

Why the Death of God's Saints Is Precious

What an honor for my wife and me to be with Randy, Amber and C.J. to say good-bye to Cathy Griffin last night. Cathy peacefully slipped into the presence of our Lord at 9:04 p.m. after a long bout with illness. We have known Cathy since high school days. My wife, Barbara, Cindy Briner and I attended college with her sister, Connie up in Indiana. Shortly before moving to Houston, Cathy had moved here to become a schoolteacher. What a pleasure to become Randy and Cathy's pastor about twenty-seven years ago after arriving in Houston to assume this pastorate. We have been blessed to see Amber and now Jenna grow up in our midst. Randy has served well as one of our deacons and Cathy has been involved in Christian education most of her adult life. Even recently, unable to negotiate a full schedule outside her home, she cherished being Jenna's home schoolteacher. Cathy is as fine a Christian as I have ever pastored! She has been a loving wife, mother and if you were blessed to call her friend, she was the best.

As we try to make sense of Cathy's passing at a relatively young age, a passage of Scripture comes to mind: "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*" (Psalm 116:15). Let's talk about this great truth from God's Word:

1. The death of a saint is valued in God's eyes.

The word for "precious" is the Hebrew word: יָקָר, yaqar, which means, "highly valued, brightness, clear, costly, excellent, precious as in stones or jewels, reputation." We often view death with foreboding and sometimes fear, but not God. Examine again this verse; death for a child of God is precious in His sight! He looks at it as a great segue, leading the individual into a glorious home for eternity. Seeing life and even death from God's viewpoint changes everything.

Joseph's brothers really thought he was going to harm them when their father, Jacob died. The Bible says, "*And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him*" (Genesis 50:15). They wrongly perceived that Joseph was only being kind to them for Jacob's sake. Now that Dad was dead, they foolishly thought they were going to reap punishment from the hand of the brother (Joseph) they had wronged. Joseph wisely replied: "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*" (Genesis 50:20). In other words, Joseph said, "You thought you had done me wrong, well God saved you and much of the world through my misfortunes." You thought it was your wicked plan, but it was God's loving and good plan that is operating here. Life becomes so much better when we see God's plan. Our set-backs should be viewed as part of God's plans working all things together for His good (Romans 8:28).

2. The death of a saint becomes a family reunion.

Family reunions are precious times when families come from all over to a central meeting place, where we reminisce, eat and play games with loved ones we have missed and are now together. The time of death for a Christian is a family reunion for God and His family members. "*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*" (II Corinthians 5:8).

As Cathy was passing from this world into the next, I thought about those here who will miss her, but then I also thought of those who had gone to Heaven before her, that she missed. I thought about her godly mother, her early miscarriages and her little boy, Richard Eugene who was still-born.

I remember well the angst in this dear mother's heart as she stood by the small casket to say good-bye. Now she is saying hello to Ricky and rejoicing with him even as I write these words.

Above all, Cathy is with the Master whom she has loved with all her heart and soul! "*And they shall see his face...*" (Revelation 22:4). She has worshipped her Lord, prayed to Him and witnessed for Him. And now she sees Him! Her faith is caught up in victory. Jesus reassures us, "...*where I am, there ye may be also*" (John 14:3).

3. The death of a saint means the beginning of the end of all sorrow!

The Bible tells us: "*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). Prophetically the Bible promises: "*The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away*" (Psalm 90:10). God is saying that our natural life goes for about seventy years. If life is extended beyond that length of time it is referred to as labor and sorrow. Then God says, it is cut off and we fly away. What a joyous way of defining death: "*we fly away!*" This phraseology is reminiscent of Peter Pan who flew from his troubles with the greatest of ease. It speaks to me of a bird who flies away from his captors. It sounds like somebody who moved away to a better location for his or her job and just flew away on a jet. This is not escapism, this is reality. One day all of the things that broke our hearts and hurt us will be left behind in our "jet stream" as we fly away to heaven.

God Himself is blessed knowing we shall hurt no more. Heaven is the ultimate healing place! "*And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*" (Revelation 22:1,2). Prayer to God for healing has been heard and answered; Cathy is healed today!

- Pastor Pope -

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