



"It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret."
—Jackie Joyner-Kersey

02-Jun-23

The Death of His Saints

In Psalm 116, the psalmist makes a remarkable statement. Near the end of this song of thanksgiving for God's deliverance from an untimely death, he says, "*Precious* in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" ([Psalm 116:15](#); emphasis ours throughout).

What does he mean by this? The word translated *precious* can mean "rare," as in "the word of the LORD was *precious* in those days" ([I Samuel 3:1](#), King James Version). It frequently refers to *precious* stones—gems worth a great deal because of their scarcity and thus elicit attention and interest from those who possess them (or wish to). The word can refer to the excellence of God's lovingkindness, which is so significant that the children of men put their trust in Him ([Psalm 36:7](#)). [Proverbs 12:27](#) says that the substance—the wealth—of a diligent man is precious, meaning it is worth all the more to him because of the conscientious effort he has put into it.

In short, the psalmist proclaims that a saint's death is precious to [God](#) because the saints are the objects of His attention, they are rare ([Matthew 22:14](#)), and He is putting so much effort into them at this time—*far* more than those with whom He is not yet working. He is investing Himself in His saints, so the death of each one brings with it the combined weight of all

God's personal efforts and the individual's choices in either responding to or rejecting Him. At the moment of death, the saint's course is finished, and God can clearly see all that has become of His investment of time, attention, [love](#), grace, instruction, and every other gift He has given (see [Matthew 25: 14-30](#)).

Because of God's sovereignty and omnipotence—and because the lives and deaths of those with whom He is working are so precious to Him—we can have every confidence that the death of a true Christian will not occur until God allows it. The apostle Paul was "confident of this very thing, that *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it* until the day of [Jesus Christ](#)" ([Philippians 1:6](#)). If God has begun such a work in us, we will not die until He judges that His work is complete. This conclusion does not imply that once we are called, we can just coast along and expect God to do everything for us. Rather, we are partners with Him. But because of what He is, He will always carry through with what He has covenanted. We are His workmanship ([Ephesians 2:10](#)), and only He can determine when the work is finished.

Along these same lines, at the end of Paul's life, he was likewise confident. His death did not occur until his race was finished—or, perhaps we might say, until God was finished with him:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the [faith](#). Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. ([II Timothy 4:6-8](#))

Notice that Paul could make these summary remarks only about himself. He was in no position to judge when somebody else's race was complete or whether God was finished using another man to accomplish His will. Paul did not deign to assume he knew when God's workmanship was complete in another person. Instead, he learned the lesson of Jesus Christ's mild rebuke when He predicted the manner of Peter's death, and the apostle became concerned about the end of another servant of God:

Peter, seeing [John], said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, *what is that to you?* You follow Me." ([John 21:21-22](#))

Just as we dare not judge our Master in His handling of another of His servants during life ([Romans 14:4](#)), so matters relating to the death of one of His servants are in His hands alone—they are *precious* to *Him*.

Jesus' final instruction in the book of John points us in the right direction. He says simply, "You follow Me." He does not intend for our time to be stolen away in contemplating the timing or manner of another saint's death—let alone presumptuously praying for such a thing. Instead, His positive instruction is to *follow Him*—imitate *His* example, listen to *His* instruction, be loyal to all that *He* is, and grow to the measure of the stature of *His* fullness and the completeness found in *Him*.

We do not know the day of our death or anyone else's. But by focusing on our personal growth in our relationship with Him rather than obsessing about death, we can, when our race is finished, have the same confidence Paul had—that he had fought the good fight and kept the faith, and a crown of righteousness awaited him in the resurrection.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Death: The End of the Beginning](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

It is a perfectly natural human reaction to fear death. We don't have God's mind on this subject as Christ had and the Apostle Paul had to grow into. Looking at death as "gain," Jesus and Paul calmly looked upon death as a natural part of life, as a transition to a better life, after this life, a time death would be "put to death" (Hosea 13:14, I Corinthians 15:54-55) The Great White Throne Judgment depicts a time when billions, resurrected with new bodies of God's manufacture, totally without spot of disease, full of vigor,

without the hindrance of Satan the Devil, will be infused with hope and an opportunity to yield to God's purpose for their lives. In the meantime, God's called out ones must also cultivate a different, more hopeful perspective on the subject of death and resurrection.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Eight\): Death](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

It is amazing to consider that, despite the fact that every human being will face death, so very few take the time to contemplate it, much less prepare for it. In covering the comparisons in Ecclesiastes 7:1-4, John Ritenbaugh surveys the Bible's attitude toward death, particularly its insistence that we should allow the reality of death to change our approach to life.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
