

Josiah Herring Teaches Us Lessons in His Life and Death

Yesterday, just before Prayer Meeting, we received news that Josiah Herring, a marvelous little boy of four years, passed into the presence of the Lord. He comes from a great Christian family and the grace of God is sufficient and evident in their lives at this hour.

As we see little ones and godly people and especially little godly people suffer and pass, we struggle. We struggle with thoughts such as:

- (1) Why do the righteous suffer?
- (2) Would this world not be much better with them in it?
- (3) We have served the Lord. Is this our reward?
- (4) Why would this kind of pain not be limited to those who overtly hate God and despise His commandments?
- (5) If God allows this in our life because He knew whom He could trust, would we be better off being not so trustworthy?
- (6) The desire of our heart was to see and be with this loved one for the rest of our lives. Why did He not answer our prayer with our heart's desire?

I cannot pretend to have all the answers. I want to write a few lines discussing the hope I have in suffering.

1. God is good.

"Thou art good, and doest good..." (Psalm 119:68). In the margin of my Bible beside this verse I have written, "He cannot do otherwise." Our Lord is too kind to be evil and too wise to make a mistake! In *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, is asking questions about Aslan, "Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King I tell you. "

Abraham said, *"...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* (Genesis 18:25). Following Jesus means taking up our cross. It may not always be safe, but God will do right because He is good.

2. All sorrow is only temporary.

God's Word gives us this concrete promise: *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). One hundred years from now we who know Jesus will all be in Heaven. One of the most oft used phrases in the Bible is *"It came to pass."* It is used no less than 457 times! Thank God, our trials did not come to stay; they have term

limits. They will come to pass. I love the last words of Stonewall Jackson, "us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees." J. I. Robertson of Virginia Tech explored these words in his extensive biography of the Southern hero. He pointed out that young Thomas Jonathan Jackson's parents died when he and his sister were very young. Thomas Jonathan was being reared by one uncle and his sister was being reared by another relative. They did not get to see much of each other. Young Jackson and his sister were lonely in their respective homes. They longed to see each other more, the last and only living reminders of the sweet Christian home they had at one time together. The most precious memory of their childhood was when they would meet at the river's edge, launch a humble row boat into the water, cross it to the big shade tree on the other side and have a picnic. Robertson wondered if the lonely boy trapped in the soldier's body was not happily going over "the river" to join his loved ones on the other side where all tears will be wiped away. He was going away from the guns of Chancellorsville and broken hearted yearning for loved ones already passed. "... *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*" (Psalm 30:5). "*To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...*" (Isaiah 61:3).

3. God's removal of a righteous person from the earth is an act of mercy.

Isaiah 57: 1 reveals one of the most comforting verses of Scripture in the Bible, "*The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.*" My mother-in-law was reared in a Cinderella environment (before the ball). After her mother died, she and her two siblings were being reared by a step mother that was anything but kind. So, with no exaggeration, her sister and brother were all she had. Her little heart was devastated when her brother was sadly killed in a most tragic way. She told me the truth that sustained her was knowing that God brought her brother to heaven to deliver him from something worse that lay ahead in the future. She was voicing exactly what Isaiah 57:1 was saying.

There are some things worse than death. God knows the beginning from the ending. He knows what lies ahead and He also knows what's best. I'm thinking of another couple whose only son had just completed his Master's program from Georgia Tech and was about to start his future in his chosen vocation. He had no sooner graduated than he died suddenly and without warning. They told me this verse is the only answer that God gave them after their son's passing that provided them peace.

4. There is a special place in God's heart for the little ones.

Please notice these beautiful words: "*And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam*" (I Kings 14:13). In this passage, God reveals that He never does things in an arbitrary fashion. In God's love He takes the rarest bud and removes it so it might open it's flower in the Master's Mansion. The child had a glorious beauty that was to be revealed in its fullest glory in Heaven - a flower with a fragrance and a splendor too good for the earth.

Josiah's grandfather said to Josiah just before he lapsed into a coma, "I love you, Josiah." The boy replied, "I love you, too, Papa, but I love Jesus better." Today I was talking to Jason (the daddy) and he told me, "In his unconscious state he (Josiah) was singing Patch the Pirate's song just before crossing over: "love You, Lord, I love You, Lord, Because of Calvary; I love You, Lord, I love You, Lord, You're everything to me." And now our little rose is in the bouquet of the Rose of Sharon. One of the select few whose precious life transcends life as we know it.

5. There is peace in knowing some things defy explanation.

John 9: 1-3 says, “*And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*” mentality of the disciples was that if a man suffered like this, either he or his parents did wrong. This argument is not unlike the friends of Job. Our Lord was simply saying, this is for God’s purpose and glory beyond our explanation, that the works of God may be manifested!

God often does the unexpected. He has prepared for that which we feel un-prepared. When we cannot track Him, we shall trust Him.

- Pastor Pope -

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