

On Death and Dying: Precious in God's Sight – *Psalm 116:15*

Introduction – Review: Death is not natural to the original creation order. It is due to sin and not to some natural law. It is a result of a holy God rendering a righteous punishment upon a race for their disobedience to His perfect law. And that punishment was fully satisfied by the death of another Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God – “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 6:23, also Rom 5:19, Rom 8:1, 1 Cor 15:21-22). Good news. But with regard to the physical death of believers, this leaves us with some questions.

Out Text - “*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.*” First, let us reflect on how broad and promising this text is. To whom are these promises? “*He may be the greatest in the church, he may be the least: he may be the boldest confessor, he may be the most timid trembler; but if a saint, his death is precious in God's sight*” – Spurgeon. And when is this death precious? Regardless of whether the saint is young or old, the Master Gardner picks both those in full bloom as well as the newly forming bud to place at His table, and they are all precious to Him. And whether the death occurs in a time of abundance or poverty, in isolation or with loved ones gathered, in an instant without warning or over a long-endured affliction, the death of His saint is precious, each one, to God. Finally though, note this carefully: the text does not simply say that it is precious that the saint is brought into the presence of the Lord, but that the saint's death itself is precious. Why?

Why Do Christians (Saints) Still Die? – If the wages of our sin have been completely atoned for, why is it still necessary to die? Why is there not simply life in Jesus? Why do even the best of God's people suffer and die? Why are the sufferings and deaths of some saints far greater than those who are infamously wicked? The answer, according to Psalm 116:15, is because, without rejecting the theology of death (an enemy, an unnatural and relentless supplier of grief and misery), God can look at the death of a saint (and only the death of a saint) and say, “*precious.*”

The Purposes of Suffering and Death (Rom 5:3-5) – All suffering and death have been transformed by Jesus. No longer are these events in our lives punishment for sin. But God has precious purposes that He works in our lives as we go through afflictions and even the event of a loved one's, and even our own, death.

Death is the Final Work of our Personal Sanctification (Heb 12:7-11) – God uses hardship and suffering to complete our sanctification. The wrath of God has been exhausted in Christ's finished work. But God disciplines those He loves in order to bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Death is Part of our Conformity to Christ (Matt 16:24) - God disciplines us because He loves us and because holiness is more important to Him than life itself. Suffering is not the worst thing in the world; neither is death. Sin is the worst thing in the world. This is why saints would rather die than sin (i.e. Moses, Heb 11:25, and OT saints, Heb 11:35b-38, Paul returning to Lystra after being stoned, the apostles refusing to cease preaching Christ, Acts 5:29-33). Death is horrific. Sin is worse.

Death Fits Us for our Final Glory (2 Cor 4:16-5:5) – Our sufferings produce an eternal weight of glory and when this “tent” is destroyed, we shall receive a dwelling which can carry the weight of that glory.

Death Preaches the Truth (John 12:25) – The death of other saints reminds us to be weaned from an unbiblical grasping to this part of life. God will be victorious through this Gospel Age, but He will use suffering and our deaths as part of how He will accomplish this. “*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church*” – Tertullian. Also, often when ministering to the afflicted and dying, our perspective on our own life changes. The ministry of a godly person who is dying is often quite effective, prompting us to follow Christ and love one another more.

Death Grants us a Participation in the Death of Christ for the Sake of the Church – This is not a denial of the uniqueness of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus which is complete and finished. Yet Paul says he participated in “*the fellowship of Christ's sufferings*” (Phil 3:10), and that he filled up “*what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body*” (Col 1:24). John taught that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren as Christ laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16). Paul said that whether he was comforted or suffered affliction, in either case it was “*for your consolation and salvation*” (2 Cor 1:5-7) and he said that we are Christ's heirs, “*provided we suffer with Him...*” (Rom 8:17), “*...that we also might be glorified together.*”

Precious in the Sight of the LORD is the Death of His Saints – Just as He does with every evil action that has ever occurred upon the face of this fallen world, God is able to take death, even your death, and use it for your eternal good (Rom 8:28). And so it is that, not only is the passing into His eternal presence a precious thing to God; even your death, along with every “little death” you ever experience in this life, because of all His purposes in it, is precious in His sight. Are you in Christ? Then entrust your life *and* your death to Him Who has ordained your every day, including the day you will die.