a Christian.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” These words intimate that a dying saint is an object of special notice unto the Lord, for mark the words “in the sight of.” It is true that the eyes of the Lord are ever upon us, for He never slumbers nor sleeps. It is true that we may say at all times “Thou God seest me.” But it appears from Scripture that there are occasions when He notices and cares for us in a special manner. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee” (Isaiah 43:2).

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” This brings before us an aspect of death which is rarely considered by believers. It gives us what may be termed the Godward side of the subject. Only too often, we contemplate death, like most other things, from our side. The text tells us that from the viewpoint of Heaven the death of a saint is neither hideous nor horrible, tragic or terrible, but “precious.” This raises the question, Why is the death of His people precious in the sight of the Lord? What is there in the last great crisis which is so dear unto Him? Without attempting an exhaustive reply, let us suggest one or two possible answers.

1. Their persons are precious to the Lord.

They ever were and always will be dear to Him. His saints! They were the ones on whom His love was set before the earth was formed or the heavens made. These are they for whose sakes He left His Home on high and whom He bought with His precious blood, cheerfully laying down His life for them. These are they whose names are borne on our great High Priest’s breast and engraven on the palms of His hands. They are His Father’s love-gift to Him, His children, members of His body; therefore, everything that concerns them is precious in His sight. The Lord loves His people so intensely that the very hairs of their heads are numbered: the angels are sent forth to minister unto them; and because their persons are precious unto the Lord so also are their deaths.

2. Because death terminates the saint’s sorrows and sufferings.

There is a needs-be for our sufferings, for through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Nevertheless, the Lord does not “afflict willingly” (Lam. 3:33). God is neither unmindful of nor indifferent to our trials and troubles. Concerning His people of old it is written, “In all their affliction, he was afflicted” (Isa. 63:9). “Like as a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear him” (Ps. 103:13). So also are we told that our great High Priest is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). Here, then, may be another reason why the death of a saint is precious in the sight of the Lord—because it marks the termination of his sorrows and sufferings.

3. Because death affords the Lord an opportunity to display His sufficiency.

Love is never so happy as when ministering to the needs of its cherished object, and never is the Christian so needy and so helpless as in the hour of death. But man's extremity is God's opportunity. It is then that the Father says to His trembling child, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10). It is because of this that the believer may confidently reply, "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." Our very weakness appeals to His strength, our emergency to His sufficiency. Most blessedly is this principle illustrated in the well-known words "He shall gather the lambs (the helpless ones) with his arm, and carry them in his bosom" (Isaiah 40:11). Yes, His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Therefore is the death of the saints "precious" in His sight because it affords the Lord a blessed occasion for His love, grace and power to minister unto and undertake for His helpless people.

4. Because at death the saint goes direct to the Lord.

The Lord delights in having His people with Himself. Blessedly was this evidenced all through His earthly ministry. Wherever He went, the Lord took His disciples along with Him. Whether it was to the marriage at Cana, to the holy feasts in Jerusalem, to the house of Jairus when his daughter lay dead, or to the Mount of Transfiguration, they ever accompanied Him. How blessed is that word in Mark 3:14, "He ordained twelve, that they should be with him." And He is "the same yesterday and today and for ever." Therefore has He assured us, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Precious then is the death of the saints in His sight, because absent from the body we are "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

While we are sorrowing over the removal of a saint, Christ is rejoicing. His prayer was "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24), and in the entrance into Heaven of each one of His own people, He sees an answer to that prayer and is glad. He beholds in each one that is freed from "this body of death" another portion of the reward for His travail of soul, and He is satisfied with it.

Therefore the death of His saints is precious to the Lord, for it occasions Him ground for rejoicing. It is most interesting and instructive to trace out the fullness of the Hebrew word here translated "precious." it is also rendered "excellent." "How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God!" (Ps. 36:7). "A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit" (Prov. 17:27). However worthily or unworthily he may live, the death of a saint is excellent in the sight of the Lord. The same Hebrew word is also rendered "honorable." "Kings" daughters were among thy honorable women" (Ps. 45:9). So Ahasuerus asked of Haman, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" (Esther 6:6). Yes, the exchange of heaven for earth is truly honorable, and "This honor have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord."

This Hebrew word is also rendered "brightness." "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness" (Job 31:26). Dark and gloomy though death may be unto those whom the Christian leaves behind, it is brightness "in the sight of the Lord:" "at evening time it shall be light" (Zech. 14:7). Precious, excellent, honorable, brightness in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. May the Lord make this little meditation precious unto His saints.

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