

Lifeworld.org

“I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (I Thessalonians 4:13).

Time to Say Good-Bye

Central Truth: Christian faith will comfort a family in the face of death.

L130. Date: November 1994. **Text:** Genesis 35:16-20, 27-29; II Samuel 12:22, 23. **Topic:** Death: Of believers. Family.

A prayer of Jesus is answered each time a Christian dies. He prayed, *“Father, I will that those whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory”* (John 17:24). That is exactly what happens when a saint steps through the doorway called death. He or she goes to be with Jesus and to behold His glory. Jesus wants us with Him, and the doorway of death is the way we go to His presence.

When a loved one dies, the heathen mourn as those who have no hope, because they have no hope. But the saints of God mourn for themselves, not for their believing dead. They suffer because of their loss, not because of any loss by the departed believer.

The Christian suffers no harm in his death. He enters into a far better condition. He suffers no harm to his person. He moves into the fullest kind of life. He goes to be with the Lord. The death of a Christian is not annihilation; it is a graduation to glory.

There are five truths taught in the Bible that will relieve you from the fear of death for yourself or your loved ones.

Death Comes Only to the Body

Some day you may receive the message, “Dr. Henderson died last night.” Do not believe it. At that moment I will be more fully alive than I have ever been in this world. My body will die, but I will not. I have eternal

life and am already passed beyond death into life through faith in Jesus (John 5:24).

Death is separation. Physical death is separation of the spirit from the body. But you and I are not bodies which have spirits; we are spirits who are presently living in physical bodies. Note the description of death given in Ecclesiastes 12:7, *“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”* The body is from the earth and returns to the earth. The spirit is the breath of God and returns to Him. A person (who is spirit) does not die at death. Only the physical body dies.

A process of deterioration and re-creation goes on continually in your body. Through the passing of years, or due to infirmity, the deterioration exceeds the re-creation and the body grows frail. At last, it deteriorates until the spirit leaves the worn-out body. We call that death. But the body is not the person. It is only the fitted-for-earth clothing that he has worn while living here. You dress in work clothes to cultivate your garden. When finished, you remove the work clothes, bathe your body, and put on your dress clothes to go to worship God. Are you harmed by putting off your work clothes and putting on your dress clothes? Not at all. In fact, you probably feel better after that change. Are you harmed when you put off your fitted-for-earth body and put on your fitted-for-heaven body? Not at all. In fact, you will be elated at the improvement.

The weakening and death of the physical body does not indicate that you have a problem in your relationship with God. *“Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day”* (II Corinthians 4:16). Death comes only to the body of the Christian, never to his immortal spirit.

Death Is a Doorway, Not a State or Condition

Death seems so fatal and so final. We look at the body our departed loved one has left behind and it seems we are looking at the person who once lived in that body. The body is so helpless and lifeless that it appears our loved one is bound there in death in the same helpless situation. Not so!

We pass through death; we are not held in bondage by it. Death is a doorway. You enter your home by stepping across a threshold. You are standing outside the house; you take one step and you are inside. In like manner we pass through the doorway to eternity which we call death. The psalmist wrote, *“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”* (Psalm 23:4). Notice that he writes of walking “through” that valley of the

shadow of death. He does not expect to be held in it, but to pass through it. And that passing through is instantaneous for the Christian.

We step through the doorway of death into the presence of Jesus.

Think about this: *“We are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord”* (II Corinthians 5:6-8). Think about that! What awaits the Christian on the other side of the doorway of death? Jesus awaits! No wonder Paul wrote that *“to depart, and to be with Christ. . . is far better”* (Philippians 1:23). It really is!

We go to a far greater condition. We move from mortality to immortality, from temporal life to eternal life, from the presence of loved ones here to the presence of loved ones there, from the partial revelation of God to the fullness of His face. Think about that! *“When by His grace I shall look on His face/That will be glory, be glory for me.”* Jesus said that anyone who believes on Him here on earth will never truly die at all (John 11:25, 26). How can that be? The life of Jesus is living in the believer (Galatians 2:20), and Jesus has already passed beyond death into life. The Christian can no more die in truth than Jesus can die.

Your loved ones are not bound in death. They are not lying in cold graves somewhere waiting for deliverance on the day of the Resurrection. Your believing dead are consciously alive and rejoicing in the very presence of God himself. Rejoice with them.

Death Is a Release, Not a Bondage

How does God evaluate the death of the righteous? John wrote, *“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them”* (Revelation 14:13). God considers the death of those who die in the Lord to be *“blessed.”* How can that be? Those who die in the Lord enter into rest. They are free from tears, death, sorrow, crying, pain, and all the problems which sin brought into the human experience (Revelation 21:4). Earth's trials are behind and forgotten, never to be remembered any more.

There is a reunion with Christian loved ones who have gone before. A common Old Testament description of death is that one was *“gathered to his fathers.”* It is not unusual for a person to call the names of departed loved ones as he approaches the doorway called death. It is as if he sees his loved ones, which might actually happen. One saint spoke these words as death

approached: “Earth is receding; heaven is approaching; Jesus is calling.” Do not fear to pass through death, because Jesus is with you and your loved ones are awaiting you.

The salvation of our immortal spirits sets us free from the penalty of sin. The salvation of our daily life sets us free from the power of sin. The salvation of our physical bodies sets us free from the presence of sin. He who has set us in such freedom will not permit us to be enslaved by death.

Death Holds No Danger to the Christian

Believe it! Death holds no danger to the Christian because Jesus has already gone through death and come forth to tell us that there is nothing to fear. He promises that death is not the end: *“Because I live, ye shall live also”* (John 14:19). Death did not destroy Him; neither will it destroy us. He announces, *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Revelation 1:18).

Death is a promotion, not destruction, for a Christian. We are willing to be absent from the body because that enables us to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). How could that be anything but a promotion? The presence of the Holy Spirit in your human spirit now is a foretaste of what the full revelation of God will be in that glad day. Death is a doorway to fullest life.

Death is a release, not a sting. In fact, the saints of God can exult, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:55, 57). The saint stands triumphant over all the threat that death seemed to hold.

Death has been conquered by Jesus. Hebrews 2:9 reports that He suffered death and then was crowned with glory and honor. That is victory! It further reports that Jesus, by the grace of God, experienced death for every person. He did not merely die; He died on our behalf, so we would not die. That is ultimate victory!

Jesus has the keys of death (Revelation 1:18). Keys indicate authority. Jesus has authority over death and hell. Not one of His own will be held there. All will pass through.

Death Leads to Fullest Life

Death leads to life immediately. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-8). Many Christians long for that experience because it is far better (Philippians 1:23). There is no delay.

There is no purgatory, where one must pay for sins. There is no soul sleeping, where one is unconscious until the Resurrection. When a believer dies, he experiences an immediate transfer from earth to heaven. Glory!

Death leads to life personally. This is not theory; it is real. Jesus asked that we might be with Him where He is, and so will we be (John 17:24). Job anticipated that, saying of his Redeemer, *“Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold”* (Job 19:27).

Death leads to life eternally. *“So shall we ever be with the Lord,”* Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 4:17. Death can never enter the home of the saints; so life will never end there.

Death! How shall they die who have already died and are living eternally in Jesus Christ? What others call death, we call sleep. The body lies down at the end of an exhausting workday to awake in the fresh energy of the eternal morning. The hopeless despair of others becomes the blessed assurance of the Christian.

Paul described death as an offering to God [*“ready to be offered”*], a loosing of the ship from its anchor [*“the time of my departure”*], the end of a struggle [*“fought a good fight”*], the conclusion of a race [*“finished my course”*], the completion of a stewardship [*“kept the faith”*] and a prelude to a reward [*“crown of righteousness”*] (I Timothy 4:6-8). What a way to die! *“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his”* (Numbers 23:10).

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you define death?
2. Why does death come only to the body?
3. In what sense is death a doorway?
4. How can death be a release, not a bondage?
5. How does I Corinthians 15:55-57 describe death?
6. What does Hebrews 2:9 teach about the fear of death?
7. What does it mean to say that Jesus has the keys of death and hell?
8. How do we know the dead go immediately into the presence of God?
9. How is the death of the sinner different from that of the saint?