

SUGGESTED ORDER OF FUNERAL SERVICE
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Introduction BY THE Pastor

Participants SEATED

Scripture Reading

Call to worship

Solo Number

Invocation

"Our Loving Eternal Heavenly Father, as we meet this morning to remember our dear friend and loved one, (Name), we ask you to be to us the God of all comfort, and the God of all grace. Give us perspective as we face the reality of death, to grow in our perspective of the truths of life. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN."

Congregation Hymn

Obituary/Eulogy

Solo

Message

PRAYER FOR THE FAMILY

Benediction

"Our Father in Heaven, in as much as you, in your sovereign love, have called the soul of our loved one and friend, (Name), to be with you, we express our thanks, for the privilege of knowing him. We thank you for the way he impacted our lives, and for your grace through difficult times. We are grateful for your love; You, who sent us the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. You who have prepared a place for all who trust you, and who alone are worthy of our faith, to you we turn for continued strength, continued comfort, continued perspective, continued purpose.

SONG

Final words

# OVERVIEW

1. The funeral as a service
2. The funeral as a testimony and/or witness
3. The biblical teaching concerning death (Involves your application of that toward the believer, non-believer, infant, youth, suicide, accident victim, murder victim, etc.)

## When Death Comes:

### **Be Prompt**

1. Go wherever necessary to be with the family
2. Express your sympathy to the family
3. Encourage the family to talk about it. ("Can you tell me what happened?")

### **Be Helpful**

1. Without going into great detail, help them to think through the next steps: funeral home, permission for autopsy, contacting relatives, etc.
2. Offer and be willing to provide help. Offer to go with them to meet with the mortician.

### **Be Brief**

1. Read scripture with them and pray.
2. Stay with them until things are under control.

### **The Day Following**

1. Assist where possible in preliminaries with the family and the mortician.
2. Use the funeral planning sheet.
3. Help them think through the type, cost and location of the service.
4. If appropriate, help them plan the time, participants (ushers, musicians, pallbearers)
5. Pray with the family (and mortician).

# The Viewing

1. Find out when the body can be viewed for the first time and be there one-half hour before so you can be with the family.
2. Take your wife if at all possible.
3. The evening prior to the funeral is a good opportunity to minister, often at an additional or final viewing.

## The Funeral or Memorial Service

1. Arrive at the church or mortuary well in advance of the service. 15-20 minutes early in order to:
  - a. Prepare your own soul
  - b. Complete details (organist, mortician, etc.)
2. Meet family as they are seated in the family room.
3. Be ready on time! Either walk in with the family or from a side door as the funeral begins.
4. Bring appropriate remarks.

### Perhaps start with a:

- ✦ Scripture reading
- ✦ Solo or congregational hymn
- ✦ Obituary/Eulogy
- ✦ Prayer
- ✦ Song
- ✦ Bible Message
- ✦ Benediction

5. At the close of the service, be available at the casket.

## Committal Service at the Graveside

1. At the cemetery, the pastor again slowly leads the procession from the hearse to the burial site.
2. Stand at the head of the casket (ask the funeral director where the head faces before arrival at the cemetery.)
3. Brief remarks,
4. Committal prayer
5. Go to the family and express your concern and availability.
6. The funeral director will then try to get the family to return to their cars.

## **Social Time with Family and Friends**

1. Depending upon the time of the service, the distance the family travels, and other factors, this might include time before, after, or both before and after the funeral service.
2. Church women may or may not be involved.

## **Post Funeral Contact**

1. Do not forget the bereaved after the funeral. Call on them at least once a week for six weeks.
2. Take a devotional pamphlet on death to the grieving.

## **Toward Better Eulogies**

### **Questions to Ask the Family**

1. Explain that you are trying to gain a better feel for what that person was like, so you can be more personal.
2. What one adjective would you use to describe him?
3. Did he have any particular loves or hobbies?
4. Did he enjoy any particular songs? poems? or Scriptures?
5. If you could name one value or lesson he most wanted to teach the next generation, what would it be?
6. What one achievement or accomplishment would make his eyes light up when you mentioned it?
7. What were some of his favorite phrases or sayings?
8. Did he ever put anything up on the wall - a picture or motto that expresses who he was?
9. Did he like his first name? Did he have any nicknames?
10. Was there a cause or a movement that he felt deeply about and supported with his time and resources?
11. If he could have me say one thing during the funeral, what do you think it would be?
12. Why do you think this world is a little different because of him?

# QUESTIONS CONCERNING DEATH AND SORROW

## 1. What happens to a person who dies?

- Every person who lives and dies will experience life after death--John 5:28-29a. (Righteous and wicked)
- After death comes a judgment--Heb. 9:27
- The death of a believer in Christ involves being ushered into the presence of Christ--2 Cor. 5:8
- The mortal is changed to immortality --1 Cor 15:54
- The death of one who has not trusted Christ is not a pleasant subject

## 2. How does God help those who sorrow?

### Psalm 119:75-77

- with the assurance of His justice
- with assurance of His character
- with His loving kindness and comfort

### 2 Corinthians 1:5 (through Christ, with His Word, He helps us:

- To understand that Jesus wept
- To understand that this life is temporary
- To see how others experienced and gained victory

## 3. How we can prepare for our own eventual deaths?

- Understand our own frailty: (Ps. 39:4-5)
- Understand what we will all face: If Heb. tells us we will all face the judgment after death, it would be wise to know the basis of his judgment:

If our own righteousness, we'd all fall short.

- Titus 3:5 (based on love not works)
- John 3:16-18
- John 1:12

I know if (Name) were here now, and especially after the perspective she has gained since her death, she would urge you to take this opportunity to experience the grace of God by placing your eternal destiny into the hands of a gracious and compassionate God who has provided for our salvation by sending His son to bear our punishment. Won't you place your faith in Him right now?

# GRAVESIDE SERVICE 1

**Background:** The deceased **was a believer who attended church. She suffered over a prolonged period with cancer and eventually died. And was in her mid-forties, married to an unbeliever, and had two teenage children.**

## **Opening Remarks**

Thank you for coming to this committal service for \_\_\_\_\_. The passing of our loved ones and friends is always a great loss and a sad occasion. But for those who know the Lord, as does \_\_\_\_\_, it is a joyous occasion for them because they are now in His glorious presence. Our loss, therefore, which is their gain, can also be for us a cause of rejoicing and thankfulness in the midst of our sorrow because God has conquered death through His Son, Jesus Christ, and because of what death means to those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ.

As we face this loss and the fact of death, I would hope that we would recognize that if we are to find encouragement and comfort amidst the losses and tragedies of life, we must turn to the Bible as God's precious Word to us. This Book, God has graciously authenticated with tremendous evidence as not merely the Word of men, but as it truly is, God's Word to man, God-breathed and accurate, and thus our means of hope. With this in mind, let me read from a couple of beautiful passages of Scripture written for just such an occasion as this.

Scripture Reading:

*In **John 11:25** "Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'" Then He asked, "Do you believe this?"*

It is the Christian's belief in Christ as the resurrection and the life and its validation or proof by Christ's own resurrection from the grave that is the basis of our encouragement and so comforts our hearts as we face the loss of our loved ones and friends.

***Romans 8:31-39**, "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the*

*present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

## **Committal**

In the light of these promises God has given us in His Word and in as much as it has pleased the Lord in His sovereign wisdom and purpose to take from our midst one whom we have loved, we now commit her body to its final resting place to await the fulfilment of another promise of Scripture.

In **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**, writing to the Thessalonians church, the Apostle Paul wrote:

*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words*

These words by the Apostle were written for our encouragement in times like these. Furthermore, they are particularly significant because, when Paul penned these words, there was an inscription in the city of Thessalonica which typically illustrates the absence of hope in the world or in those who are without Jesus Christ.

The inscription read: *"After death no reviving; after the grave, no meeting again."*

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the glorious hope and for the great consolation concerning those who sleep in Jesus as believers in Christ. that our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared a place for those who have placed their faith in Him, and that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now for the family, for the loved ones and friends we ask that:

- *there might be the recognition that You work all things together for good for those who love you; and that precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints because death is the calling of a believer home and into God's presence;*
- *that there might be a casting of our care upon you to find comfort in the knowledge of what death means to the our dear friend who is now with you; and*
- *That you would comfort and strengthen in the days ahead. Help the family and friends to rest and draw strength from you.*

These things we ask in the name of the King of kings and Lord of lords, even in Christ our Savior

## GRAVESIDE SERVICE 2

**Background:** This older gentleman was one of the committed workers.  
**He died of cancer after an 18-month illness.**

He left behind his wife and three grown children.

### **Personal Comments**

Thank you for coming this afternoon. This is a sad occasion for all of us and our hearts are full of mixed emotions. Our loss is great. We have lost a father, a husband, and a very good friend.

We are going to miss him. But we must also remember that our brother has gone home to be with the Lord. His physical death represents a glorious event in that he is even now in glory, in the presence of His Savior.

As we face this loss and the fact of death, we need to recognize that if we are to find endurance, encouragement and comfort amidst the pressures, losses, and tragedies of life, we must turn to the Bible, the Word of God.

This Book, God has graciously authenticated with tremendous evidence as not merely the Word of men, but as God's Word to man, God-breathed and accurate, and thus our means of hope.

Let's remember that the Bible, the Word of God, is the revelation of a sovereign God and the planner of the universe. It is He who cares for us, who are in control of all the affairs of our lives, and who has not left us to ourselves but has reached out to us in Christ and in the Bible.

As the word of such a God, the Bible alone can give us an adequate understanding, meaning, and hope in the face of the realities of life with its complexities, trials, and losses as with sickness and death.

### **Scriptures**

In **John 11:25** Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* Then He asked, *"Do you believe this?"*

It is the Christian's belief in Christ as the Resurrection and the Life and its strong validation by Christ's own death and resurrection from the grave that so encourages our hearts as we face the loss of our loved ones and face death ourselves.



### **Romans 8:31-39**

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).*

Writing of the believer's ultimate source of encouragement through the Bible, the Apostle Paul wrote,

### **Romans 15:4-5**

*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus."*

### **Committal**

In the light of these promises of God in His Word and because it has pleased the Lord in His divine wisdom and purpose to take from our midst one whom we have loved, we commit the body of \_\_\_\_\_ to its final resting place to await the fulfilment of another marvellous and comforting promise of the Bible, one that was written to the Thessalonians Christians. And, this passage is tremendously significant in view of any pagan inscription that existed in the city of Thessalonica that demonstrates man's lack of hope without Christ.

The inscription read: "*After death no reviving; After the grave, no meeting again.*"

But based on the fact of the resurrection of Christ and His promises to the church, Paul wrote these words:

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for revealing to us what lies beyond death, for giving to us the Holy Scriptures, and for authenticating them through many wonderful evidences and making them sure through the incontrovertible evidence of Christ's resurrection. Thank you, therefore,

- for the glorious hope and for the great consolation concerning those who sleep in Jesus as believers in Christ;
- that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ;
- that our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared a place for those who have placed their faith in Him;
- And that He is personally coming back to raise us from the grave and receive us all to Himself to dwell together in the glories of eternity.

And now for the family, for the loved ones and friends we ask that:

- There might be the recognition that while death is our enemy, it has been conquered by the Lord, and that he works all things together for good for those who love Him.
- May we also recognize and rest in the promise of Scripture that precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints and that death for the believer is a going home, a relief from the pain and sorrows of this life.
- May there also be a casting of our care upon you with the ability that is needed to focus on what death means to our dear friend who is now with you.
- We ask that you would comfort and strengthen in the days ahead. Help the family and friends to rest and draw strength and comfort from you.

These things we ask in the name of the King of kings and Lord of lords, even Jesus Christ our Savior who is coming again.

## GRAVESIDE SERVICE 3

### **2 Kings 6:15-17**

**Background:** The king of Syria intended to put Elisha, the prophet of God to death. He surrounded the place where Elisha and his servant were staying. The servant was stricken with fear. Elisha, however, responded,

*"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Ki. 6:15-17).*

### **2 Kings 2:9-12**

**Background:** Elijah, the prophet of God was about to depart, and Elisha, his servant who was to take his place, knew it, and so he would not leave him. Finally Elijah gave Elisha one last request, to which he responded,

*"Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. And Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more (2 Ki. 2:9b-12a).*

These two passages remind us of a very important truth.

There are things going on around us, which are normally not visible to us. In the case of the horsemen and chariots of fire which Elisha's servant was enabled to see, in answer to the prophet's prayer, these were angelic hosts, assigned to protect God's prophet. The servant's fear was based upon his lack of awareness of all that was taking place around him. We are thus all reminded that God's angels are all about us, and that nothing can harm us apart from the permission and will of God.

The chariot and horses of fire which took Elijah into heaven remind us of another fact. While it is not normally visible to us, I believe that the angels are also employed in "escorting" the spirits of those who have died "in the Lord" into God's presence.

We have come here to lay (Name)body to the ground, but his entrance into heaven took place on Sunday, in a much more glorious way than our eyes can behold. The apostle Paul reminds us in the New Testament that the depositing of the physical body in the ground is necessary, since mortal bodies must be exchanged for those which are immortal. He also tells us that placing this body in the soil is like the planting of a seed in the soil. Thus, we do so looking forward to the time of the resurrection and transformation of this body.

READ 1 Cor. 15:35-58.

Closing Prayer

## GRAVESIDE SERVICE 4

### INTRODUCTION:

As we come to the time when we must commit the body of (Name) to the ground, we should do so with the assurance of these words of Scripture. They are words of assurance for every person who dies in Christ, as a believer in His work on the cross of Calvary which has accomplished the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words

As Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, our fleshly bodies cannot enter into the eternal presence of God. We will gladly set aside our earthly "tent" so that we may possess the new heavenly "building" which God has prepared for us, and which will never be subject to corruption. It is necessary for us to set aside this earthly body, so that we may put on our heavenly, glorified body. As we place this body into the ground, we do so awaiting its resurrection and transformation. What a glorious hope!

As we commit the body of \_\_\_\_\_ to the ground, there is yet another text which I would commend to you, to think about in a way that you may never have considered before. Listen to these words of our Lord:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

I would like to suggest to you who believe in the Lord Jesus, and who loved \_\_\_\_\_, that we are now "laying up treasure in heaven" as we commit her physical body to the ground.

It is in her heavenly body that she will live forever, and in a way that will make her no longer vulnerable to earthly corruption. And as we "lay her up in heaven" we find that in so doing our hearts become that much more fixed on heaven as well.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a treasure, which our hearts look forward to enjoying for all eternity, in the presence of God

## GRAVESIDE SERVICE 5

INTRODUCTION: There are certain texts which are traditionally read at the graveside, but I would like to read a text that is not often used as the body is committed to the ground.

It is recorded in the **16th chapter of the Gospel of Luke:**

19 "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. 20 "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame'" (Luke 16:19-24).

As you know, the story goes on, and the rich man receives no comfort or privileges, but only eternal torment. The point which I wish to make from this text has to do with the dramatic contrast which our Lord makes in this story between appearances and reality.

To some, the rich man appeared to be right with God, and assured of a place in heaven. His funeral must have been extravagant, in contrast with that of Lazarus. And yet while this man's body went into the ground, his eternal soul went into torment.

The poor man, Lazarus, did not look like a true saint.

- His clothing was ragged.
- He ate scraps from the rich man's garbage.
- The dogs licked his sores. His death and burial were surely ugly.
- In fact, he may not have had a funeral at all.
- His body may have been cast onto the garbage heap. But in spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we are told something which no one saw, but which we are to believe as true.

When Lazarus died, "he was carried away to Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22a).

\_\_\_\_\_ (Name) death was probably more like that of Lazarus. It was not a pretty sight. But what we should find comfort in as we place her body in the ground is that her soul has already been escorted into the presence of God by the angels.

This body, which we commit to the ground, is going to be raised up, transformed, and joined once again to her spirit.

We who are Christian should look at the burial of this earthly body as Paul instructs us in 1 Corinthians chapter 15--as the planting of a seed. Our body will be raised, but it will not be a body like the one we leave here today. We should gladly set this body aside, looking forward to that day when our bodies will be transformed, like the body of our Lord. What a comfort! What hope!

May this comfort and hope be yours as you trust in Jesus Christ. Amen

## GRAVESIDE SERVICE 6

### **(2 Kings 2:1-14).**

1 And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 Then the sons of the prophets who [were at] Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; be still." 4 And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 And the sons of the prophets who [were] at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite[them] at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. 8 And Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. 9 Now it came about when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. [Nevertheless,] if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be [so.]" 11 Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, [there appeared] a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. 12 And Elisha saw [it] and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. 14 And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over.

### **(2 Kings 6:8-23).**

8 Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp." 9 And the man of God sent [word] to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." 10 And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice. 11 Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" 12 And one of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." 13 So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan." 14 And he sent horses and chariots and

a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. 15 Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! what shall we do?" 16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. 19 Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria. 20 And it came about when they had come into Samaria, that Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these [men,] that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. 21 Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" 22 And he answered, "You shall not kill [them.] would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel

When we think of (Name), we will unfortunately tend to think of him/her as he/she was in the last months and days of his/her life. And if we do so, we fail to grasp the full reality of the glory of his/her exodus, and of ours, if we trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

These two stories, recorded in the Book of 2 Kings, challenge us to look on \_\_\_\_\_ passing of the believer from here to eternity as the Bible describes it.

Elijah's time of departure had come, and Elisha was appointed to replace him. Elisha determined that he would not leave Elijah until the Lord took him away. Elisha alone watched as the horses and chariot of fire transported him into heaven. Some time later, Elisha was surrounded by horses and chariots, sent by the king of Aram, to capture and perhaps to kill Elisha, because this prophet was making his plans known to the king of Israel.

It looked as though his situation was hopeless. His servant certainly thought so. But Elisha knew that the spiritual life has to do with the unseen as well as the seen. He prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened, and that he would be able to see things as they really were.

And when his eyes were opened, he saw the horses and chariots of fire surrounding them. Nothing could harm them when God's angelic army was assembled for their defence.

The very angels who are assembled about us for our protection in this world seem to be those angels which transport us into heaven when it is time for us to depart from this life. God promised never to leave us nor forsake us. His angels guard us now, so that we are not taken from life one second sooner than God has purposed. And when that time of departure does come, His angels are there to escort us into heaven.

You may think that such treatment is only for those special, spiritual people like Elijah and Elisha. I do not think so. I simply remind you of our Lord's own words, in which he tells of the angelic escort of a poor beggar named Lazarus:

**(Luke 16:19-23)**

*19 "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. 20 "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom"*

I believe that when our brother/ sister's spirit departed from his/her body, he/she was escorted into the presence of the Lord in the same way. While appearances would indicate otherwise, her departure was a glorious one.

As we leave his/her body in this grave, to be resurrected and transformed at the return of our Lord, let us rejoice in the fact that his/her suffering is over, and his/her departure was triumphant.

May we look forward to our day of triumph as well, as those who trust in Him who not only gave His life for us, but who was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father.



## GRAVESIDE MESSAGE 7

**This was the funeral of a very lovely 90-year-old woman, who was a believer.** Point out that our comfort (and hers) in the face of death was not based upon her age and physical condition, but rather in Christ.

### **The Difference between Assumption and Assurance**

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, NET Bible)

13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. 15 For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord always. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words This well-known text in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is one that gives the Christian great encouragement when dealing with the death of a Christian. Paul makes it very clear that those who have died as Christians will be raised from the dead, to be united with Christ and with other saints. It is a verse that gives us great comfort as we commit our friend's body to this grave.

But in this passage Paul also reminds us that it is not to be misunderstood or misrepresented as a comfort to everyone.

Paul distinguishes between those who grieve in hope and those who grieve without hope.

As we reflect on the life and death of our friend, we must also reflect on our own death. The most dangerous thing a person can do is to assume that he or she is going to heaven when their assumption is without proper basis.

I want to draw your attention to a story Jesus told which warns us about assuming that we are going to heaven.

**It is found in Luke chapter 16:**

19 "There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 But at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus whose body was covered with sores, 21 who longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table. In addition, the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "Now the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And in hell, as he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. 24 So he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in this fire.' 25 But Abraham

said, 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus likewise bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. 26 Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' 27 So the rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father-send Lazarus to my father's house 28 (for I have five brothers) to warn them so that they don't come into this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to them.' 30 Then the rich man said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 He replied to him, 'If they do not respond to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead'" (Luke 16:19-31, NET Bible).

There is much that could be said about this parable, but I must only briefly call attention to the fate of the "rich man."

While Lazarus the "poor man" went to heaven, the rich man went to hell. The Jews of Jesus' day made a number of false assumptions.

They believed that those who were righteous were blessed, while those who were sinners suffered (compare John 9:1-3). They thought that piety could be measured in terms of one's bank account. Because of this, they assumed that this "rich man" would have 50 yard line tickets in the kingdom of God. And because Lazarus was poor, and he suffered in life, they assumed that he would be sent to hell.

And yet just the opposite happened. The rich man made a very wrong assumption. He (and many others) assumed he was going to heaven because he was rich.

If the rich man had made certain assumptions, the Bible speaks of others who had great assurance of salvation.

Let me read just three texts which reveal this kind of assurance.

*25 As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that as the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God, 27 whom I will see for myself, and whom my own eyes will behold, and not another. My heart grows faint within me (Job 19:25-27, NET Bible).*

*4 Even when I must walk through a dark ravine,  
I fear no danger, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff keep me calm.*

*5 You prepare a feast before me in plain sight of my enemies.  
You refresh my head with oil; my cup is full of wine.*

*6 Surely your goodness and faithfulness will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the Lord's palace for the rest of my life  
(Psalms 23:4-6, NET Bible).*

*(Philippians 1:21, NET Bible) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "ASSUMPTION" AND "ASSURANCE"?

**Assumptions** are made when men trust in themselves (their wealth, their good deeds) for salvation;

**Assurance** of eternal life is always based upon the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

**Assumption** trusts in "our" righteousness;  
**assurance** rests in His righteousness.

As we have come face to face with death today, I urge you to reflect on your eternal destiny.

Is it an assumption, which will surely prove false, or is it an assurance which rests on the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

May you experience the same calm assurance that our friend had as she faced death.

# COMMITTALS (AT THE GRAVE SITE)

## ✠ COMMITTALS FOR BELIEVERS

### → *Number 1*

*For as much as it has pleased Almighty God to take out of this world the soul of \_\_\_\_\_, we therefore commit his/her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for that blessed hope when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord, wherefore comfort ye one another with these words.*

### → *Number 2*

*For as much as it has pleased our Heavenly Father in His wise providence to take unto Himself our beloved \_\_\_\_\_, we therefore commit his or her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God in our Savior Jesus Christ who shall change the body of our humiliation and fashion it anew in the likeness of His own body of glory according to the working of His mighty power wherewith He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.*

### → *Number 3*

*In the light of these promises God has given us in His Word and in as much as it has pleased the Lord in His sovereign wisdom and purpose to take from our midst one whom we have loved, we now commit her body to its final resting place to await the fulfillment of another promise of Scripture.*

*In 1 Thess. 4:13-18, writing to the Thessalonians church, the Apostle Paul wrote:*

*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thes. 4:13-18).*

These words by the Apostle were written for our encouragement in times like these. Furthermore, they are particularly significant because, when Paul penned these words, there was an inscription in the city of Thessalonica which typically illustrates the absence of hope in the world or in those who are without Jesus Christ. The inscription read: "**After death no reviving; after the grave, no meeting again.**"

## COMMITTAL FOR A CHILD

### → *Number 1*

*In infinite wisdom and love our Heavenly Father has received unto Himself the innocent spirit of this little child. We therefore tenderly commit the body to its resting place in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

### → *Number 2*

*In that it has pleased our heavenly Father, who loaned these little ones to us for this short time, to take them back to Himself, we commit their bodies to the ground.*

*Looking for that blessed hope; when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.*

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

# SELECTED FUNERAL SERVICE MESSAGES

## ***I. God—Our Shepherd (John 10)***

### **Introduction**

Sorrow and grief are not easy things to face. We would avoid them if we could. We know that even Jesus wept at times.

Sorrow and grief do force us to examine life from a different perspective. We need to be attentive to what God might want to teach us through difficult times--things that He may not be able to teach us at other times. We need to be sensitive to what God would have us learn through this experience.

(Name) daughter, \_\_\_\_\_, told me that her grandmother (deceased's mother) encouraged her, maybe made her, memorize the 23rd Psalm as a child. I have a sneaking suspicion that (Name) had the same expectation placed upon him as a child.

I would like to look at how God reveals Himself to us as a shepherd, to see if we can gain some understanding of what God may want us to learn about Him.

### **God Reveals Himself to Us as a Shepherd**

John 10:11--"I am the good shepherd.... The good shepherd give His life for the sheep"

John 10:14--"and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

1. We can have an intimate relationship with our Shepherd. (10:14)
2. It is our Shepherd who makes life abundant (10:10)
3. The Shepherd gave his life for us (15, 17-18)

Heb. 13:20--"Jesus, the GREAT shepherd of the sheep . . . " Our shepherd rose from the dead, demonstrating to us that there is a resurrection from the dead, life after death.

1 Peter 5:4--"And when the CHIEF shepherd shall appear . . ." The shepherd is going to reappear, and we will stand accountable to Him.

- This gives purpose to life.
- This gives a standard to life.

## ***II. God Works through Trials (James 1:1-13)***

### **Introduction**

As I have reflected over the events of the past few days and months, I was drawn to the first chapter of James. In the first 13 verses we are given some understanding of the purpose of trials that come our way.

- The good that has come from trials.
- The comfort we can have in trials.

So this passage speaks to us to help us in our time of trial when we need understanding and comfort. And yet in a real way I have also thought that the life of our friend and loved one actually was a living example of this passage:

- As she and her family demonstrated before us the reality of this portion of God's Word.
- I shall never be able to read these verses without thinking of (Name) and how her life reflected this passage.

So for a few minutes, think with me as we look into God's Word.

(Read verses 2-4) The Lord would first of all have us know that there is . . .

#### **✦ Purpose in Trials (verses 2-4)**

1. When difficult times come into our lives and we find ourselves unable to comprehend/to understand; the enemy is quick to throw doubts/questions into our minds.
2. We find ourselves questioning God's goodness/God's wisdom in allowing these things to happen.
3. We may even be bitter and angry with God for allowing this to happen to us and wonder if He really understands.
4. But God's word confidently reminds us that God does understand . . .
  - Things do not just happen haphazardly to the Christian.
  - With no meaning/no purpose.
5. God is in control and as Paul reminds us no one or nothing can separate us from God's love. Rom. 8--even the most difficult of circumstances.
6. James reminds us that God wants us to trust Him in the trials of life.

- For as we trust Him in the trials God can use the difficult trial to mold us:
- To mature us.
- So that we will be more like Jesus Christ our Savior.

7. Isaiah the prophet said in trying to comprehend God's ways:

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8-9)*

8. God would have us trust Him in the difficult trials:

- For even though we cannot understand He loves us and He is in control.
- He will use this trial to help us grow spiritually and to help us mature and become more like Jesus Christ.

9. Trust Him! Keep your eyes on Him! And God will use even this trial for His glory.

10. But James goes on to tell us that not only does God have purpose in trials--but also that God gives wisdom in trials.

#### ✦ **Wisdom in Trials** **(verses 5-11)**

(Read verses 5 and 6)

1. James recognizes that we may not always be able to see the purpose in trials or see the good that can come from trials.

2. When we find ourselves unable to see the good and the purpose in trials we are to:

- Keep on asking Him for wisdom.
- In faith.
- And our God who loves to give will respond so that we can see the good and the purpose in trials.

3. Then James illustrates and says:

- That even a poor man has much good in his trial of poverty if he knows God--the owner of the universe.
- And a rich man through he lose everything can rejoice in the good of having learned not to place his faith in riches which quickly pass away.



4. God has been very good to us in allowing us to see the good even in this difficult trial.

- For so much good has already come from this trial:
- As a church family we are growing spiritually and united together.
- As individuals we have seen faith in action and we have learned lessons we shall never forget.
- As we have seen at least three people come to Jesus Christ through faith. (As NAME shared her vital faith with Jesus Christ with others)

5. Yet in the days to come we will continue to need wisdom to see the purpose and the good in this trial.

- James exhorts us to keep on asking God in faith for wisdom.
- And our generous loving God will give us the wisdom needed.

(But finally James reminds us that not only does God have a purpose in trials; and gives wisdom in trials but thirdly there is comfort in trials.)

#### ✦ **Comfort in Trials** **(verse 12)**

(Read verse 12)

1. James here reminds us that this life is not all there is to life.

- That right will be commended.
- That due reward will be give for faithfulness.

2. We often live as if we are the living on the way to the dying.

3. But God's word makes it very clear that we are the dying on the way to the living.

4. What is in store then for one who knows Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and passes from this life?

- Phil. I tells us that when a Christian departs he is with Christ.
- II Cor. 5 tells that when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord
- And I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4 tells us that someday that body which for the present sleeps in the grave will be resurrected and united with our soul/spirit and in this glorified state we will be with the Lord forever.
- And there rewards will be given for endurance through trials and for faithfulness to God in difficult times.

5. So today we sorrow - but we sorrow not as others who have no hope.

- We have the assurance of the word of God that (name) is with Christ.
- (Name) had trusted Jesus Christ as her personal Savior from sin.

6. But I cannot help but think that perhaps some of you are not prepared to face death and you are not prepared to meet Jesus Christ face to face. Nor are you ready to face a trial like (Name) has faced with peace in your heart.

- The strength that enabled this dear one to face her trial with confidence and assurance was not her own.
- It came as she allowed the life of her Savior to live His life through her. It came from a confidence that she was ready to meet her Savior.
- She had made her peace with God through faith in Christ and desired above all else to glorify Him with her life.

7. I invite you right where you are sitting to invite Christ into your life as your Savior from sin.

- Jesus Christ died as your substitute paying the penalty for your sin.
- But He asks you ;by an act of your will to trust Him as your personal Savior from sin.
- If you do this, on the authority of God's word you are a new creature/born again and prepared to meet your Savior.

## Conclusion

James (The Holy Spirit of God) in the quietness of this hour reminds us that .

1. There is purpose in trials:

- God is still in control
- He has not forsaken us but wants us to trust Him so we can mature.

2. God has and will give us wisdom to see the purpose and the good in this trial--As we ask in faith.

3. And there is comfort in knowing that this life is not all there is--that absent from the body means present with the Lord.

4. These truths were demonstrated before us in the life of (Name). (Name) faith in Christ enabled her to face her trial with the peace that passes understanding. Phil. 4:7

5. And I trust that now as her family as her family and friends we may lay hold of the same Savior and the same truths from God's word to enable us to bear this trial together.

### ***III. God's Encouragement (Isaiah 40)***

#### **Introduction**

The people of Israel faced difficulties, not unlike many of the difficulties we face in our lives.

Three truths about God are given to encourage the people. These truths are God's encouragement to us at times like this, also.

#### **The First Truth: We are Mortal, Finite Creatures**

Verses 6(b) - 8(a) tell us that we all live temporal lives here.

Verses 15-16 tell us how limited we are, compared to God.

The first verse tells us of our humanity in pointing to our sin, and as God as the one able to address our need.

(Elsewhere Isaiah tells us our sins separate us from God).

The last verse speaks also of our growing weak and weary.

When we face death--our own or anothers, we come face to face with our own finiteness. Then, he contrasts us with God.

#### **The Second Truth: God is in Control**

Verses 12-14 His infinite wisdom and knowledge.

Verses 21-22 He is in control watching over His creation.

Verses 23-24 He controls history.

Verses 25-26 He is sustaining and keeping His creation.

If He's in control, Why does it sometimes seem otherwise?

We experience trials and troubles, we face sickness and death, we seemingly face unanswered prayers.

God comforts Israel by answering these same questions.



## **The Third Truth: God is Watching Over His People and Meets Their Needs**

Verse 11 He cares for us as a shepherd.

Verse 27 We should never feel as if He's forgotten us.

Verse 28 He never grows weary.

Verses 29-30 He meets our needs as we "wait" upon Him.

- for strength 31
- for provisions
- for salvation--shepherd . . . earlier we read how the good shepherd gave His life for His sheep.
- facing trials
- facing death
- facing grief

## ***IV. How Does Faith Faces Death***

### **Background:**

**This man was the father of one of our church members. He belonged to the Church of God.**

### INTRODUCTION:

We have reflected on the life of (Name) and sought to honor his life and his memory. If his life brings to mind many pleasant thoughts, his death also confronts us with some harsh realities.

Faith is needed in all the circumstances in life, but it is never needed more than in the face of death.

In the few moments that we have, I would like to remind you of four truths from the Word of God which describe the relationship of faith and death.

These truths are the source of true comfort, hope, and joy, in the face of death. They are truths which are offered to all men, but which are experienced only by those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

### **1. Faith Faces Death Squarely**

-Hebrews chapter 11 has often been referred to as the "Hall of Faith". It is a summary of the faith of many of the characters described in the Old Testament.

-While we find the word "faith" frequently in chapter 11, there is another word (or concept) which is found alongside of faith--it is death.

-While every one of these members of the "Hall of Faith" had faith, every one of them died without receiving the promises which they believed and acted upon in their lives.

-We see, then, that biblical faith is that faith which faces death squarely, indeed, which looks beyond death.

-If men can say, "Where there's life, there's hope", the man or woman of faith can say, "Where there is death, there is hope", for faith is the basis for hope beyond death.

### **2. Faith Takes Death Seriously**

-Faith does not deal with death by minimizing it, it deals with sin as a most serious matter. It is, without trying to be humorous, a **grave** matter.

-Death is serious because it is the penalty which God has pronounced on sin. Death is serious because it is a certainty for all men. Death is to be taken seriously because, as God says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

-Death is an irreversible step into eternity, an eternity which is one of eternal bliss in the presence of God, or of eternal agony, removed from the presence of God (cf. Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:9).

-The seriousness of death is indicated by our Lord's response to it. One of the few times that we are told the Lord Jesus wept was at the grave of Lazarus, a man whom He was shortly to call forth from the grave.

-Jesus took His own death seriously as well, as can be seen from His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Death must be taken seriously, for it is the unavoidable consequence of sin.

### **3. Faith Enables the Christian to be Comforted, even to Worship God, when a Loved One Has Died**

-In the first chapter of the Book of Job, we are told of the tragic death of Job's children (Job 1:18-22).

-Job was a man of faith. He did not merely accept the news of his children's death; he fell to the ground in worship. What was it that enabled Job to worship, when all of his children died tragically, and (from a human point of view) prematurely?

-Job's faith was evidenced in three ways.

- ◇ Job had faith in the power of God.
- ◇ Job believed in God's sovereignty, in the fact that God was in control. Thus, he did not view the death of his children as a natural disaster (though, in a sense, it was), but as an act of God. He said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (1:20).
- ◇ Job knew that his children were not his, ultimately, but God's. He knew that just as God had given his children life, God had also taken it away. To Job, it was not "their time", it was "God's time". God was in control, specifically in the manner and timing of the death of his family. Thus, Job could worship.

-But further, Job had faith not only in the power of God (in His sovereignty, in His control), but in His person.

-Job's faith was rooted in the character of God. God was both powerful and good. Job, we are told, "did not sin nor did he blame God" (1:22).

-He did not see God as being in any way "at fault", as doing wrong in the death of His children. He was a God whom Job trusted. Thus he worshipped him, even in this time of tragedy.

-There is one final dimension to Job's faith, as I understand this text. It is that Job was willing to trust God in the death of his children, even though he did not understand it.

-Job knew that God was good, and that God had taken his children in death. Job did not know why. And it would seem that his faith was such that he did not need to know why, at least not then.

-Time will sometimes reveal those reasons, but it is often only in eternity that they will be known. Faith finds comfort in the power, in the goodness, and in the purposes of God, even though we do not understand them at the moment.

-As we face the loss of \_\_\_\_\_, there are many questions to ask, there are many things we do not, at this moment in time, understand. But if we, by faith, have come to know God as our Savior, then we do know that He is in control, that He is good, and that His wisdom and grace in \_\_\_\_\_ death will someday be evident.

#### **4. Faith Views Death through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ**

-Part of the reason why death is so difficult for men is because they fear death.

-The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ was in order that He "might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:15).

-Men rightly fear death, apart from Christ. It is a just and certain punishment, and it is the entrance into a life of separation from God, for all sinners.

-Thus, men who do not have faith in God fear death. They dread it. They live their lives in the bondage of this fear of death.

-Christians no longer fear death because of their faith in Jesus Christ. He came to die in the sinner's place, to bear the penalty of death.

-He not only suffered God's wrath, He was raised from the dead, so that death no longer reigns over the Christian.

-Death is a defeated foe. Death holds no fear for those who have faith in Christ.

-Paul looked at death as a deliverance, as a promotion (Philippians 1:19-26). These triumphant words of the apostle Paul, recorded in the 8th chapter of the Book of Romans, reveal faith's perspective of death:

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).*

## **Closing Prayer**

Lord, I thank you for the life of (deceased). And I pray that through faith in Jesus Christ, each of us may worship you in his death. May we rejoice in your goodness and power, and in your plans which are beyond our ability to understand this side of heaven.

May each one here, through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, experience the joy of being delivered from the fear of death, to the anticipation of death as the entrance into His presence forever more.

May your comfort and joy be experienced by those who are here today, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died that sin and death might no longer reign.

We look forward to the day when death itself shall be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity. In Jesus' name, amen



## V. How Old Testament Saints Faced Death

**Background:** Death of a believer.

(Romans 8:28-39).

*28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*

(Romans 11:33-36).

*33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen*

-As we have sought to honor the memory of \_\_\_\_\_, so also we wish to focus on his/her faith, a faith which some of you share, and which I know she desired all of you to share with his/her.

-The texts which I have read from the Bible come from the Book of Romans. Both texts speak of what preachers refer to as the sovereignty of God.

-Basically, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God maintains that God is in complete control. It is only a God who is in control who can "cause all things to work together for good" (Romans 8:28), and of whom it can be said, "All things are from Him and through Him and to Him" (Romans 11:36).

-This truth gave great comfort, and it is a truth which can give you great comfort here and now, as you come to grips not only with \_\_\_\_\_

death, but with the inevitability of your own death, whether that is sooner or later.

-For just a few moments, I would like to focus your attention on three men in the Bible, all of whom lived in Old Testament times, and all of whom are said to have worshiped God in the face of death.

**Job, we are told, worshiped God at the time of the tragic death of his children.**

*(Job 1:20-22).20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." 22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God*

**Jacob worshiped God at the time of his own death:**

By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff ([Hebrews 11:21](#)).

**David worshiped God at the time of the death of his son, a son who was born as a result of David's immorality, and who died as a result of his immorality:**

*([2 Samuel 12:18-20](#)).18 Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!" 19 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." 20 So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate*

-I would like to point out that each of these men worshiped God in the face of death, and I would like to suggest that in each case, the sovereignty of God was a significant factor in their worship.

-Job was a righteous man, whom God chose as an example of faithfulness to point out to Satan. By divine permission, Satan was able to strike Job's family, so that all of his children died from what appeared to be a natural calamity. When word reached Job that all of his children were dead, we are told that he worshiped God, saying,

- "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

- Job was able to worship after hearing that all of his children had perished in a tornado (a wind storm), because he was assured of the truth of the sovereignty of God. He knew that it was a sovereign God who gave life, just as it was the same sovereign God who took it. The sovereignty of God in the death of his loved ones was Job's comfort, because Job knew that the God who is sovereign is also the God who is all-wise and good. Job did not know the reason for the death of his children, but He did know God, and that was enough. Those of us who believe in the sovereignty of God can say, with Job, regarding Sue's death: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

- David was a man who worshiped God at the time of the death of his son, as we are told in 2 Samuel chapter 12. David had sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then committed murder to cover up his sin when he learned she had become pregnant by him. When the son of David and Bathsheba was born he became ill. David fasted and lay on the ground, petitioning God to restore the child to health. When the child died, his servants were afraid to tell him, fearing that he would become despondent. David sensed that the child had died and inquired of his servants. When he learned that the child had died, David washed his face, changed his clothes, and went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. His servants asked him how this could be. His response is instructive to us.

David hoped that God would spare that child from death, but his hope and comfort was not destroyed by the death of the child. Why not? Because, David tells us, he was assured that both he and the child would be together once again. David believed that he and the child would be together in heaven. The God who is sovereign, who could spare that child from death, is also the God who is able to turn sorrow to joy, and death to life.

What a comfort it is for Christians to come to this funeral, knowing that our sister was a Christian, and that she is forever with her Lord. What a comfort it is for us to know that before we were even created, God had numbered our days (Psalm 139:13-16). And what a comfort it is for Christians to be assured that when we die, we will be with Him as well, not because we deserve it, but because the God who is Sovereign is also the God who is forgiving. He who has purposed to save us is the One who will bring that good work to completion (Philippians 1:6). He who has chosen us, is He who can keep us, so that no one can snatch us from His saving hand (John 10:27-30).

There can be no real comfort for those who face death apart from faith in Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews tells us those unbelievers dread death, as they well should. But the good news is that no one needs to dread death, because God has defeated death in the person of Jesus Christ:

### **Hebrews 2:14-18 14**

*Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He [Jesus Christ] Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted*

The Bible declares all men to be sinners, deserving of the eternal wrath of God. We have rejected His Word and have broken His commandment.

All have sinned ([Romans 3:23](#)), and the wages of sin is death ([Romans 6:23](#)). God knew that we could never save ourselves. We can not earn or merit salvation.

God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to come to the earth to reveal Himself to us, and to bear our sins and their penalty on the cross of Calvary. Jesus overcame death and the grave, because God raised Him from the dead.

The good news of the gospel is that although we are sinners, deserving of God's eternal wrath, we may be saved by simply trusting in Jesus Christ, and receiving the salvation which God has accomplished for us through His death, burial, and resurrection.

This was the good news which was shared with our sister here, and which she received. The same good news is for each of those gathered here today. The God who is sovereign, before whom every knee will someday bow, is the God who has provided forgiveness for sins and the certainty of eternal life, as you receive the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is our hope and our joy and Christians.

This is why we can worship God even in the face of death. The death of our sister will work together for good, for those who love God, and it may be that God will cause her death to work for your good by drawing you to Himself, by faith.

## *Graveside Luke 16*

There are certain texts which are traditionally read at the graveside, but I would like to read a text that is not often used as the body is committed to the ground. It is recorded in the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Luke:

*19 "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. 20 "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame'" (Luke 16:19-24).*

As you know, the story goes on, and the rich man receives no comfort or privileges, but only eternal torment. The point which I wish to make from this text has to do with the dramatic contrast which our Lord makes in this story between appearances and reality.

To some, the rich man appeared to be right with God, and assured of a place in heaven. His funeral must have been extravagant, in contrast with that of Lazarus. And yet while this man's body went into the ground, his eternal soul went into torment.

The poor man, Lazarus, did not look like a true saint. His clothing was ragged. He ate scraps from the rich man's garbage. The dogs licked his sores. His death and burial were surely ugly. In fact, he may not have had a funeral at all. His body may have been cast onto the garbage heap. But in spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we are told something which no one saw, but which we are to believe as true.

When Lazarus died, "he was carried away to Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22a). Our sister's death was probably more like that of Lazarus. It was not a pretty sight. But what we should find comfort in as we place her body in the ground is that her soul has already been escorted into the presence of God by the angels. This body, which we commit to the ground, is going to be raised up, transformed, and joined once again to her spirit.

We should gladly set this body aside, looking forward to that day when our bodies will be transformed, like the body of our Lord. What a comfort! What hope! May this comfort and hope be yours as you trust in Jesus Christ.

## VI. *“Life is not fair! Praise God!”* *Matthew 20:1-16*

**BACKGROUND:** OLDER GENTLEMAN WHO TRUST CHRIST A FEW DAYS BEFORE HE DIED FROM CANCER.

1 *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.*

2 *And after agreeing with the workers for the standard wage, he sent them into his vineyard.*

3 *He went out about nine o'clock in the morning and saw others standing in the marketplace without work.*

4 *And he said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’*

5 *So they went. When he went out again about noon and three o'clock that afternoon, he did the same thing.*

6 *And about five o'clock that afternoon he went out and found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why are you standing here all day without work?’*

7 *They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go and work in the vineyard too.’*

8 *When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and give the pay starting with the last hired until the first.’*

9 *When those hired about five o'clock came, each received a full day's pay. 10 And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each one also received the standard wage.*

11 *When they received it, they began to complain against the landowner,*

12 *saying, ‘These last fellows worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the hardship and burning heat of the day.’*

13 *And the landowner replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am not treating you unfairly. Didn't you agree with me to work for the standard wage?’*

14 *Take what is yours and go. I want to give to this last man the same as I gave to you.*

15 *Aren't I permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’*

16 *So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:1-16).*

As the conflict between Jesus and His adversaries began to intensify, and as the time for our Lord's sacrificial death drew near, He said some very shocking things.

Some of these are recorded in Matthew's Gospel, just before the words of our text – which were also shocking. When some parents sought to bring their little children to Jesus, so that He could bless them, the disciples rebuked them for doing so.

Jesus was too busy and too important to be interrupted by children. Jesus corrected His disciples, instructing them to allow the children to come to Him, because, He said, **“the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”** (Matthew 19:14). The scribes and Pharisees didn't see it that way. They thought that heaven belonged to them, because of their religious efforts, and because of their positions.

Then, Jesus was approached by a man we know as **“the rich young ruler”** (Matthew 19:16-22). This man wanted to know what it was that he must do

to inherit eternal life. Since this man felt that he had fully kept the law from his youth, Jesus had to show him how far he came from measuring up to God's standards. Jesus told this **"rich young ruler"** to sell all that he owned and to give the proceeds to the poor. That was too high a price to pay, and so the rich young ruler went away sorrowful.

Jesus then turned to his disciples and pointed out how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven. Their love and their trust is in their wealth. When Jesus said that **"it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven"** (Matthew 19:24), the disciples were shocked.

In that day, many assumed that the rich all went to heaven, while the poor went to hell. They believed that wealth was God's reward for being righteous, while poverty was God's punishment for sin. Jesus told His disciples that the gospel turned the religion of that day upside-down. He said, **"many who are first will be last, and the last first"** (Matthew 19:30).

Jesus then went on to tell the parable that is our text for this funeral service. It is clear that it was meant to explain our Lord's words, **"many who are first will be last, and the last first,"** because these same words are repeated at the end of the parable, in verse 16. The parable went like this.

A landowner needed to hire day laborers to work in his fields, and so he went to the labor pool and hired a number of workers. He agreed to pay these workers the standard wage – a denarius a day.

Needing more help, he made several more trips to the labor pool, hiring additional workers. But to these workers, he gave no specific commitment. He did not tell them what he would pay, only that he would do **"whatever is right."** The last group of workers was hired one hour before the workday ended. The landowner made no specific commitment to them about how much they were to receive.

In those days, the workers were paid for their labors at the end of the workday. When it came time to pay, the landowner began with those workers who had labored for only an hour.

Everyone was amazed when they saw that these workers were given a full day's pay, for only one hour's work. You can imagine how the rest of the workers began to reason to themselves. The ones who worked two hours must be getting paid twice the daily rate, and the ones who worked all day must be getting eight denari.

The parable deals only with the "first" and the "last" groups, for rather obvious reasons (**"the last will be first, and the first will be last"**).

-It is those who are hired first who protest when they are paid their normal wage, even though this was the payment upon which they had agreed. It

is not so much that they had been cheated, by being paid less than the rate agreed upon; it is that the last group of workers were paid more than they deserved. I think Joe would smile to hear me say, "Life isn't fair."

-But by these words, I do not mean to suggest that this landowner has cheated anyone. He was "fair" with those who worked the entire day because he paid them the usual wage, and this was also the amount for which they had agreed to work.

-No one was cheated here. The protest had to do with the generosity of the landowner towards the late-comers, who worked a mere hour. They hardly broke a sweat, but they were paid a full day's wage.

-The thing that angered the early workers was not the landowner's greed, but his grace. They were angry that while they worked hard for what they got, the late workers received the same reward, but for very little labor.

Here is the point. Angry workers represented the legalists, who thought that salvation came to those who worked the hardest. Earlier in his life, Joe found a certain comfort in the fact that he was better than a lot of folks; he had worked harder than many. But when it comes to getting into heaven, the Bible makes it clear that no one can work hard enough or long enough to earn eternal life. The Apostle Paul wrote,

**(Romans 3:19-20, NKJV).**

*19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

In this same chapter of Romans, Paul makes it very clear that all men are sinners, unworthy of heaven, and deserving of God's eternal wrath:

**(Romans 3:9-18, NKJV)**

*9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes".*

*It is only by grace that men can be saved, and this grace is available only in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ made on the cross of Calvary, where He took the sin, the guilt, and the punishment for lost sinners.*

*21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:21-23, NKJV).*



Eternal life is not fair; it is a gift of God's grace. If eternal life were "fair" (that is, a payment to men, based upon the quality and quantity of their good works), no one would ever see heaven. Eternal life cannot be earned, but it can be received as a gift. That is what this parable was meant to convey.

It is not the "righteous" – that is, those who do the best deeds – who get to heaven; it is sinners, who know that they deserve nothing but God's wrath, *but who gladly receive the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ*. It is not "the first" who get to heaven, but "the last" that get there, *by grace through faith*.

How blessed our brother is today. He was one of "the last," in the sense that he came to faith literally in the last hours of his life.

If salvation were the result of works, there would be a lot of very angry people in heaven, wondering why they worked so hard for so long to get there, when he arrived in his last hours.

God did not save him so that He could benefit from years of service.

God saved us *by grace, through the work that Jesus Christ accomplished at Calvary*. We can rejoice, with him, that eternal life is not fair, and that it is, instead, by grace.

What an encouraging truth, that God has made salvation and eternal life available to men, apart from works -- and by grace alone -- through faith. What a joy it is to celebrate our brother's life, and death, in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But I must issue a final word of warning. It is an offer that is available only before death.

Our brother was graciously saved hours before his departure from this life.

If you are one of those who have wrongly supposed that salvation is something you earn, something that God gives you in payment for your good deeds let me urge you to recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not work this way.

No one will get to heaven because they tried to live a good life, or even because they seemingly lived a better life than others.

The only people who will see heaven are those who realize that their works can only condemn them, and that *it is the work of Christ alone that saves*. I urge you to trust in Him, in what may be our final hours, so that you can rejoice forever in the grace of God.

## ***VII. Our Hope: The Character of God (Psalm 130)***

**Background:** This is the service FOR AN OLDER CHURCH MEMBER, who died of sickness as a believer.

The message is based upon Psalm 130, this member's favorite psalm.

For example's sake; The deceased was given the name Sarah.

About two years ago it was apparent that apart from a miracle "Sara" would not have a great deal of time left on this earth, and so she and her husband and I sat at their kitchen table, discussing the arrangements for her funeral.

"Sara" expressed not only the hymns which she wanted to be a part of her funeral, but also the texts which have been read. She did not avoid the reality of her own death.

It was Sara's request that I conduct her funeral. In these last few moments, I would like to share with you the faith which Sara professed, which not only gave her comfort, but which can be of comfort to you as well. Sara's favorite text in Scripture was Psalm 130. I have chosen to use this text as the basis for the message today, because it not only expresses Sara's faith and hope in God, but also her desire that you experience the salvation in which she delighted and found both comfort and hope.

**PSALM 130(A Song of Ascents)**

Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice! Let Thine ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.

3 If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with Thee, That Thou mayest be feared.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope.

6 My soul [waits] for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. 8 And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities (Psalms 130:1-8).

This Psalm was Sara's favorite text, and no wonder. It draws upon the great doctrines of the faith. It expresses her hope and faith as a believer, as well as her desire for each of you.

**Verses 1-2** "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O LORD. 2 Lord, hear my voice! Let Thine ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications."

(1) The believer comes to the Lord from the depths. He calls upon the Lord as his last and only hope. As the final days of Sara's earthly struggle drew to a close, this psalm must have been of greater and greater comfort.

**Verse 3** *"If Thou, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"*

(2) While some of the psalmist's despair must have come from external trials and difficulties, the great despair is his awareness of his own sin. As the psalmist falls before God, he does so as an unworthy sinner, before a righteous and holy God, who is without sin, and whose character requires that sin be dealt with in holiness. There is no self-righteousness here. The psalmist knows that if dealt with according to his works, he could not stand before God.

**Verse 4** *"But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou may be feared."*

The psalmist's hope is not in his good works of the past, or any future deeds he might do. His hope is in the character of God. He confesses to God that He is not only holy, He is forgiving. He grants forgiveness so that men might fear and worship Him.

**Verses 5-6** *"I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope. 6 My soul [waits] for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning."*

Verses 5 and 6 are the psalmist's personal testimony. The forgiveness which God grants is present. The full and final salvation for which the psalmist hopes is yet future. And so he describes God as the One for whom He waits. And until the time of His coming, the psalmist knows that his hope is rooted in His revealed Word. The Word of God is the source of his hope. Verse 6 expresses the yearning which the saint has for the coming of the Lord and the final salvation He will bring.

**Verses 7-8** *"O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is loving kindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. 8 And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."*

Verses 7 and 8 are the psalmist's appeal to his fellow-Israelites, to share in the salvation of the Lord. He does not assume that because they are Jews, they are necessarily saints. They, too, are sinners, in need of divine forgiveness. They, like the psalmist, must acknowledge their sin, and trust in God, and in the salvation He alone can give.

What a beautiful expression of Sara's faith. What a comfort to know that she has now entered into the blessings of eternity, that she has left behind earthly suffering and sorrows, and is in the presence of her Lord.

Her desire was and is that you should share these blessings with her. The forgiveness of sins for which the psalmist looked forward has now been accomplished by the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Testament counterpart to Psalm 130 might be found in Romans chapter 5:

1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.  
3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath [of God] through Him.

10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:1-11).

Jesus Christ came into the world nearly 2,000 years ago to provide for man's salvation. He was sinless, but He came to die in the sinner's place. Those who trust in Him by faith have their sins forgiven by Jesus Christ, who bore the penalty they deserved. And those who trust in Him have His righteousness, so that they can stand before God justified, forgiven, and righteous, in Christ. This was Sara's hope. It is not the hope of all, but only of those who, like Sara, have trusted in Him. I pray that you make give thought to the words of Psalm 130 and that you might trust in the salvation which God provided through His Son, Jesus Christ. It is then that you will be able to share the hope of this psalm, and have confidence in the face of death.

## **Closing Prayer**

### **Graveside Service**

### **READ 2 Kings 2: 1-14**

1 And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 Then the sons of the prophets who [were at] Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; be still." 4 And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho."

But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 And the sons of the prophets who [were] at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite[them] at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. 8 And Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. 9 Now it came about when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. [Nevertheless,] if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be [so.]" 11 Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, [there appeared] a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. 12 And Elisha saw [it] and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. 14 And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over (2 Kings 2:1-14).

Meditate (2 Kings 6:8-23).

When we think of Sara, we will unfortunately tend to think of her as she was in the last months and days of her life. We will remember her with her oxygen hose trailing behind her, wherever she went. We will think of her as she lay in her bed, struggling for each breath. We will think of her in terms of her last moments of life. And if we do so, we fail to grasp the full reality of the glory of her exodus, and of ours, if we trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

These two stories, recorded in the Book of 2 Kings, challenge us to look on Sara's passing of the believer from here to eternity as the Bible describes it.

Elijah's time of departure had come, and Elisha was appointed to replace him.

Elisha determined that he would not leave Elijah until the Lord took him away. Elisha alone watched as the horses and chariot of fire transported him into heaven. Some time later, Elisha was surrounded by horses and chariots, sent by the king of Aram, to capture and perhaps to kill Elisha, because this prophet was making his plans known to the king of Israel.

It looked as though his situation was hopeless. His servant certainly thought so. But Elisha knew that the spiritual life has to do with the unseen as well as the seen. He prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened, and that he would be able to see things as they really were.

And when his eyes were opened, he saw the horses and chariots of fire surrounding them. Nothing could harm them when God's angelic army was assembled for their defence.

The very angels who are assembled about us for our protection in this world seem to be those angels which transport us into heaven when it is time for us to depart from this life.

God promised never to leave us nor forsake us. His angels guard us now, so that we are not taken from life one second sooner than God has purposed. And when that time of departure does come, His angels are there to escort us into heaven.

You may think that such treatment is only for those special, spiritual people like Elijah and Elisha. I do not think so. I simply remind you of our Lord's own words, in which he tells of the angelic escort of a poor beggar named Lazarus:

(Luke 16:19-23).<sup>19</sup> "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. <sup>20</sup> "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. <sup>22</sup> "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom"

I believe that when Sara's spirit departed from her body, she was escorted into the presence of the Lord in the same way.

While appearances would indicate otherwise, her departure was a glorious one. As we leave her body in this grave, to be resurrected and transformed at the return of our Lord, let us rejoice in the fact that her suffering is over, and her departure was triumphant.

May we look forward to our day of triumph as well, as those who trust in Him who not only gave His life for us, but Who was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

## ***VIII. The Goodness of God in Grief and Death***

**Background:** Death of an old man who had trusted in Christ.

### ***Eulogy and Scripture Reading***

For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done (Matt, 16:26- 27). If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:8-9). For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life; he will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).

### ***Prayer***

In the Book of Proverbs we read: "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children"(13:22).

One of the purposes of this service is to remember the heritage which (Name) has left behind. The goodness of a man as a husband and a father will always be remembered by those he has left behind in death. His goodness is also the cause of great sorrow at the time of his death, for now only the memories remain.

This service also provides us with the occasion to reflect on the goodness of God.

At a time of personal sorrow and grief, thoughts of the goodness of God may be doubted by some. After all, we may reason, how is it that a God who is good can allow a good man to die and his family to be deprived of his presence in life?

The character of God thus seems to be challenged by the fact of sickness, suffering, and death.

The matter of the goodness of God is of even greater urgency, for not only is the character of God at stake, so also is our hope of eternal life.

The Bible is very clear that no man by his own good deeds can merit the forgiveness of sins and God's gift of eternal life.

The Bible teaches us that it is only through the goodness of God that any man can hope for heaven.

How, then, can we see the goodness of God in the grief of death?

### **The Goodness of God is Revealed in Death as the Response of His Righteousness to Evil**

When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden and gave them freedom to eat freely of every tree, save one--the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned them that to disobey would result in death--and so it did.

When you and I see what is clearly evil, we expect it to be punished.

When an innocent victim is robbed or killed, we expect the guilty to be punished. For government to fail to punish the guilty would be intolerable--indeed, it would be evil.

So, too, the goodness of God is to be seen in the fact that He has prescribed death as the punishment for sin.

### **The Goodness of God is revealed by the Fact that Death is not only the Consequence of Sin, but can also be its cure.**

#### **1. Death prevented Adam and Eve from living forever in their sinful condition and under the curse of God.**

Remember that because of their sin, both Adam and Eve had to live under God's curse.

Had God allowed them to live forever, they would have lived as sinners, under a curse.

The curse which was pronounced on this couple did not include death. Death was the warning of God which accompanied the command not to eat of the forbidden fruit.

God banned Adam and Eve from the garden and guarded it so that they could not eat of the tree of life and life forever, **under the curse.**

We evidence our agreement that God is good in using death to terminate life which is lived under the curse. While we struggle with the death of those who are healthy and well, we are relieved when one dies whose body has been racked with pain, or whose faculties have been lost due to age or illness.



Death is therefore an evidence of the goodness of God toward those who trust in Him because it terminates living under the curse of sin and its consequences. Death provides men with the opportunity to lay aside the flesh, dominated by sin, and by faith in Christ, to live in the freedom of God's salvation.

## **2. Death is also the means by which God has dealt with sin and made eternal life possible.**

While the death of men terminates life under the curse, it does not make provision for the restoration of man into fellowship with God and the hope of eternal life.

Adam's death merely kept him from living forever in a fallen state, it did not offer him the hope of restoration.

The good news of the gospel and the goodness of God are seen in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, which has made restoration possible for all men.

The Bible tells us that due to sin man lives under the curse of God, unable by his own deeds or even his own death to be reconciled with God. But the goodness of God was evidenced in His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to the earth to die in our place, to bear our punishment, and by His death, burial, and resurrection, to make us righteous and to assure us of eternal life.

By what our Lord said and did, we can see that He was the sinless Son of God. By faith in His death, burial, and resurrection our sins are forgiven. Because of His resurrection, those who are in Christ by personal faith are raised to newness of life now, and will be raised to live with Him forever when He returns.

### **Conclusion**

Because of the goodness of Alan Smith, we can look back on the days of his life with deep gratitude and fond memories.

Because of the goodness of God in the person of Christ, we can experience the forgiveness of sins, we need not fear death, and we can look forward to eternal life in the presence of God.

This hope in the face of death is only found by a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that each of you will come to experience this hope as you personally accept the gift of God's salvation through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and who was raised for your justification.

## **IX. The Joy of Knowing Christ (1 Peter 1:3-8)**

### **Introduction**

It's interesting, when there are so many different things you want to say at an occasion like this, that in looking at one of (Name)'s favorite Scripture passages, we find--almost in outline form--the very ideas which I believe should grab our attention.

1 Peter 1:3-8 is printed on the inside of your memorial folders. That passage begins and ends so appropriately with praise to God, and a focus upon the joy of knowing Christ. Between those "brackets" lay three truths which penetrated (Name)'s very being. . . . Three truths which God would have us to rest upon in times like these.

### **The First Truth**

**God, in His mercy, has provided for new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

- Another passage records Christ's teaching about new birth: John 3
- The key to this first truth is faith in the finished work of Christ.

### **The Second Truth**

**Each believer possesses an inheritance which never deteriorates.**

- The nature of this inheritance is in corruption.
- This inheritance includes our new bodies....
- The receiving of this inheritance is in heaven.
- The receiving of this inheritance includes the fullness of salvation: freedom from not only the penalty, and the power, but also from the presence of sin.
- (Name) is now experiencing the joy of his inheritance.
- The key to the second truth is also faith in the trustworthiness of a God who has given a pledge of our inheritance by giving the Holy Spirit.

### **The Third Truth**

**Trials and difficult times are often a necessary experience in our attempt to glorify Christ.**

- Trials are often necessary.
- Trials have a purpose in God's plan.
- (Name) desired to glorify Christ -- through all the struggles life brought. He kept a diary the last months of his life. One entry particularly stuck out as I read it. In the midst of describing his failing condition, and relating some of the hardest days and worst news yet relating to his cancer, he spontaneously recorded this poem, a song he had memorized:

"How good is the God we adore,  
Our Faithful, Unchangeable Friend;  
Whose Love is as good as His Power,  
And knows neither measure nor end.  
'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,  
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;  
We'll praise Him for all that is past,  
And trust Him for all that's to come.

That so characterized (Name)'s implicit trust in a God who always was, and is, worthy of our complete trust and confidence.

God WILL call each of us to face various trials. Our only rest now is in the assurance that God will remain faithful and that when Christ takes us to be with Him, that then we find complete rest.

Second Timothy 4:7-8 speaks of a struggle: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

A little over a year ago, much of the world watched with amazement as Manny Pacquiao won over Dela Joya. I will never forget Manny's look of triumphant disdain and De la Joya's look of amazement as they fight.

Even though in the eyes of millions of TV viewers he had apparently won, his victory was not final until it had been proven that he had won lawfully by the raising of the hand of the winner by the referee.

You see, it isn't enough just to win, you must also win according to the rules of competition.

Paul, the apostle, may have had this in mind when he penned:

Second Timothy 4:7. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." There is some debate about the exact meaning of the last phrase, "I have kept the faith." Paul may be saying that he has not diluted or contaminated the pure gospel that he received from the Lord Jesus Christ. But the idea of athletic contest is prominent in verses 7-8. It could be that Paul is thinking of the early Olympic Games. After an event, the judges were consulted to determine if the winner had competed according to the rules. If he hadn't, the prize was awarded to another. In this passage, when Paul writes "I have kept the faith," he may be saying, "I've not cheated. I've followed the rules. I've not been disqualified." His was not a hollow victory.

Today, there are many men in various positions who have been widely admired for what they do and say.

But often, theirs is a hollow victory. What they are in public, and what they are in private, differ widely.

The fact that (Name) had an effective career, and in the neighborhood, and a great ministry among many, is a great tribute to him.

But it would have been a hollow victory if he had sacrificed his marriage on the altar of ministry or career.

(Name) experienced years of productive ministry, and a successful career . . . and with the same wife! That is a greater tribute. But even that would have been a hollow victory if he had sacrificed his children on the altar of ministry or career.

He didn't! Years of fruitful service with the same wife and with his children who have married well in the Lord, and who are now doing everything to serve the same God he served. That is not a hollow victory!

But even that would have been a hollow victory, if, when faced with terminal cancer, (Name) had cursed God, abandoned his trust in God's faithfulness. He didn't.

The Greeks had a unique race in their Olympic games.

The winner was not the runner who finished first, but the runner who finished first with his torch still lit.

(Name) competed according to the rules, finishing the race not only with a good ministry, but also with a godly marriage, a solid family, and an abiding faith. (Name) finished with his torch lit!

## X. The Lord is Our Shepherd

**SCRIPTURE READING:** One of (NAME) favorite passages of scripture is the text which I have been requested to use for this service:

### Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, 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. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

By the use of the imagery of a shepherd and his flock of sheep, David describes the care and the comfort which one of God's sheep has in Him. He begins by describing the comfort and care of His Lord for him in life. He sums all of God's care up in one phrase, "I shall not want." There is no good thing that he lacks, for his shepherd cares for all of his needs.

In the agricultural imagery of his day, David describes the ways in which his Shepherd cares for him.

- He Leads me besides still waters
- He makes me lie down in green pastures
- He leads me in paths of righteousness

David's Shepherd does not leave him in death, however, so he goes on to describe the Lord's presence in death. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me.*"

Passing through death, David says, is like walking through dark shadows. He means to tell us that the experience is not a pleasant one, but that we, if we are one of God's sheep, are to pass through death. He also tells us that the Lord is with us through this passing, so that we are not alone and we need not fear.

WHILE THIS PSALM ASSURES US THAT GOD IS WITH US AS WE PASS THROUGH THE SHADOW OF DEATH, IT DOES NOT TELL US HOW THIS HAPPENS.

As I understand it, the death of (Name) was one that was associated with a hospital and surgery. In our memories we will tend to think of her passing in the context of that hospital bed. I would like to turn your attention to two texts of Scripture which I hope will modify that memory of her death.

## **2 Kings 6:15-17**

In this text in the book of 2 Kings, the king of Syria intended to put Elisha, the prophet of God, to death. He surrounded the place where Elisha and his servant were staying. The servant was stricken with fear. Elisha, however, responded,

"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Ki. 6:15-17).

The lesson is a simple one:

What we see is only part of the picture. Elisha's servant saw only the enemy, and they were awesome.

But Elisha's prayer enabled this servant to see the larger picture: the unseen host of angels, who were there to protect them from the enemy army which had encircled them.

## **2 Kings 2:9-12**

In this text, Elijah, the prophet of God was about to depart, and Elisha, his servant who was to take his place, knew it, and so he would not leave him. Finally Elijah gave Elisha one last request, to which he responded,

"Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. And Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more (2 Ki. 2:9b-12a).

These two passages remind us of a very important truth. There are things going on around us, which are normally not visible to us.

In the case of the horsemen and chariots of fire which Elisha's servant was enabled to see, in answer to the prophet's prayer, these were angelic hosts, assigned to protect God's prophet.

The servant's fear was based upon his lack of awareness of all that was taking place around him.

We are thus all reminded that God's angels are all about us, and that nothing can harm us apart from the permission and will of God.

The chariot and horses of fire which took Elijah into heaven remind us of another fact.

While it is not normally visible to us, I believe that the angels are also employed in "escorting" the spirits of those who have died "in the Lord" into God's presence.

I know that apart from divine intervention, (Name) death was not at all glorious. But I believe that this text assures us that there was much more to be seen, just as was the case with Elisha's servant in chapter 6.

In the light of these events in the life of Elisha and Elijah I believe that we have a glimpse of how God is with one of His children when they die.

We may see a hospital scene, with its doctors and nurses desperately trying to save a life. We may see sophisticated equipment and heroic efforts, but let us also consider the unseen things which can be received only by faith.

Let us remember that if the Lord is our shepherd, He is with us as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

There is only one condition, if this is to be our experience as well, and that is that the Lord is **OUR** SHEPHERD. HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT HE IS OUR SHEPHERD?

In addition to the figure of a shepherd, *the coming Christ was also referred to as a lamb*. This is because it was necessary for the Christ to take the place of His people, to bear their punishment, so that they could share in His blessings. Specifically, He would have to die in the place of the sinner, and then to be raised again. Thus, Isaiah the prophet wrote,

(Isa. 53:6-7).

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In the New Testament, the writers of the gospels therefore speak of the Christ who came to the earth as a babe in the manger as both the "lamb of God" and the "shepherd." When John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus he said,

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

When Jesus referred to Himself as the "Good Shepherd" He was identifying Himself as the promised Messiah, the Christ for whom the Old Testament saints looked. Jesus said,

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"* (John 10:11).

The Lord Jesus did lay down His life. He was nailed to a cross. He was buried in a tomb that was sealed shut and guarded by Roman soldiers, and yet, in spite of this, He rose from the grave, appeared to hundreds, and then ascended to heaven, from which He will return.

Because of this, the apostle Peter could encourage his readers by telling them that the "Chief Shepherd" will someday appear and will reward those who are faithful (1 Pet. 5:4).

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John spoke of those who suffer in the great tribulation period, yet to come, saying,

*"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (**Rev. 7:14b-17**).

The only question which remains is this:

IS THIS HOPE YOUR HOPE? IS JESUS CHRIST YOUR GREAT SHEPHERD?

The faith and confidence in the face of death of which the Bible speaks is not the possession of all, but only of those who have personally trusted in Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that all have sinned, and that the wages of sin is death.

Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. He died in your place, bearing your punishment, so that your sins might be forgiven and you might live eternally in His presence.



## **XII. Lazarus: Rose from the DEAD! (John 11)**

**Background: An elder of a church when he died of cancer, still in his 30s.**

The funeral is from John 11 and the raising of Lazarus.

(Deceased) died at the age of 38, leaving behind his wife and three children. I think there is a sense in which we can all agree that this is a tragedy.

Perhaps you have come expecting a some kind of apology from God, or at least an explanation.

If God were not a God of love we would have no need for any explanation.

Russia feels no need to explain her act of shooting down a civilian aircraft, but we have learned not to expect that nation to act out of love or compassion.

If God were not sovereign, we could explain death as something which was not God's will, but was simply beyond His ability to control.

But our faith is in a God who is both good and great. Their faith, and mine, is that it is God's will to die what would seem to be an untimely death.

The portion of Scripture which was read to you from the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel contains a message which is particularly relevant to us today.

Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus, was critically ill. Mary and Martha sent an urgent message to the Savior, expecting that He would immediately come to them and heal Lazarus.

John informs us, however, that Jesus responded (it would seem to the messengers who had been sent) that the illness of Lazarus was not unto death, but for the glory of God.

Then, instead of hastening to Bethany, Jesus deliberately delayed for two days. The disciples were not surprised and did not seem eager to encourage Jesus to return to Judea, for opposition had become so intense that some of the Jews had attempted to stone Jesus (v. 8). To go back to Bethany, to the disciples, meant almost certain death (v. 16).

John writes in such a way as to heighten our interest. He tells us what Mary and Martha did not yet know--that Jesus could have been there much sooner, but that He chose not to, so that Lazarus would die. Jesus could have been there sooner, but chose not to.

Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus, but did not. Why? That is the question which John intends us to ask. Before we seek to find the answer from this text, let me make three observations which are crucial to our understanding.

## **(1) The Lord purposed for Lazarus to die.**

Let us not attempt to gloss over the clear statement of verse 6 that Jesus deliberately delayed knowing that Lazarus would be dead (v. 14). The Lord could have prevented Lazarus' death and restored him to perfect health, just as Mary and Martha believed (cf. vss. 21, 32).

The tragic thing about the death of Lazarus, in addition to the fact that it was untimely, was that Jesus could have prevented it. While many attempt to explain death in such a way as to absolve God of any responsibility,

John clearly tells us that Lazarus died because our Lord planned it that way. I wish to be very clear this morning when I say to you that it is the firm conviction of those in this church, that (Name) death was the will of God. (Name) died because it was God's time for him. The God who is sovereign in our salvation is also sovereign in our suffering.

## **(2) The Lord Jesus loved Lazarus.**

When Mary and Martha sent news to our Lord of Lazarus' illness, they said, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" (v. 3).

That was not just their estimation, for in verse 5 we are told that Jesus did love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When Jesus arrived at the tomb of Lazarus, He wept (11:33, 35). Those who witnessed the response of the Lord to the grief of Mary and the others remarked, "Behold how He loved him!" (11:36).

What Jesus did here, he did out of love. We have no doubt that our Lord also loved this family. While we may not fully understand how it can be, the death of Lazarus, and our brother, and other saints, is not inconsistent with His love.

## **(3) The delay of Jesus and the death of Lazarus was for the glory of God.**

Just as some believe that death is inconsistent with God's love, so they also contend that death is contrary to the glory of God. But our Lord told His disciples that the death of Lazarus was the reason for His delay, so that God might be glorified as He was glorified (v. 4). Do you notice that John made no attempt to apologize for our Lord's delay or for the death of Lazarus. Why should he apologize for what Jesus said was intended to glorify Him?

For me, this means that I dare not attempt to apologize for John's death. It, too, is the will of God, consistent with the love of God. But how can cancer claiming the life of our brethren possibly be glorifying to God? Let us look further in John chapter 11 to learn the answer.

## **What Glorifies God at the Time of Death?**

The key to understanding the death of Lazarus is directly related to the glory of God. What is it that glorifies God at the time of death which helps explain why our Lord purposed to let Lazarus die when he could have been healed?

### **First, God is glorified by the demonstration of His power.**

Jesus had performed many miracles before the raising of Lazarus, but the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is far greater.

After all, which is the greater miracle, to heal a sick man or to raise a dead man? Mary and Martha both believed that Jesus could have healed their brother so long as he was alive, but neither entertained hopes of his being brought forth from that tomb.

The power of God was seen on that day to be not only greater than sickness, but even greater than death itself.

Our Lord's power over death was vitally important.

The raising of Lazarus was to serve as proof of our Lord's claim to be "the resurrection and the life," the One who would give life to all who would believe in Him, even though he were to die.

Jesus claimed to have power over death itself, so that none of those who believe in Him will be subject to the power of death (v. 26).

Jesus told His opponents that the last and final sign would be His resurrection from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40). It was our Lord's resurrection which proved His claim to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). The raising of Lazarus was proof of the power of the Lord Jesus over death.

### **Second, God is glorified by the demonstration of our faith.**

I believe that our text makes it clear that the glory of God is inseparably related to faith.

While in verse 4 He speaks of His purpose for the death of Lazarus in terms of His glory, in verses 14 & 15 He speaks of the death of Lazarus in terms of their faith: "Then Jesus therefore said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe. . .'"

When Jesus was met by Martha, she professed her faith in His ability to heal Lazarus, had He arrived in time. But even beyond this, she testified that she knew, even now, that God would answer His petition (11:21-22).

The Lord Jesus included His ability to raise the dead in the category of faith and asked Martha if she believed this (vs. 23, 25-26), to which she responded in a beautiful confession of faith: "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (v. 27).

Martha's faith in Christ as her Messiah and her Savior of necessity included faith in His power over death and the grave.

To believe in Him as Savior is to trust in Him as **the resurrection and the life**. Mary's faith was apparently not as great at this moment, but the Lord Jesus encouraged her to believe so that she could behold the glory of God: "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (v. 40).

When Lazarus was raised from the grave we are told that many who beheld believe in Him (11:45).

God is glorified when men believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. God is glorified by the faith of men in Christ as their Savior, and as the One who alone has power over death and the grave.

Now, when, I would ask you, is our faith greater? When we must trust Him as one who can heal sickness, or when we must trust His power to raise the dead?

The answer is obvious. Our Lord purposely allowed Lazarus to die so that He might deepen the faith of those He loved, and so that He might draw to faith, those who had not yet trusted in Him as Mary and Martha had done already.

For Mary and Martha, those whom our Lord loved greatly, their faith would not grow deeper apart from the temporary loss of Lazarus.

Only when Mary and Martha came to trust the Lord Jesus in the face of death did their faith grow. Those of us who knew and loved John believed that God was able to heal him of the cancer which was destroying his body. The greater act of faith will now be for us to trust our Lord to raise John from the dead.

It is in the darkest hours of our lives that our Lord seeks to strengthen our faith and thus to glorify Himself.

You may object that there is a difference between what took place in John chapter 11 and what has happened here. After all, our Lord did raise Lazarus, but He has not done so with (Name).

There are differences. Jesus raised Lazarus only a few days after he died. But I would also remind you that Lazarus eventually died. He was raised from the dead.

(Name), along with all who trust in God will be resurrected from death, never to die again.

Let me point out that the critical time for Mary and Martha to exercise faith in the love and power of our Lord was while the body of Lazarus was still in the grave.

Jesus talked with both Martha and Mary about their faith while Lazarus was still dead.

That was when faith was most difficult and when it was most necessary. So it is with us. Some day, the Bible promises us, the Lord Jesus will come again for His own. At that time the dead in Christ will return with Him and we shall be joined with our Lord and our saved loved ones in the air. The resurrection of John Smith is just as certain as that of Lazarus--indeed, it is more certain, for now we have the account of the raising of Lazarus, and even better, the resurrection of our Lord. These are the times when faith is most required, and when our faith is forced to deepen. But it is in the process that God is glorified.

Lazarus was dead, and it was the sovereign will of God, consistent with the love of God. Our Lord was glorified by the death of Lazarus because it provided the opportunity for Him to demonstrate His power and it also gave those whom He loved the opportunity to exercise their faith. It was God's time for John Smith to die. It was no mistake. It was for God's glory, and the Bible tells us it is for John's good, and for the good of his family. We do not fully understand how or why this is so, any more than Mary or Martha understood what our Lord was doing until after Lazarus had been raised. But we do know that it was not enough for them to believe that God could have cured Lazarus from his illness. God was glorified by the demonstration of His power over death, and by the faith of those who place their trust in Him.

As we stand, as it were, before the grave, it is the time when we must believe if we would find comfort in these difficult times and if we would experience His presence and His power. John and Sue did not look forward to this moment, any more than Mary and Martha did the death of Lazarus, but they did in those dark hours come to a deeper and fuller trust in the Savior.

John tells us in this passage that the death of Lazarus resulted in the belief of many. It was John's request that I speak very plainly to you in this service to invite each of you to find in his death, just as Mary and Martha did at the death of Lazarus, an occasion to trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior and as Lord.

The Lord Jesus is never more worthy of our trust than He is at this moment.

He not only raised Lazarus from the grave, but He Himself died for our sins and rose from the dead, triumphant and able to raise all men from the grave. The faith of (Name) is in the Savior, who is the resurrection and the life.

Unfortunately not all who witnessed to rising of Lazarus from the grave came to faith in the Lord Jesus.

We read in the text that from that point on the religious leaders of the nation planned to put Jesus to death.

I am certain that in this service there are some who see death only as a dreaded enemy, totally inconsistent with the goodness and power of God.

I urge you, as our (brother/ Sister) may already have done, to place your trust in the Lord Jesus, so that even in the death of this loved one, we may glorify God and know that (Name) death is but sleep.

Our (brother's/ sister's) desire is that when our Lord returns to raise him from the grave, you will be there too.

As individuals, I think there is no more difficult time than this to express our true feelings. To find the proper words is so difficult and . . . words seem so inadequate, so incomplete--yet we do our best to express our sympathy/our concern to those left behind.

But I am reminded again that what we need at a time like this is revelation, not just words.

- We need something that speaks of certainties, not just hopes.
- We need something that speaks with authority.
- We need something that provides true comfort and gives something and someone to believe in/to trust as we go on from here.
- We need more than sincere expressions of sympathy and concern (as wonderful as they are) in a time of sorrow and death
- We need the authoritative, comforting "Thus saith the Lord!" the revelation of Scripture.

And God has not left us without Revelation in a time like this.

He has spoken clearly, concisely and with authority.

Let's look for a few minutes at what the Bible, God's Word promises the person who dies in the Lord. The passage I want to look at was written especially for those in a time of sorrow –

**1 Thess. 4:13-18.**

## XII. THE BIBLE PROMISES THE BELIEVER A RECEPTION IN GLORY

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

1. Paul was writing to these believers to instruct them about those who had died. The term "fall asleep" refers to those who had died. Paul doesn't want those left behind to sorrow as those who have no hope.

2. The reason they don't have to sorrow as others without hope is given in verse 14 (read). Those who have died in the Lord are with Christ. The souls (immaterial part) of departed Christians are with God and Jesus is going to bring them back with Him when He comes for His Church.

3. The rest of Scripture teaches us the same thing.

- II Corinthians 5:6-8 tells us that when we Christians die, we go immediately to be with God. To be "absent from the body-present with the Lord."
- Philippians 1:23 Paul tells us when we depart from this life, we are with Christ.

3. We need not sorrow then as others who have no hope because the authoritative Word of God promises the believer an immediate reception in glory--"absent from the body present with the Lord. II Corinthians 5:8"

But not only does the Bible promise the Christian an immediate reception in glory but . . .

## ✦ THE BIBLE PROMISES THE BELIEVER A RESURRECTION OF HIS BODY

### 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16

1. These verses promise that the bodies of our Christian loved ones will be raised from the dead.

2. The Bible teaches the sleep of the body, not the sleep of the soul.

3. These verses teach us that those bodies of Christians that are sleeping in the graves will one day come forth--be resurrected when Christ comes back. In vs. 16 we see that the souls of the believers (who are now with Christ) will be reunited with their resurrected bodies at Jesus' coming for His church.

4. And that body will be a body described in Rev. 21:3-4 as:

- free from pain
- free from sorrow, crying, tears
- free from sin
- free from death

5. The Christian's soul goes immediately to the presence of the Lord. The Christian's body rests in the grave until the day the Lord comes back for His church when it will be resurrected into a glorious body and be reunited with the soul.

6. We need not sorrow as others who have no hope for the Christian is promised: (a) an immediate reception in glory; and (b) a resurrection of his body. But there is more . . . for not only does the Christian who dies have the certainty of an immediate reception in glory and a resurrection of his body but . . .

## ✦ THE BIBLE PROMISES A REUNION WITH CHRIST AND WITH LOVED ONES

### **I Thessalonians 4:17**

1. The reunion is actually two-fold, first with loved ones:

- The Lord may come back today; if He does the believers who are alive will be reunited with our Christian loved ones in God's presence. Our separation is not permanent! (and then secondly there will be a reunion with Christ). One day the Lord will come back and Christians who are alive will be caught up to join the resurrected bodies of those who have died. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord."
- God promises Christians that they will be reunited whether through death - (Review) The Christian who dies has the promise:  
of an immediate reception into the Lord's presence  
of a resurrected body  
of reunion with loved ones (fellow believers)

(No wonder Paul says that these verses should be used at times like these) for he says, "wherefore comfort one another with these words." those who are left behind can be comforted in knowing the certainties of these verses.

### **Application/Conclusion**

1. But we should not forget that these promises are conditioned on faith in Christ as Savior who died as our substitute on Calvary and rose again (vs. 14)

2. The reality of death should make us stop and ask whether we could claim these promises if we were to die.

Right now, if you're not sure where you will spend eternity . . . I invite you to ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior from sin by an act of your will; trusting Him to save you from your sin. It was (name's) deep concern that his



friends know Jesus as their Savior. Won't you trust Him right now as your Savior?

3. I thank God that (name) knew Jesus Christ as His Savior from sin. It was this faith that sustained him through the trials of illness that he so bravely faced.

4. Because (Name) had trusted Jesus Christ to be her Savior from sin, on the authority of God's Holy Word, I can say that (Name)'s soul is now with Jesus in glory. Her body will one day be resurrected. We'll be reunited with her and spend eternity together with the Lord.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

### XIII. READY TO DIE!!

If our brother/ sister (deceased) was here, he would be tugging on my sleeve, reminding me that this is more about His Savior, than about himself.

I know he would be eagerly waiting for me to tell you about Jesus, as the only means for the forgiveness of your sins and entrance into God's glorious presence.

This brother's/ sister's life illustrates truths that deal with the most important decision you will ever make. As our brother and His Lord look down on our gathering this afternoon I'd like to spend these few moments talking to you about eternity.

Only Jesus can make you ready to die. As he told me and others, Brother \_\_\_\_\_ was ready to die. One of the Scriptures I read to him as I sat at his bedside the last day of his life is found in 2 Corinthians:

(2 Corinthians 4:13-5:9).

13 But since we have the same spirit of faith as that shown in what has been written, "I believed; therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak. 14 We do so because we know that the one who raised up Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence. 15 For all these things are for your sake, so that the grace that is including more and more people may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. 1 For we know that if our earthly house, the tent we live in, is dismantled, we have a building from God, a house not built by human hands, that is eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this earthly house we groan, because we desire to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed, after we have put on our heavenly house, we will not be found naked. 4 For indeed we groan while we are in this tent, since we are weighed down, because we do not want to be unclothed, but clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment. 6 Therefore we are always full of courage, and we know that as long as we are alive here on earth we are absent from the Lord- 7 for we live by faith, not by sight. 8 Thus we are full of courage and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition to please him

Years ago, \_\_\_\_\_ recognized that he was a sinner, and that Jesus had died to pay the penalty for his sins. \_\_\_\_\_ trusted in Jesus, who not only died on the cross of Calvary, but rose from the dead.

\_\_\_\_\_ enjoyed the presence of God in this life, but he yearned to spend eternity in God's presence. It is true that our earthly pains prompt us to let go of this life, and to anxiously seek the next, but it would not be accurate to say that \_\_\_\_\_ simply wanted to escape the suffering and groaning of earthly life. More than anything, \_\_\_\_\_ loved his Savior, and wanted to be with him.

\_\_\_\_\_ had no fear of death because Jesus took that fear away. In the Book of Hebrews we read,

*14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil), 15 and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).*

But more than this, \_\_\_\_\_ had a yearning for heaven. He wanted to dwell in the presence of his Savior for all eternity. This is the way the apostle Paul felt, as well, after he came to faith in Jesus:

*19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ. 20 My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 Now if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean productive work for me, yet I don't know which I prefer: 23 I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:19-23).*

I cannot know your hearts, my friend, but you know, and God knows. As we remember the life of \_\_\_\_\_ and you come face to face with the reality of death, is there fear in your heart, or faith; do you dread death and try to avoid even thinking about it, or do you see death as an escape from this life and an entrance into the presence of God forever? The difference is what you do with the death of Jesus Christ, who died that your sins might be forgiven, and that you might enter into eternal life.

\_\_\_\_\_ testimony calls our attention to a very important truth: BEING RELIGIOUS IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING A CHRISTIAN. There may be those here today who are trying to suppress the fear of death with the consolation that they are religious. I must tell you plainly that religion will never save you, only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, by faith.

I am simply telling you what Jesus Himself said, as we read in the third chapter of the Gospel of John 3: 1- 18

*1 Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, 2 came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.' 8 The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus replied, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand these things? 11 I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. 12 If I have told you people about earthly things*

and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven-the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." 16 For this is the way God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. 18 The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God (John 3:1-18).

We are told not only that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a devoutly religious man, but that he was "the teacher of Israel" (John 3:10). He was, perhaps, the most prominent teacher of that day, and yet Jesus told him he must be "born again."

To be born again Nicodemus must trust in Jesus, the one who would soon be "lifted up" on the cross of Calvary.

To be born again, Nicodemus must not trust in what he had done - or would do - but in what Christ had done, and in what the Holy Spirit would do - give him life. Being born again meant that Nicodemus would have to renounce his religious good works and trust in Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and raised from the dead.

It would not be long before another Pharisee - Saul -- would be "born again." He describes his conversion this way:

*3 For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials*

*4 -though mine too are significant. If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more:*

*5 I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee.*

*6 In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless.*

*7 But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. 8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things-indeed, I regard them as dung!-that I might gain Christ,*

*9 and be found in him, not because of having my own righteousness derived from the law, but because of having the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness-a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness.*

*10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death,*

*11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:3-11).*

And so, as we come face to face with sin and the reality of its penalty - death - I must ask you this question: "Are you ready to die?" "

Do you trust in your good works or in your religion to save you, or are you trusting in God's only provision, Jesus Christ?"

He died on the cross of Calvary to pay the penalty for your sins. He rose from the dead, so that you can live a life pleasing to Him, and so that you can spend eternity in the presence of God.

(Deceased) trusted in Jesus Christ. He was ready to die. He was eager to see His Savior face to face. If you are not yet ready, then I urge you to trust in Jesus Christ this very hour.

## ✦ WHAT DEATH MEANS FOR THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST

### INTRODUCTION

If we are to find endurance, encouragement, and comfort amidst the pressures, losses, and tragedies of life, man must turn to the Bible, the Word of God. Why?

Because this Book, God has graciously authenticated with tremendous evidence as not merely the Word of man, but as it is, the Word of God to man, God breathed, accurate, and without error.

As the Apostle affirms, what has been written in the Bible has been written "that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4b).

As the Word of God, the Bible is the revelation of the sovereign God and planner of the universe.

It is the revelation of a God who cares and who is in control of all the affairs of our lives, and who has not left us to ourselves, but has reached out to us in Christ and in the Bible.

As the word of such a God, the Bible alone can give man an adequate understanding, meaning, and hope in the face of the facts and realities of life with its complexities, trials, and losses as with death.

So today, for a few moments, let us turn to the Bible and let us reflect together on some of its truth and promises that we might find courage, hope, and joy in the Lord in the midst of our sorrow.

First, we might start with a question? Why death? Why was our beloved friend, taken home at this time in her life? We simply do not know the answer to that? That is one of the mysteries of life that Scripture does not answer.

But when is death convenient?

When is death ever timely for the individual or for the family and friends?

When is death not a shock? When is death normal?

Certainly, sometimes it is a relief because of sickness or the pains of this life, but who can ever really be thankful for death. So let's ask a question.

## Death Is An Enemy

According to Scripture, death is not really normal or natural even though it is a persistent fact of human history. Why?

Because man was created by God to be a unity of body, soul, and spirit and in that state to live forever with God in fellowship with Him. This is the natural, normal state that God planned for man.

This is why we have the hope and promise of the resurrection (2 Cor. 5:1-9).

Further, according to Scripture, death is an enemy, the last enemy to be conquered by God, and as such, it is the result of a cause, the result of sin and the fall of the human race.

*"For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Cor. 15:25-26).*

How is death our enemy? It is our enemy:

1. Because it separates man from his body,
2. Because is the result of sin and Satan's attack on man who was created in the image of God for fellowship with God,
3. Because it separates us from our loved ones,
4. Because it ends ministries and often makes life seem futile or without purpose, and
5. Because, if men are without Christ, it sends them into a Christ- less eternity, forever separated from God.

But dear friends in Christ, there is an answer to death; there is victory and deliverance from this ancient and ever present, stalking enemy.

### **Victory over Death**

So, the Apostle, in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, declared in the that great chapter on the resurrection:

*"But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57).*

What is that victory over death? Let's think together and reflect for a moment on some of the great declarations of the Bible:

**(1)** Because of Christ's victory for us, God assures us in His Word that this separation is not permanent for believers in Christ. For one day there will be a reuniting of believing loved ones in heaven, never to be separated again.

Even now, (Name) is enjoying not only fellowship with the Lord, but with other members of her family that have gone on before.

In the OT, it is often repeated that a saint who died "was gathered to his people." This was said of Abraham, Isaac, Aaron, and Moses. This does not mean they were laid to rest with their people, for Moses was not. It means their souls and spirits were reunited in a place called Abraham's bosom or paradise.

When David's child died, he said "Can I bring him back? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (II Sam. 12:23). It was comforting to David to know he would someday be reunited with his child whom he would know and with whom he would have eternal fellowship.

**(2)** The Word of God tells us that the sting of death has been swallowed up in the victory of Christ. The "sting of death," Scripture says, "is sin," and Scripture says because of this sin "it is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment."

But for (Name), the sting, which is sin, has been removed and so also the judgment.

For Romans 8:1 says "*there is therefore now no condemnation (no Great White Throne Judgment for sin) to them who are in Christ Jesus.*"

**(3)** For (Name), this appointment has been cancelled because an earlier appointment was made and kept when she received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. Christ's death cancelled sin's penalty and its judgment was born by the Lord in the sinners place on the cross.

**(4)** Because of the victory of Christ, death for (Name) was a departure for home and means being in the presence of the Lord as well as in the presence of other believing loved ones.

In II Timothy 4:6, Paul wrote to Timothy "*for I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand.*"



The Greek word here for departure is "**ANALUSIS**" which is:

(a) a nautical term used of a ship which pulls up its anchor and sets sail;  
(b) it also used in a military way of an army breaking camp to move on;  
and (c) it was used of freeing someone from his chains.

Do you see? This, for the Christian, is what death is--its setting sail, its breaking camp, it's being freed from this life so we can go home.

The anchor is weighed and we set sail for the golden shore of the blessed presence of God, carried into God's presence.

Have you never been away from home and then boarded a plane or train, and as the time to depart approached, experienced that warm feeling and the thought--I am going home. This explains what death is like for the believer--it's a going home experience.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

II Corinthians 5:8 "*We are of good courage, I say, and prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.*"

There is no intermediate state. The Bible teaches us there is no soul sleep, no purgatory, but instant entrance into God's presence and home. So, heaven is our eternal home. Our Lord is there. Our friends and loved ones in Christ are there. There is neither sin nor sinful nature there to cause unhappiness.

Death for the believer is not a venture into the unknown, or a strange or alien atmosphere: it's like going home. But it is even more wonderful than that because it is a home in God's presence.

**(5)** While the ultimate wiping away of every tear awaits the final battle and the resurrection, our victory in Christ means that at death, we are ushered into the Lord's presence which brings joy unspeakable.

In this heavenly home there won't be the sorrow, the tears, and the pain that we have here, and certainly, there is no death there (Rev. 21:4).

The believer there experiences perfect happiness and all the joys which attend being in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When thinking of the glories of heaven and being at home with the Lord, the apostle Paul wrote, "I am in a straight between two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, or to abide here."

So you can see we should receive much comfort and joy if we think about what death really means to the departed believer in Christ.

**(6)** Our victory in Christ also assures us that the believer will one day experience a glorious resurrection and a glorified body like that of Christ. Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live.*"

Paul said, "*For our manner of life is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*" (Phil. 3:20-21).

This life is so often beset by ailing and painfully sick bodies, but our future body will know no such problems.

**(7)** The Word of God assures us that the victory accomplished for us by the Lord Jesus means a glorious, eternal inheritance "*an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, that faded not away, which is reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Pet. 1:3-5).

In other words, our heavenly inheritance is everything that our earthly inheritances are not.

*Our heavenly inheritance is: incorruptible in substance, undefiled in purity, unfading in beauty and joy, and reserved in heaven (kept sure) for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ by the eternal power and love of God in Jesus Christ* (Rom. 8:39).

This means that our work on earth is never forgotten and that the labor of believers will follow them into eternity. So the Apostle concludes the resurrection chapter with these words:

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:58).

**(8)** Finally, we can find further comfort in knowing "that precious in the sight of the LORD, is the death of His saints." There are no accidents with God, His timing is perfect, and He works all things together for good, for the one taken and those left (Rom. 8:28-29). When a believer is called home, it's because God's purposes for that believer are over. It's because in God's love and wisdom, He wants that believer with Him in glory.

The apostle also wrote: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

## CONCLUSION

The awful pity is when one dies and departs without faith in Jesus Christ. And I only hope that this service, which causes us all to face the realities of death and what lies beyond, will cause you, if you have never done so, to do what (Name) did, trust in Jesus Christ, to consider Him . . .

Further, may this cause each of us to reflect on the meaning of life . . .

The Psalmist exclaimed:

*Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.*

Then in Psalm 90:12, in view of the temporality of life, the Psalmist wrote,

*So teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

That is, that we may redeem the time, that, through the knowledge and application of God's truth, we may glorify God and live for Him.

May we think on these things... Amen

## XV WHY WE CAN WORSHIP GOD AT THE TIME OF THE DEATH OF OUR LOVED ONES (JOB CHAPTER 1)

On the remembrance of \_\_\_\_\_(deceased) at this funeral, it may seem strange to speak about worship, especially since, to some, our prayers for her in her suffering did not remove her suffering nor prevent her death.

In particular, we find our attention drawn to the many good things about \_\_\_\_\_, which only makes the matter of her death more painful to us.

How is it that we should worship God at a time of tragedy? The answer, I believe, can be found in the first chapter of the **Book of Job**.

We know from the first chapter of the Book of Job that he was a righteous man, a man who was blameless and who feared God and turned away from evil (1:1, 8).

We know also that he was a man blessed by God, he was rich in the goods of this world (1:3), and he was blessed with a family of ten children (1:2).

We know, as Job did not, that God had chosen to use Job as an example of a faithful man.

Satan, however, protested that anyone would worship God when God prospered him for doing so. Let his life turn sour, and then see what becomes of Job's piety," Satan challenged.

This scene in heaven is the backdrop for all the tragedy which is to follow.

I do not wish to focus on Satan's folly, however, but on Job's righteous in a time of family tragedy.

Our text tells us that wave upon wave of announcements of tragedy quickly were thrust upon this godly man. One messenger reported that all of Job's oxen and donkeys had been stolen, and the servants who kept them slaughtered (1:14-15).

Then another came to convey the news that lightning had destroyed all of his sheep, and those who tended them (1:16).

Then another came to report that a raiding band had stolen his camels and killed his servants who cared for them (1:17). The most devastating report came last. A wind had struck and collapsed the home of his eldest son, where he and all the other children were gathered, and all were had perished (1:18-19).

Satan was certain that Job's faith would collapse, like the roof of the house of his eldest son, crushing his devotion to God.

And there was good reason, in Satan's mind, for such anticipation. After all, Job was a righteous man. Why should God allow tragedy to strike not only his possessions, but his loved ones?

Even beyond this, we have been told that it was Job's habitual practice to intercede for his children, asking God's special care on them. The tragic death of his family was surely contrary to Job's righteousness, contrary to his prayers, and contrary to his faith--or so Satan reasoned.

Some of Job's responses were predictable. He tore his clothes and shaved his head--all signs of mourning and grief.

But what he did after this is the key to our comfort in the face of grief--Job fell to the ground and worshipped (v. 20), and these are his words:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."*

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

In these words we find the reason why Job could worship God, even in the greatest tragedy he had ever known--the loss of his loved ones.

As I point of the reasons for Job's worship, I want to be clear in saying that Job's grief was not inconsistent with his grief.

Job worshipped God with a torn robe and with a shaved head and a tear-stained face--all genuine tokens of his grief. But in his grief, he did not lose sight of his God.

Indeed, it was in his grief that God become ever more real. I do not wish you to think that grief is inappropriate this afternoon, for it is altogether right.

But in our grief, we will only find consolation as we are able to worship God in the face of tragedy. There are two truths revealed in these words of Job which were the basis for his worship.

### **First, Job was confident of the greatness of God.**

He said, "**The Lord** gave and **the Lord** has taken away" (v. 21).

Job understood that God was in control of His creation. Whether it be the cruel and heartlessness of a raiding army, or the forces of nature, it was, in the final analysis, God who had given him his riches and his family, and it was God who took them away. Whatever had happened, Job knew that God had allowed it, and that He was still in control.

This same truth is true of the death of (deceased). God gave her life, and God, in His own time, took her in death. Just as Job recognized this when he prayed for the protection of his family.

Just as Job remained confident, though his prayers seemed unanswered, we too must be confident of the sovereign hand of God in the suffering and death of this woman whom we have loved.

### **Second, Job was confident of the goodness of God.**

It is good to know that we can worship a God who is all-powerful, who controls every aspect of our lives. But it is even better to know that the God who is great, is also a God who is good.

When greatness and goodness are both found in God, there is every reason to worship Him. Verse 31 tells us that *Job did not sin, nor did he blame God, as though He had done wrong.*

While Job did not understand the purposes which God was working out in this tragedy, He did trust in the Person who was in control. Thus, he could worship, even in his grief.

### **What Job Did Not Know, That We Know**

Knowing the greatness and the goodness of God was sufficient basis for the faith of Job, which was revealed more in his worship at the time of tragedy than at any other occasion.

These two truths, the greatness of God and His goodness, should be sufficient for our worship, but there is even more for us, for we have been given additional revelation, which was not made known to Job at his time of sorrow.

Allow me to briefly mention these.

**We have the additional revelation of the Book of Job**, which shows us how and why God was great and good to Job.

Job not only glorified God by revealing his faith, but Job grew in his faith as he was tested.

And, the last chapter tells us that when Job's faith was strengthened, God prospered him twice as much in the end, as at the beginning (cf. 42:10-17).

## **The greatest revelation, however, is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in the words of the New Testament.**

Here we discover that the saint not only can have victory in death, but can also, through Jesus Christ, have victory over death.

During His life, the Lord Jesus raised the dead.

In John chapter 11, we have recorded the raising of Lazarus. There, our Lord assured Mary and Martha that He was the resurrection and the life, and that those who place their trust in Him would never die.

The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus staked His authority and the truth His message on His resurrection from the grave (cf. Matt. 12:38-40).

They then describe the arrest, crucifixion, and burial of our Lord, followed by His resurrection on the third day.

In the New Testament epistles, we are told that it is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ which is the basis for a man's forgiveness of sins, and for his ultimate victory over death, for our Lord will come to receive unto Himself, those who have trusted in Him.

I submit to you, that in the face of the tragedy of the death of \_\_\_\_\_ there is more than enough reason to worship God.

You will only be able to do that when you, like Job, and countless others throughout history, have placed your trust in the God who is both great and good, and who has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in your place, and to be raised to new life, for your deliverance.

I pray that because of Him you will be able to worship.

# MESSAGE FOR UNIQUE FUNERAL SITUATIONS

## ✦ Where Do Infants Go When They Die?

2 Samuel 12

### L. DEATH OF A BABY

**Background:** This was a young child, who suddenly died.

There is a passage of Scripture in the Book of II Samuel which offers each of us great comfort in the death of this little one, whose death as an infant may seem untimely,

Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. The it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!" But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "he is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, what is this thing that you have done? while the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." And he said, "while the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." (II Samuel 12:15-23).

We know the background to the death of this child all too well.

David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba and then seeking to cover it up by the murder of her husband, Uriah.

God rebuked David for his sin through Nathan the prophet. As a consequence of David's sin with Bathsheba, the child of their illicit union was stricken with a serious illness.

Throughout this period of illness, David fasted and prayed, begging God to save the life of the child.

God did not choose to restore the health of the child and it died. David's servants were very reluctant to tell him of the child's death.



They feared that his grief might be too great and he might do himself harm. They did not have to tell David, because he sensed that the child had died. When asked about it directly, they could not deny it.

The servants were shocked by what happened next.

David ceased his mourning and fasting and began to go about life normally. David's response to the child's death was the reverse of what they had expected. When they could not restrain themselves any longer, they asked him pointedly, "Why you responded this way?"

David's response is found in verses 22 and 23. It is here that we can find the faith and hope to go on living after the death of the child.

### **1. David Was Confident His Child Was in Heaven.**

While the child was still alive, David was right to beseech God for mercy and healing. But once the child was dead, David could accept this as the will of God, knowing that his child was in heaven. His statement, "*I shall go to him, but he will not return to me,*" indicated that he knew he could not bring the child back, so fasting and prayer for the child was no longer appropriate.

When he spoke of going to be with the child, he gives evidence to his faith that the child still lives, but now in heaven.

Of greatest comfort to David was the knowledge that while his sins of adultery and murder, were the cause of the child's death, this in no way changed the fact that the child was in heaven.

Why can David be so certain that his child is now in heaven?

The answer is not given in this passage.

It is perhaps most clearly explained in Romans chapter 5. There, Paul teaches us that it was Adam's sin which made each of us sinful by nature. But he also taught that the death of Jesus Christ has reversed the consequences of Adam's sin, allowing God to give eternal life to all who are "in Christ." By sinning against God, we identify with Adam, and demonstrate that we are worthy of God's judgment and death.

By trusting in Christ, we are forgiven of our sins and given the righteousness which leads to eternal life.

Infants, by virtue of being born of man and therefore are the descendants of Adam, and consequently must face physical death.

But because they have not wilfully resisted and rejected the revealed word of God, the death of Christ covers their sins and we can thus be assured that they will go to heaven.

## **2. David was assured that he would go to heaven, to be with his child.**

It is not difficult to believe that David's child would go to heaven. What is more difficult to believe is that David is certain he will be there with the child.

While the child did not sin, David had. David had taken another man's wife. David had murdered Uriah, the husband of the child's mother. What possible reason can we find for David's hope of heaven?

The answer to this is found in the 51st Psalm.

There we read that David confessed his sin to God and sought His forgiveness. If David can be assured of God's forgiveness for the sins of adultery and murder, surely you and I can be assured of forgiveness as well.

Conclusion: We may, like David, be assured that this child is in heaven, with the Lord. Our confidence in this rests in the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

There is no question as to where this child is this very moment. The only question is whether we will claim the forgiveness of God in Christ and thus be assured of heaven as well.

## II. PAIN AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD PSALM 73)

### (DEATH OF A YOUNG MOTHER)

**Background:** This is probably one of the most crucial funerals I have done. This was a young wife and mother, who died of cancer.

#### **Introduction ( Let's suppose that her name is Mary)**

A book has recently been written entitled, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. I do not agree with its message, but the problem which is raised is surely a valid one. Mary was a good person, and her cancer was surely a bad thing. We must agree, in a sense at least, that a bad thing has happened to a good person. The answer to the problem of pain is not found in a contemporary book, however, but in an ancient book--the Bible. It is found in many places in the Bible, but none quite as precious to me as in the 73rd Psalm.

This psalm is the testimony of an ancient Israelite, but it is also the testimony of Mary. The last time that I read Scripture to Mary, I chose to

read this psalm. When I finished the psalm Mary told me that this text beautifully described her relationship with God as she struggled with the reality of her cancer. It is our prayer that you will find the same comfort from this portion of God's Word that Mary has, along with countless men and women down through the centuries.

Psalm 73 is the honest confession of a faithful Israelite, concerning his own struggle with the problem of pain.

Asaph, the author, is the choir leader, whose occupation placed him in constant contact with the people of Israel, and with the sanctuary of God, the temple. He was, I believe, a godly man during the time of his personal struggle. He was a more godly man afterwards.

Let us consider the confession of Asaph with the purpose of understanding how a good God can allow pain and suffering to come into the life of the saint.

### **The Psalmist's Problem**

#### **Psalm 73:1-14**

#### ***The Premise: The Goodness of God -- Verse 1***

The first half of the psalm (verses 1-14) describes the problem of the psalmist in detail. His problem stems from a premise, a fact about the God whom he loved and served, a fact which was foundational to his faith:

Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! (v. 1)

This truth was fundamental and foundational to the faith of every godly Israelite. God is good, Asaph believed. In particular, God is the God of Israel, and is good to those Israelites who are pure in heart.

#### ***Asaph's Perceptual Problem: Envy -- Verses 2-3***

In and of itself, there is nothing about this fact that would trouble Asaph, since he considered himself an Israelite who was pure in heart. The problem is that this foundational truth seemed to be contradicted by the reality of life which Asaph had observed. In verses 4- 9 Asaph's practical problem is detailed, but before telling the reader what troubled him, the psalmist first made a confession, which should cause us to question the objectivity of Asaph:

But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, As I saw the prosperity of the wicked (vv. 2-3).

The practical problem with which Asaph wrestled was the "prosperity of the wicked," but let us take note that Asaph's observations which follow

are those made through the eyes of an envious man, a man who was angered because he did not possess the prosperity which the wicked were experiencing.

### ***The Problem: The Prosperity of the Wicked -- Verses 4-9***

Asaph's problem was the result of an apparent contradiction between his faith (as founded in the principle of verse 1) and the "facts" (as reported in verses 4-9). God was supposed to be good to the Israelite who was pure in heart, and yet it appeared that He was good to the wicked. The wicked seemed to have no pain, and their prosperity was painfully evident in their sleek, even fat, bodies (v. 4). The adversities of life seemed to pass them by. They seemed immune to the problems of life.

If this was not enough, the attitudes and actions of the wicked were such that they "rubbed salt in the wound" of the righteous. They were violent and cruel, and rather than being shamefaced, they were proud and arrogant. They boasted of their wickedness and their minds continued to conjure up further evil. They not only boasted before men, they even seemed to shake their fists in the face of God.

### ***The Scepticism of the Saints -- Verses 10-14***

I am not certain whether all of the "wicked" who are described in the preceding verses were Israelites, but I am convinced that those described in verses 10-14 are. As the people of God looked about and saw that the wicked were prospering, they wrongly reasoned that if God was supposed to be good to the pure in heart something must have gone terribly wrong.

God's people seem to have adopted the same evil practices as the pagans. They, too, doubt that God either knows or cares. They see prosperity as something which they bring on themselves, and more by practicing evil than by living righteously. They prosper in their wickedness and are always at ease, even while they dare God to act in judgment.

Asaph is close to joining the wicked among his brethren, and this he frankly confesses to the reader:

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long, And chastened every morning (vv. 13-14).

The premise seemed to promise that the righteous would prosper and that the wicked would suffer pain and adversity, and yet the (apparent) reality was that the wicked prospered and the righteous suffered. Asaph was thus tempted to forsake righteousness and to join the wicked. Asaph was dangerously close to forsaking his faith because it appeared that God was not good to the pure in heart.

## ***A New Perspective -- Verses 15-28***

Asaph is intensely honest in revealing his innermost thoughts and temptations. He was considering giving it all up, and joining the wicked. He suffered great agony of soul, until he had a change in perspective. This change took place when he entered the sanctuary of God (v. 17). This was the dwelling place of God in the Old Testament days. This was the place where time met eternity and where appearances could be distinguished from reality. This was the place where the present "realities" could be viewed in the light of eternal "realities."

Here, Asaph was reminded that the prosperity of the wicked was only momentary. The feet of the wicked are on slippery ground. Their destruction had not yet come, but it would come, and quickly, suddenly, irreversibly. The present prosperity of the wicked was but a dream, and their ultimate destiny a dreaded reality. God does despise the wicked and He will judge them. There is nothing to envy here!

In contrast to the fate of the wicked, the psalmist now views his own circumstances in an entirely different light, from a divine perspective. His present state was one of bitterness and anguish. He was senseless and ignorant. His perception was wrong, and yet even in this spiritual state God was with him. Better still, God would always be with him, in time and in eternity:

Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou has taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, And afterward receive me to glory (vv. 23-24).

## ***The Ultimate Good: The Presence of God -- Verses 25-28***

The psalmist closes with the only appropriate response to this new perception of life's circumstances--praise. The presence of God is the only ultimate good. In the light of this, present prosperity is of no great value, and thus the desire for material prosperity diminishes:

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth (v. 25).

Thus, even physical pain and bodily deterioration are no longer dreaded:

My flesh and my heart may fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (v. 26).

The temporary prosperity and pleasure of the wicked will shortly come to an end in their destruction:

For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; For Thou has destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee (v. 27).

Asaph's problem with the "goodness" of God and the prosperity of the wicked is now seen to be rooted in a defective definition of "good" and "evil". Before, he had equated "good" with "prosperity" and "evil" with "adversity," but now he understands "good" in terms of the presence of God:

But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works (v. 28).

## **Conclusion**

The experience of Asaph as recorded in the 73rd psalm conveys three vital principles, which I believe are the basis for our comfort in the suffering and death of Mary.

### **(1) First, the ultimate good in life is not prosperity, nor the absence of pain, but the nearness of God.**

The miraculous healing, for which many of us prayed, would not have brought Mary as close to the Lord as her prolonged pain. I cannot fully explain why pain drives us closer to God than prosperity, but it is so. The prosperity of the wicked in [Psalm 73](#) only caused the wicked to become more arrogant and to draw farther away from God.

Asaph's pain was the instrument which God used to draw him even near to Himself than ever before. I, along with the others who spent time with Mary during her illness, can testify that Mary's pain drew her and her husband closer to God than they have ever experienced in the past.

If Mary's illness and its pain brought her nearer to God, her death has brought her even nearer. This is what the psalmist has said. He could look death and eternity in the face because it could only bring him into the full and timeless presence of God (vv. 24-26). While death has separated Mary from us, it has brought her into the very presence of the God, whose presence is her highest good.

### **(2) Second, pain serves the good purpose of putting life and death, pain and prosperity into perspective.**

Asaph found that the problem of pain served to reverse his priorities. Before, Asaph saw prosperity as the highest good, and to be sought at any cost. Now, Asaph can see the nearness of God to be the ultimate good, and worth the cost of suffering, pain, and death. Physical freedom from sickness and pain, from poverty or adversity, came to mean little to Mary, while God's presence became her highest goal. Her sickness and death changed her priorities.

### **(3) Third, we can see from Asaph's experience that dealing with the problem of pain is a process.**

Asaph had to work through the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. It was only after time and agony that he could profess the goodness of God and the preciousness of His presence. So it is for all of us.

I want to tell you that Mary could identify with this psalm because she was able to identify with the process. Initially she was inclined to think that if God was good to her He would heal her, delivering her from pain and from death. In the last days of her life, when her body began to reflect the ugliness of cancer, she radiated the beauty and glory of God.

Mary told me that on one of her darkest days the sustaining reality was that God was nearer to her than He had ever been before. Her last words were to tell the children not to fear death. I believe that one of the reasons why Mary's illness was so prolonged was that God was giving her the time required to complete the process which Asaph and every saint experiences in their pain.

May I ask you, my friend, can you, at this moment find the comfort and the joy in Mary's cancer and death which she and her husband have found? Is the nearness of God dearer to you than material prosperity, than the absence of pain, than deliverance from death? As we conclude this funeral service I want to share with you as candidly as I can the way you can experience the nearness of God in your life. This was Mary's desire, and all who know the goodness of God as well.

Men are not near to God, but they are, according to the Bible, "far off." The reason is that men have sinned. The intimacy which Adam and Eve experienced with God in the garden of Eden ended with their disobedience. They hid themselves from the presence of God were put out of the garden, where God's presence was once so sweet. From that day on, men have experienced alienation, separation from God. Nearness to God is not something which we are born with, not something which comes naturally. The Bible says that we were born as enemies of God, fighting against Him and struggling to get away from Him. Sickness, suffering and death are some of the tangible results of man's sin.

The beautiful story of the gospel is that consequences of sin--sickness and sorrow and death--are the very things which God has ordained as His instruments to bring men back into the enjoyment of His presence. Jesus Christ came to the earth, adding humanity to His deity, so that He could experience suffering and death. He suffered and died on the cross of Calvary, not for His sins, but for ours. His words from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me," are testimony to the alienation from God which He suffered for us, in our place.

If you would have the nearness to God which Mary experienced, then you must first recognize that your sin has separated you from God, has made you His enemy. If you would be brought near to God, you must draw near by trusting in Jesus Christ as the one who experienced suffering and death in your place, for your sins. I pray that you might do that this very hour, and find the nearness of God to be your highest good.

### III. THE LORD IS FAITHFUL (SUICIDE)

#### 1. The Lord's words are certain

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will not pass away."  
(Mark 13:31)

#### 2. The Lord's salvation/forgiveness is adequate for every sin.

John 10:27-29

Romans 8:31-39

#### 3. The Lord is faithful to His promises

#### 4. Benediction

1 Thess. 5:23-24

### IV. GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS

**Background:** The death of a child.

Isaiah 55:89; James 1:2-5 and Philippians 4:4-7 emphasize several truths we need to know and be reminded of:

#### **God's Ways are Not Our Ways**

#### **Isaiah 55:89**

1. He is infinite--we are finite.
2. He knows the end from the beginning while we see just a short part of the now.
3. He knows the whys, while we grasp for wisdom.
4. Examples through scripture and experience clearly illustrate that His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

(In spite of our difficulty in understanding God's ways and thoughts, He in His mercy and promise provides.)



## **God Promises Us Help in Difficult Times (James 1:2-5 and Philippians 4:4-7)**

In these verses God promises us some vital things for times like this.

### **First, He promises wisdom instead of confusion. (James 1:5)**

- The context is trials.
- God will allow us to understand and to see the good as we ask in faith believing.
- He promises us wisdom to understand the thoughts and ways of the infinite God.

### **Second, these verses tell us that God promises peace instead of anxiety (Phil. 4:4-7).**

- A peace that passes understanding.
- A peace that stands as a sentry to guard your hearts and thoughts
- A calmness and a rest in God.
- Both of these (wisdom and peace) are ours for the asking.
- Both are conditioned upon prayer.
- Both are ours for the asking.

May I encourage you to pour out your hearts to the Heavenly Father and express them to Him and ask Him for His wisdom to understand and His peace to guard your hearts. (There is something else that these verses emphasize that is . . . )

### **Third, these verses tell us that we can rejoice and be thankful even in the darkest hour.**

This is certainly not saying that it is wrong to sorrow and to grieve. Even our Lord grieved at the loss of a loved one and friend.

What it is saying is that even in sorrowful times we can find things for which to be thankful and rejoice. And these things are what we are to concentrate and think upon. Not what might have been but what is and shall be.

There are several things that come to my mind for which we can be thankful and rejoice.

1. First of all the reminder of Philippians 4:5 "The Lord is at hand." One of the meanings of this is that the Lord is locally near. He is with us-- as He told us "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5). He is with us and He is in control.

As Moses reminds us, "The eternal God is our dwelling place and

underneath are the everlasting arms. (Duet. 33:37) For God's presence and control we can be thankful and rejoice.

2. Second we can rejoice and be thankful that the Lord is at work in our lives.

- a. James I reminds us that through this trial you will grow in your faith as you trust God.
- b. As gold is refined and purified by fire so our faith is refined through trials.
- c. God wants to make you stronger and increase your faith in Him. He is at work in your lives and for that we can rejoice.

3. Third we can rejoice and be thankful in the knowledge that the souls of these little ones are with God. And He will care for them and bring them back with Him when He comes for us.

4. Finally we can rejoice in the families God has given to us.

- a. For the love of husband and wife.
- b. For the love and concern of Mom and Dad, brothers and sisters.
- c. For the prayers and concern of your church family and friends.
- d. You are not going through this alone. We love you and want to carry the burden with you.

## **Conclusion**

1. So we've seen though God's ways are not ours nor His thoughts our thoughts.

2. Yet he offers us:
- a. Wisdom instead of confusion.
  - b. Peace instead of anxiety.
  - c. As we ask in faith believing.

3. We also saw that our minds are to be occupied not on what might have been, but what is? (i.e. even in times like this we can rejoice and be thankful).

- a. That God is with us and in control.
- b. That the Lord is at work in your lives.
- c. That these little ones are with Christ.
- d. That our families and friends want to bear these burdens with you.

4. I thank God (Parent's names) that I see these things already reflected in your lives and I challenge you to continue to go to God in prayer for wisdom and peace, and to spend your time meditating on these things for which we can rejoice and be thankful.

## **Committal**

In that it has pleased our heavenly Father, who loaned these little ones to us for this short time, to take them back to Himself, we commit their bodies to the ground. Looking for that blessed hope; when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

## V. "GOD'S TIME" IN THE FACE OF WHAT SEEMED AN UNTIMELY DEATH

(Vehicle Accident: Lets name her Mary)

**Background:** Here is the funeral for a young woman. She had struggled in her Christian life and just returned to fellowship with Him. She was killed in a car accident on her way to SCHOOL.

The death of this lovely young woman, at the prime of her life, may seem to some to be untimely. In the sense that it catches us unprepared and overcomes us with grief, this is no doubt true. But from a biblical perspective Mary's death is not untimely at all. I would like to share the Scriptural truths which can bring us great comfort as we see the timeliness of Mary's death. If believed, these biblical truths will enable us to grieve as those who have the hope which God alone can place in our hearts at a time like this.

**First, the Bible assures us that Mary's death was not untimely, because this was God's appointed time for her to die.**

When Job was informed of the tragic death of his children, he responded, *"The Lord Gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord"* (Job 1:21).

Even when faced with the tragic news of the death of his children, Job knew that their death did not take God by surprise. Job was comforted in knowing that just as God had given him his children in birth, so it was God who had taken them in death.

Job's theology is also that of David, who wrote, "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them" (Ps. 139:16).

This passage informs us that from eternity past, the number of Mary's days, like yours and mine, were foreordained. Her death came earlier than we would have expected, but it was God's appointed time, and therefore it cannot be untimely, for God does all things well.

**Second, Mary's death was not untimely because she was ready to die.**

The timeliness of death has nothing to do with one's age, but it has everything to do with one's relationship to the God who made them, and who takes them in death at His appointed time.

The most significant event in her life came at the age of five, when Mary personally entrusted her soul to Jesus Christ, believing in Him as her Savior.

In these last few weeks God has also worked in Mary's life in such a way as to bring her to the point where she desired to be obedient to God's call and committed her life to serve Him. She gave up a good job and at the moment of her death was on her way to a Christian college where she had planned to prepare for a life of service to God by serving others.

God chose to call Mary home before she reached that school and before she could begin her anticipated ministry, but the important thing is that she had chosen to be obedient to His will. What better time to be called home than at a time of dedication and commitment to Him. Such a home-going is never untimely.

**Third, Mary's death cannot be called untimely because she was not only ready to die, she was eager to be with her Lord, in whose presence she now abides forever.**

When a person does not have a saving faith in Christ, death is a dreaded foe to be avoided as long as possible. For the Christian, death is not a dreaded foe, but a defeated enemy (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58). The Christian's only dread is to die in a condition for which we will be ashamed as we stand in the presence of God (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:5). Death is actually a way of life for the Christian, for we are told by our Lord that we must daily "take up our cross" (Luke 9:23), an instrument of death, to follow Him.

In one sense, death is a welcomed deliverer to the Christian, for it is a means of gaining immediate entrance into the presence of Christ. Paul wrote,

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by sight--we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-8).

When faced with the possibility of death for his faith in Christ, Paul found himself torn between his desire to live, and thus to give his life in service to others, or to die, and to be with Christ:

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake (Phil. 1:21-24).

For the Christian there is not greater hope or joy than that of being in the presence of the Lord. Mary's desire was to prepare to serve God by attending a Christian college in California, but when faced with the choice of serving Him here or in His presence, there is no doubt what that choice would be. There is a sense in which every Christian here at this funeral service envies Mary, as she now stands in His presence.

## **Finally, Mary's death should not be considered untimely because of the timeliness of the message God is speaking to us through her death.**

When the apostle Paul considered the options of life or death, he believed that God would give him added years of life because it was through his life that he could minister to the saints. Paul left the matter of his life or death in God's hands, knowing that He would do what was best.

While God chose to spare Paul's life, at least for a time, He has chosen to take Mary home to be in His presence. This strongly suggests to me that God has chosen to speak to us through Mary's death, rather than through her life. Let me suggest some of the things which her life and death should teach us.

### **A Reminder of the Brevity and Uncertainty of Life**

We were all shocked by the news of Mary's death because we assumed that she had many more years of life to live. The Bible reminds us, however, that life is uncertain and fleeting. James writes,

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away ([James 4:13-14](#)).

Mary's death reminds us that we dare not presume on the future. We have only the present moment to serve God and our neighbors. The future is uncertain and life is fleeting.

### ***We Must be Prepared to Die***

We must be prepared to stand before a Righteous God, who will be either our judge or our Savior. We have already seen how God worked in Mary's life, not only in saving her at an early age, but also in bringing her to a place of submission and obedience to His will. How joyful it is for her to now stand in the presence of God. But what if it were you, my friend, who had died? What would be your response to God?

Mary can stand confidently before God because she trusted in the death of Jesus Christ for her sins, and in His resurrection from the grave for her resurrection. I pray that Mary's death may be the instrument which God uses to prepare some of you for the day on which you will stand before God.

### ***God Will Have Other Workers***

Mary's death also faces us with the reality that the work which she might have done, God will have others of us do. One of the most significant events in my life was the funeral service of a young minister who died in an automobile accident, while he was working with the young people at our church. I want to challenge you young people to consider the possibility that God may want you to do some of the work which Mary was willing and eager to do.

My prayer is that as God has spoken through Mary's life, and now, through her death, you and I might be attentive to that message as it applies to each of us.

## Psalm 23 (Car Accident)

**Background:** I think this man was a believer who may have been out of fellowship with the Lord and died in a senseless car accident. He was known as a loving son, a man of many friends, and a young man with a positive outlook on life. He freely expressed his love for his mother and others. Most importantly he was known, by those closest to him, to be a man whose trust was placed in Jesus Christ for his salvation.

I will be reading several passages of Scripture, which express the faith and the hope of the child of God when confronted with the ugly reality of death. These passages reflect the faith of Mr. Smith's family, which they desire me to share with you.

**Isaiah 57:1-2** The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.

**Job 1:17-22**

. . . another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart." The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

**Psalm 23**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, 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. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

**Message**

The words of the 23rd Psalm, which I read a few moments ago, are familiar to nearly everyone, even those who seldom attend church or read the Bible. This psalm speaks of the comfort and security of the child

of God, even in the face of death. More specifically, this psalm bears testimony to the faith which those who knew Mr. Smith were assured that he possessed, and of which he spoke.

In the agriculturally oriented world of the ancient Near East, the literary imagery of a shepherd and his sheep was immediately grasped. David, who is the psalmist, spoke of His relationship with God as being like that of a sheep, who is comforted, guided, and protected by a faithful shepherd. He acknowledged that every blessing he experienced was the result of the leading of his shepherd. Following the imagery of the psalm, these blessings were "green pastures," "still waters," "restoration of his soul," and "guidance in the right path." In short, all blessings came from God.

David was a man who had experienced adversity as well as affluence and ease. Thus, this psalm also speaks of the comfort which David, as a sheep, experienced in the trials of life. Summing all adversity up in terms of the worst trial of life, David spoke of the ultimate enemy of man--death. He does not say that God has led him to the valley of death, for death is the consequence of man's rebellion against God. He does say that even in death, God is with Him, and thus he need not fear any evil. Indeed, death is referred to as "the valley of the shadow of death" for the shadow is but a reflection. For David, death was not the ultimate enemy, but only a shadow, something which one could pass through unharmed. You may not walk through a wall, but you can pass through its shadow unharmed.

David's hope and joy was not merely a matter of the present, but also of the future. After death David looked forward to spending eternity in God's presence. David changes his imagery and speaks of the joys of heaven as that of a great banquet, which God has prepared for him. His enemies will look on in wonder as God anoints his head with oil. Goodness and mercy will follow after David, as He will live forever in the house of the Lord.

This Old Testament psalm depicts in poetic form the hope of the child. It was a hope which saw the enemy of death as but a passing incident, and ultimately only an event which would only usher the child of God into the presence of God. No wonder men and women have found comfort in this psalm. Notice, however, that the comfort and joy of the psalmist is his because the LORD was **his** shepherd. David did not fear death and he delighted in the hope of living in God's presence for all eternity because he had come to trust in God as **his** shepherd.

IF WE WOULD EXPERIENCE THE COMFORT OF WHICH THIS PSALM SPEAKS, WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE GOD AS OUR SHEPHERD. This becomes clearer in the Old Testament, finally explained in the New.

In the Old Testament, God was spoken of as Israel's shepherd. The promise and hope of God's people was that someday God would come to the

earth in human flesh to shepherd those who trusted in Him. Through the prophet **Ezekiel**, God promised,

"I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice" (Ezek. 34:15-16).

In addition to the figure of a shepherd, **the coming Christ was also referred to as a lamb**. This is because it was necessary for the Christ to take the place of His people, to bear their punishment, so that they could share in His blessings. Specifically, He would have to die in the place of the sinner, and then to be raised again. Thus, **Isaiah the prophet wrote**,

we all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa. 53:6-7).

**In the New Testament**, the writers of the gospels therefore speak of the Christ who came to the earth as a babe in the manger as both the "lamb of God" and the "shepherd." When **John the Baptist** introduced the Lord Jesus he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

When **Jesus referred to Himself as the "good shepherd"** He was identifying Himself as the promised Messiah, the Christ for whom the Old Testament saints looked. Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

The Lord Jesus did lay down His life. He was nailed to a cross. He was buried in a tomb that was sealed shut and guarded by Roman soldiers, and yet, in spite of this, He rose from the grave, appeared to hundreds, and then ascended to heaven, from which He will return.

Because of this, the apostle **Peter** could encourage his readers by telling them that the "Chief Shepherd" will someday appear and will reward those who are faithful (1 Pet. 5:4). In the **book of Revelation**, the apostle **John** spoke of those who suffer in the great tribulation period, yet to come, saying,

"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:14b-17).



The unnamed author of the epistle to the Hebrews concludes his epistle with this benediction:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

I do not in any way wish to minimize the sorrow and grief which the family and loved ones of OUR BROTHER are experiencing. Nor will I attempt to explain the purposes of God in taking him home at such an early age.

But what I do know, along with all those present who have come to know Jesus Christ as their Great Shepherd, that death is but a shadow, and that once we have passed through this valley, this shadow, we enter into the eternal presence of God.

And because of this, we can find comfort in the assurance that those in Jesus who experience death have entered into the presence of God. This is not mere wishful thinking. It is the promise of the Word of God. It has been the source of comfort to all those who have faith in Christ.

Thus, the apostle **Paul**, when facing the possibility of his own execution as a martyr of the faith could write,

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Phil. 1:20-24).

Again, in his second epistle to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote,

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. . . We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6, 8).

There is great sorrow for each of us at the passing of Mr. Smith, but for the Christian who knows Jesus Christ as the Great Shepherd, there is also joy and hope. This hope is based upon the Word of God, in which we read,

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we

tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

The only question which remains is this: **IS THIS HOPE YOUR HOPE? IS JESUS CHRIST YOUR GREAT SHEPHERD?** The faith and confidence in the face of death of which the Bible speaks is not the possession of all, but only of those who have personally trusted in Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that all have sinned, and that the wages of sin is death. Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. He died in your place, bearing your punishment, so that your sins might be forgiven and you might live eternally in His presence.

The family and loved ones who knew our dear brother have indicated to me that they are assured of his faith in Jesus Christ as his shepherd. The promises of the Bible are promises in which we can find comfort regarding the present blessing which Mr. Smith has in the presence of God. Is the Lord Jesus Christ your shepherd? If He is, you need not fear the valley of the shadow of death, for He is with you.

### **Closing Prayer**

### **Graveside Service**

#### **2 Kings 6:15-17**

**Background:** The king of Syria intended to put Elisha, the prophet of God to death. He surrounded the place where Elisha and his servant were staying. The servant was stricken with fear. Elisha, however, responded,

"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Ki. 6:15-17).

#### **2 Kings 2:9-12**

**Background:** Elijah, the prophet of God was about to depart, and Elisha, his servant who was to take his place, knew it, and so he would not leave him. Finally Elijah gave Elisha one last request, to which he responded,

"Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. And Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more (2 Ki. 2:9b-12a).

- These two passages remind us of a very important truth. There are things going on around us, which are normally not visible to us.
- In the case of the horsemen and chariots of fire which Elisha's servant was enabled to see, in answer to the prophet's prayer, these were angelic hosts, assigned to protect God's prophet.
- The servant's fear was based upon his lack of awareness of all that was taking place around him. We are thus all reminded that God's angels are all about us, and that nothing can harm us apart from the permission and will of God.
- The chariot and horses of fire which took Elijah into heaven remind us of another fact. While it is not normally visible to us, I believe that the angels are also employed in "escorting" the spirits of those who have died "in the Lord" into God's presence.
- I know that apart from divine enablement, our brother's departure was not at all glorious. But I believe that this text assures us that there was much more to be seen, just as was the case with Elisha's servant in chapter 6.
- We have come here to lay \_\_\_\_\_ body in the ground, but his entrance into heaven took place on Sunday, in a much more glorious way than our eyes can behold.
- The apostle Paul reminds us in the New Testament that the depositing of the physical body in the ground is necessary, since mortal bodies must be exchanged for those which are immortal.
- He also tells us that placing this body in the soil is like the planting of a seed in the soil.
- Thus, we do so looking forward to the time of the resurrection and transformation of this body.

### **1 Cor. 15:35-58**

These are promises for the Christian, for those who have trusted in the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of their sins. Let us find hope in them as those who trust in Him.

## VII. DEATH: A TERRIFYING REALITY

### (Death from Cancer Became Believer in Final Days)

**Background:** This gentleman had no spiritual interest until after he learned that he was dying of cancer.

He made a profession of faith in his last days and began to speak openly with me about his relationship with God. He was not only reading the Scriptures; he was trying to memorize them.

The Bible makes it clear that death is a certainty for us all:

**And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27).**

If this text of Scripture is true, death is especially frightening, because it does not end it all, it precedes judgment. Death is a terrifying reality for those who are outside the Christian faith:

14 since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Why is death such a dreaded thing (Hebrews 2)?

1. Death is our enemy. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul calls it the last enemy.
2. Death is appointed to all men (Hebrews 9:27).
3. Death holds men in fear (Hebrews 2:14-15).

How can a God who is good allow men to die?

1. He is a good God, who because He is righteous, hates sin.
2. He is a good God who must take sin seriously, but punishing it. Death tells us how seriously God takes sin. Death tells us how seriously we should take our own sin.
3. He is a God whose Word is always true, and this God has told us that the wages of sin is death (see Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 6:23).
4. He is a good God, who has not only made death a curse, but a cure for sin.

5. He is a good God, who not only sent His Son to die on the cross for sinners; He raised Him from the dead.

6. God is good, and He has given us His Word, the Bible, and Christians who proclaim the good news that death can be defeated through faith in Jesus Christ.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus died for sinners, bearing their penalty for sin. And not only did He die for sin, He was raised from the dead, so that He and all who have trusted in Him may live forever in the joy of His salvation (Romans 3:21-26).

(Romans 3:21-26).

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus

For our Scripture reading, I read a portion from the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of John.

There, John tells us about a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Jesus tells this man that he must be born again. And this man is a very well known teacher of the Old Testament.

He is a very religious man. We are not shocked in the next chapter (4) that Jesus would tell a Samaritan woman (who was living immorally) that she needed to be saved.

But Jesus also told this religious man that he, too, must be born again. Being born again is what happens when we confess that we are sinners, deserving of death, but trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

Faith in the Lord Jesus takes away the fear of death.

Death is our last enemy, but a defeated enemy. It is my prayer that you will trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins, for victory over death and the grave, and for eternal life.

**I close with these words of triumph, in which everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation can rejoice!**

(Romans 8:31-39):

31 what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).

## VIII. COMFORT AND HOPE IN THE FACE OF DEATH (Death from AIDS)

**Background:** This funeral was for the brother of one of our church members. He had lived a wild life, and none of the family even knew where he had been living for some time.

Then he re-appeared with a wife and family, and shortly thereafter learned that his lifestyle had resulted in his infection with AIDS.

He had believed in God since his childhood, but expressed his need and desire to be saved. He then prayed a very brief prayer, expressing his response to the offer of salvation. I then conducted this service a few days later, which was attended by many young people...

This message is the hope of salvation and eternal life. It is not only the message which he received, and in which he found hope and comfort; it is the only message which can give each of you comfort and hope in the face of death.

1. There is no righteousness any man can produce which is good enough to obtain God's approval and eternal life.

Matthew 5:20 "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

John 3:3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again. He cannot see the kingdom of God."

Romans 3:10-11, 20 "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE. . . . By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:10-11, 20).

2. There is no sinner so bad that God's grace in Christ cannot forgive him and make him righteous in Christ.

- ✦ Luke 7:37-50 -- the woman with a sinful past and a bad reputation
- ✦ Luke 23:39-43 -- the thief on the cross
- ✦ John 4:3-42 -- the Samaritan Woman
- ✦ John 8:1-11 -- the woman caught in the act of adultery, who was condemned to death by the Law
- ✦ Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-22; Philippians 3:1-11; 1 Timothy 1:12-16
- ✦ The apostle Paul, who before his conversion persecuted the church, who imprisoned and put Christians to death.

3. There is but one way by which God has made it possible for men to be forgiven, and to have the assurance of eternal life -- Jesus Christ.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me."

Romans 10:9-10 ". . . if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

For the Scripture says, 'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.'

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:6-9 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord -- for we walk by faith, not by sight -- we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

As we come here this morning, to honor the memory of our dear brother, we come face to face with the ugly reality of death. The words of comfort, which I shared, can also be the basis of your comfort as well. I urge you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the remedy for your sin, and as the only basis for righteousness and eternal life.

## A Hope Which Exchanges Fear for Faith

Psalms 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Those who have personally trusted in Jesus Christ can also give thanks for the failures and the faults of those who have touched their lives, and have passed on.

While we do not focus on one's failures at the time of their death, we must all admit that there are failures.



The Christian can be thankful for the failures of those whose lives have touched their own because of the assurance that "God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Because of this, Joseph could not only forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery, he could recognize the good hand of God in this cruel act, providing him with the opportunity to return good for evil, and to spare the lives of his own family, even though they had not spared his (see Genesis 37-45; 50:20).

It is my privilege to share with you in the grief and the joy of fondly recalling the good things which God brought into our lives by the deceased.

But as a preacher of the gospel, it is also my obligation to remind you that our eternal destiny is not determined by the ratio of our good deeds to our faults and failures, which the Bible more frankly calls sin.

At the beginning of the service, a very familiar passage was read--Psalm 23.

This psalm is a favorite, especially when one brought fact to face with the grim reality of death. It describes, in poetic terms, the peace and confidence which David has, in the face of adversity and opposition from his enemies, and even death.

There is another passage, not nearly as familiar, which informs us that David's sense of peace and security is not natural, but supernatural. Consider these words, from the pen of the unknown author of the New Testament Book of Hebrews:

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives  
**(Hebrews 2:14-15).**

This passage puts Psalm 23 into perspective. It tells us that death normally produces fear, and not faith.

It tells us that the fear of death hinders and haunts men all of their lives. It tells us that David's faith, as expressed in Psalm 23 is not natural, but supernatural.

As we come to honor the life and memory of \_\_\_\_\_, we come also to face the reality of death.

We come, knowing that we, too, shall experience death. If we are honest with ourselves, some must admit that facing death today is a fearful experience, just as Hebrews informs us.

Others can truly identify with David, and the peace and security which he knew and cherished. In his epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul described these two contrasting responses to death in these words:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Paul expects Christians to view death differently than the rest. Christians, he tells us, will grieve, but they will grieve in hope. The rest have no hope. What is that hope? What is it that makes the difference?

My privilege on this occasion is to share with you how you can grieve with hope.

My joy and delight is to share with you how you can exchange the fear of death for the faith of David.

In the next few moments, I want to offer to you the hope which David experienced, and which he expressed in Psalm 23. The source of this hope is to be found in the texts of both passages which you have heard today.

Let me make a few comments about the hope which God offers to all those who face death, a hope which exchanges fear for faith.

David did not fear. He did not fear what his enemies would do to him. He did not fear death. His fear was replaced by faith. The basis of David's faith is expressed in Psalm 23.

**First**, David's faith rested in God.

**Second**, David's faith rested in the fact that God was His shepherd.

**Third**, David's faith replaced his fear of his enemies, and even of death.

**Fourth**, David's fear of death was gone because he was assured of God's presence.

**Fifth**, David's faith rested in the fact that God was present with him, in life, in death, and throughout all eternity.

The text which I have just read from the Book of Hebrews expands on David's words in Psalm 23, explaining how David's faith in God can free him from the fear of death. The writer to the Hebrews gives us two vitally important truths, which explain the faith of David in Psalm 23.

## **(1) The Shepherd became a sheep**

In Psalm 23, David describes himself as a sheep, and the Lord as his Shepherd. In the Old Testament, the sins of Israel were temporarily atoned for by the sacrifice of a lamb. Isaiah the prophet spoke of the coming Savior as a Lamb, who would suffer for the sins of men:

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

John the Baptist was a prophet, the prophet whose privilege it was to introduce Jesus of Nazareth as God's Messiah. When John saw Jesus, he cried out,

**"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**  
(John 1:29)

David could rejoice because the Lord, his Shepherd, was with Him. We can now see that the Good Shepherd became a sheep (like David).

(2) The Lamb of God died for us, and triumphed over death by His resurrection

Not only did Jesus Christ come as the Lamb of God, to die for those who would be His sheep. Jesus rose from the dead, triumphant over death. And thus, those who trust in Him need no longer fear death. Death was defeated by the Lamb who was slain, and who rose again.

Let me illustrate from the life of Abraham, how the fear of death imprisons us as slaves, and how faith in Jesus Christ frees us.

- ◇ Abraham is perhaps one of the most well-known Old Testament patriarchs. The Jews boasted that they were his descendants. But Abraham, like all men, feared death, and this fear enslaved him.
- ◇ God had called Abraham from his homeland and brought him to the land of Israel, which He promised to give to him and his descendants.
- ◇ God promised to bless Abraham through his offspring. But Abraham and Sarah were unable to bear children.
- ◇ They were old, and over a period of time child-bearing became a human impossibility.
- ◇ When a famine came to the land of Canaan, Abraham took Sarah, his wife, to Egypt.
- ◇ Knowing that his wife was beautiful, and fearing that the Egyptians would kill him, in order to marry his wife, Abraham instructed Sarah to lie, and to represent herself as his sister, not his wife.
- ◇ This made her eligible for marriage, and it seemed to put the promise of God at risk, because the promised "seed" was to come through the union of Abraham and Sarah.

- ◇ Now, there was the danger that Sarah would become the wife of an Egyptian, and bear him children.
- ◇ God protected Sarah, and spoke to Pharaoh, who was about to make her his wife. When Pharaoh rebuked Abraham, and asked why he would deceive him about his wife, Abraham admitted that he feared death.
- ◇ One might hope that this painful experience in Egypt would have cured Abraham from his deception, but it did not. On at least one more occasion, Abraham and Sarah lied again. God once again spared them.
- ◇ God solved the problem of Abraham's lying by dealing with his fear of death. He gave Abraham and Sarah a son, when they were "as good as dead" so far as child-bearing was concerned.
- ◇ Their son, Isaac, was born to them in their old age. He was truly a miracle child. After a number of years, God put Abraham's faith to its greatest test.
- ◇ He instructed him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to put him to death. It was only a test, but Abraham did not know it.
- ◇
- ◇ From the New Testament, we know why Abraham was willing to obey God, and to put his son to death. He had come to trust in God as the One who was able to raise the dead.
- ◇ God had given them a son, when they were as good as dead. Now, if he must put this son to death, God would raise him. This was Abraham's faith, and thus it overcomes his fear of death.

This is the faith of which David is writing, in Psalm 23.

This is the good news of the gospel, of which the writer to the Hebrews is speaking. Man's fear of death is well-rounded.

Death is the penalty for sin, and we are all sinners, worthy of death. But the Good Shepherd became a sheep, so to speak. He took on human flesh and lived among men.

The Lord Jesus Christ then died for our sins, and suffered the penalty, our penalty, of death. God raised Him from the dead. All those who trust in Him lose their fear of death and find the faith, peace, and hope of which David writes.

Exchanging the fear of death for faith in Jesus Christ is a personal decision. David does not speak of the Lord as "our Shepherd," but as "my Shepherd."

Have you come to grips with the reality of death as God's penalty for sin? Have you personally received Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God and as your Good Shepherd?

If so, you will no longer be enslaved by the fear of death. The words of David in Psalm 23 no longer are his expression of faith, but yours as well.

It is with this faith that we can grieve today, but we will grieve with hope, if the Lord is our Shepherd, because He became the Lamb of God in our place. May this hope be yours in this hour of grief.

READ JOHN 14:1-6. Jesus comforted his disciples--and He comforts us--by sharing four truths.

We are here today to say good-bye. Jesus knew what this experience was like.

## Death is Real

1. We must face it honestly
2. When we accept it, healing begins
3. DEATH to us means GLORY to a believer in Christ

## Heaven is Real

1. A real place
2. A prepared place
3. A perfect place - home with the Father

## Salvation is Real

1. Christ is the only way to heaven
2. Faith is the only way to be saved

## Christ's Coming is Real

1. It means resurrection
2. It means reunion
3. It means comfort today

## VIX DEATH: THE DOOR TO ETERNITY (LUKE 16:19-31)

**The death of a neighbor, a friend,** or a loved one brings us face to face with eternity.

We dare not honor the life and death of another without being reminded of the fact that we, too, will die.

The Bible teaches us that death is a kind of door leading to eternity. There is much that is mysterious about eternity, but the story which our Lord told in Luke chapter 16 opens the door, and enables us to learn some important lessons concerning the relationship between life now and life in eternity.

The story our Lord told was directed toward a hostile audience.

It was aimed at a particular group of religious people, known as the Pharisees. Luke tells us that they were "lovers of money" and that they were scoffing at His teaching (verse 14).

They were also those who were proud of their knowledge of the Old Testament, thinking they knew much more about their Scriptures than others (John 7:47-49).

The story is one which may be familiar to you. It is about two very different men, who in their lives lived in close proximity to each other. The first man was named Lazarus; we are not told the name of the second man, only that he was a rich man in life. Their lives are contrasted in three different ways:

1. In life--verses 19-21
2. In death--verse 22
3. In eternity--verses 23-31

The story has many lessons for us, but I wish to focus on just five:

1. First, eternity is where earthly wrongs or injustices are made right.
2. Second, our eternal destiny is not what most people expect. Eternity will come as a shock and a surprise to many, who think that they are going to heaven, and find themselves in hell.
3. Third, our eternal destiny is not determined by those things by which our society measures "success" and "significance." By human estimates, it would have been Lazarus, the poor and miserable man, who would have suffered eternally, and the rich man who would have lived in comfort.
4. Fourth, our eternal destiny is sealed by a decision we make in life, and cannot be reversed after death.
5. Fifth, the decision involves the acknowledgment and repentance of our sins, and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who died rise from the dead and proclaim the good news of the gospel and warn men of eternal judgment.

# GOD—A SHEPHERD TO ISRAEL (EZEKIEL 34)

## Introduction

On behalf of (spouse), and on behalf of the rest of the family, let me begin by thanking you for your display of care by being here this morning.

Sorrow and grief are not easy things to face

We would avoid them if we could.

We know that even Jesus wept at times.

But sorrow and grief do force us to examine life from a different perspective.

We need to be attentive to what God might want to teach us through difficult times;

Things that He may not be able to teach us at other times;

We need to be sensitive to what God would have us learn through this experience.

(Name) was not embarrassed when it came to his faith in Christ. From the jewellery he'd wear, to the way he decorated his house, both inside and out, (Name) wanted others to know where he stood in his relationship with Jesus Christ. He wanted others to know of his love for God's chosen people, the Jews, and his burning desire that they, along with all mankind, would each one come into a personal relationship with the "Eternal Most Gracious Heavenly Father."

## **Ezekiel 34:1-11**

(Name) loved God, and he loved God's Word. This morning I want to turn to one portion of Scripture which was especially meaningful to Him, and share with you in the way in which I believe (Name) would have me share. To use a phrase that's not original, I believe (Name) would desire that God's Word at this moment might comfort the afflicted, but also afflict the comfortable. Might we let God speak to each one of us from His Word.

The passage is found in the book bearing the name of the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 34.

In the first 11 verses, God uses the prophet to chastise the leaders of the nation for failing to lead the people rightly in their walk with Jehovah God. He suggests that they should have been shepherds, caring for God's flock, but instead had been feeding upon them for their own selfish gain.

Ultimately, God shares that HE would be a Shepherd to Israel.

In verse 11 we read: "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them."

Again in verse 15 He says: "I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord."

And as a shepherd to His people, we read of His care in verse 12: "As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness."

Verse 13: "I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land."

Verse 14: "I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel."

God was speaking in this case, directly to His chosen people, the Jews. But, just as today, though, He does not simply care for people as a race, but as individuals. Listen to How He cares for individuals:

Ezekiel 34:16a I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, just as real as God's care for individuals, so is His commitment to execute judgment. As a holy God, he will not tolerate sin. Listen to the scriptures as we continue in the same passage:

Verse 16b but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Verse 17 "'As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.

Verse 18 Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?

Verse 19 Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

Verse 20 "'Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.



Verse 21 Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away,

Verse 22 I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.

In verses 21-30, God is using Ezekiel to speak directly to the Jewish people. He says to them that there will be a time of difficulty for their disobedience and unbelief, but that He will remain faithful to His promises to restore them. This was one of many passages (Name) knew which declared God's love for and future plans for the Jewish people. But to all of us, God has spoken of:

1. His love and care for us, even individually. (Name) would want you to not miss the fact that God cares for you. Whatever your need, sorrow during these days, trouble tomorrow, God cares for you like a shepherd, and

2. He would not have us miss the fact that God in His justice will execute judgment. We need to each expect to face the living God.

He finished his message in Ezekiel 34 by stating:

Verse:31 "You, my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord."

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM DEATH?

**Background:** I am not sure this man was a professing Christian.

As I talked with the family yesterday I was reminded of the biblical proverb which says, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children" (13:22).

The Deceased has certainly left a great heritage to his family, his friends, and to his city. Many knew him as like a father and as friend. There is for all of you, a great heritage in the fond memories which he has left you.

A few have explained suffering, death, and tragedy by insisting that God is not good, but evil.

He uses His power, they tell us, to entertain Himself at our expense.

Most have sought consolation in the idea that while God is good, He is not so great as to be able to keep evil from making men miserable.

This solution is not acceptable because the Bible insists that God is both good and great.

The Bible helps us to accept the tragedy of death by teaching us what we would never have expected to hear--that death is good, a gracious gift from God.

To say that death is good and gracious is not to deny the evils associated with death.

Death, the Bible teaches, is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23).

Death brings separation and sorrow. Our Lord did not look forward to His death, even when He was confident that He would be raised from the grave (cf. John 10:17-18).

The Bible does teach us that God is able to use what is, in and of itself, evil, in order to bring about what is good.

So it was that God could use the sin of Joseph's brothers, who sought to do him harm, to bring about the deliverance of the nation Israel (Gen. 50:20).

Let us consider, then, how death can be called a good and gracious thing in our lives.

### **1. DEATH IS A REMINDER TO MAN OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN IN GOD'S SIGHT.**

When God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden, He warned them that if they ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). While our society has taken a casual attitude toward sin, God never has and never will. Death is a reminder of the seriousness of sin.

### **2. DEATH IS A REMINDER OF THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROMISES.**

Not only does death instruct us that God takes sin seriously, but that God takes His promises seriously. God told Adam that eating of the forbidden fruit would bring death. No man has ever avoided death, which strongly underscores that God always keeps His word. And if this is true of the warnings concerning His judgment, it is just as true of His promise of salvation.

### **3. DEATH IS GOOD BECAUSE IT GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO GLORIFY GOD BY BELIEVING IN HIM.**

In the portion of Scripture in the 11th chapter of the gospel of John which I read to you, our Lord made some startling statements about the death of Lazarus, which our Lord brought about by His delay in going to him while he was still ill.

In verse 11 our Lord told His disciples that the Son of God was to be glorified by the death of Lazarus.

In verse 15, He told the disciples that He was glad he was not present when Lazarus died, **so that they might believe**. When our Lord arrived, He spoke to both Mary and Martha about the **necessity of belief in Him as the Resurrection and the Life** (vss. 25-27, 40).

In verse 40 our Lord said that His glory was to be seen only by their belief. It is clear that many believed on the occasion of the raising of Lazarus, while many others did not (vss. 45-46).

Death is an occasion which God has designed to bring men to faith in Himself and thus to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **4. FOR THOSE OF US WHO REMAIN, DEATH IS AN INVESTMENT IN HEAVEN.**

In the sermon on the Mount our Lord taught that "where our treasure is, there our heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Knowing the Joe Smith is in heaven loosens our grasp on the things of this life and makes us hunger for heaven.

#### **5. IF DEATH IS A RESULT OF SIN, IT IS ALSO A REMEDY FOR SIN, FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST.**

It was gracious of God to terminate the life of Adam, and of all his offspring, for had man not been subject to death, he would have to live eternally as a sinner.

In the Book of II Corinthians we find these words from the inspired pen of the apostle Paul: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."

All of us who have left our youth behind can agree with Paul's words. We do find our bodies slowly deteriorating. Death is already at work in us. But while this is the result of sin, it is also the remedy. While the body is undergoing deterioration, the spirit of the saint is being renewed. The process of physical death cannot hinder the progress of spiritual renewal.

Rather than keeping us from glory, death brings us to it. In the next verses in the Book of II Corinthians Paul speaks of the joys of heaven which await the Christian:

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven . . . . Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by

sight--we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (II Cor. 5:1-2, 6-8).

For the Christian, death is the remedy for sin.

First and foremost, it is the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, which frees us from sin and its consequences:

Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God (Rom. 6:6-10).

When we come to trust in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we become a participant in His death, thus being freed from the penalty and power of death.

And when we die physically, we are freed from the presence and power of sin and enter into the totality of the life which is in Christ.

Death for the Christian is therefore **not to be dreaded**, for it looses us from sin and its consequences.

## **Conclusion**

I am convinced from the teaching of the Scriptures that the one thing which presently concerns our friend is what will happen to you at your time of death.

The one heritage which no man can leave to another, no matter how good or how godly his life, is a personal faith for each of his family and friends. That is something which each of us must decide for ourselves.

## THINGS GOD WANTS US TO KNOW

### Introduction

- 1. Sorrow and grief are never easy.**
- 2. We discover in the gospel of John that even our Lord wept at times.**

### **3. But though sorrow and grief are real to us we dare not miss the lessons God is trying to teach us through sorrow.**

- Through the loss of a loved one and friend God is able to teach us things that He could not teach us at other times, in other circumstances.
- We need to be sensitive to Him in this time.
- What then would God teach us through this experience? What can we learn? What are the lessons He wants to teach us?

### **God wants us to know that He still loves us**

- It sometimes is easy to feel that God loves us when things are going well and He doesn't love us when things aren't going well.
- We sometimes wonder how can God love us and allow the things to come into our lives that he does?
- How can God love us and allow death and sorrow to come?

### **1. The Bible responds by telling us that it is God's very nature to be loving**

- God is love. (1 John 4:8)
- His love for us doesn't change though the circumstances may.

### **2. The problem isn't that God doesn't love us but that our perspective is limited**

- God is infinite, we are finite.
- God sees the whole, we see only the part.
- God's ways aren't our ways. Is. 55:8-9 "for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."
- God in His wisdom allows sorrow to come into our lives and we must remember that His plan is best.

### **3. It is to this loving God that we can turn and know that He judges rightly and correctly.**

- Gen. 18 asks the question, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"
- We can turn to God at this time and know he is fair, just, impartial and loving. (Ps. 98:9)

### **4. Yes, in this time of sorrow it may seem as if God's love is not to be found.**

- But His word reminds us that He does love us.
- But more than this He sympathizes with us. Heb. 2:17 tells us **"Wherefore it behoved him (Christ) in all things to be made like unto**

**His brethren, that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest . . .**

- The Lord Jesus came to earth from heaven to become a man.
- He knows what it means to sorrow, to grieve.
- He sympathizes with you in your grief.

**5. In sorrow, God wants us to know He still loves us.**

- He is loving.
- He is just, and fair in judgment.
- He is sympathetic in our sorrow.

(But God not only wants us to learn something of His love while we sorrow, but)

**God Wants Us to learn Something About Life**

**1. God would remind us at a time like this that life is a gift.**

- None of us are promised another year, another month, another day. Each day is a gift from God.
- The Bible reminds us of the shortness of life by the comparisons it makes to life.
- The Bible says that a man's days are:
  - a. Swifter than a runner. (Job 9:25)
  - b. Like a swift ship. (Job 9:26)
  - c. Swifter than a weaver's shuttle.
- We are further reminded of the shortness of life by comparisons which describe life:
  - a. As a vapor. (James 4:14)
  - b. As grass. (1 Peter 1:24)
  - c. As a flower that withereth. (Job 14:2)

Yes, a time like this reminds us of the shortness of life; a life that is a gift, a life that is only one heart beat from eternity.

**2. But God would also teach us something else about life.**

- Not only is it short and a gift, but life is a time of preparation.
- For though life at times seems absurd, unreasonable, tragic, difficult and hard to understand; the Bible makes it perfectly clear that life is a time of preparation.
- For all that we know of life is not encompassed from the crib to the grave.
- The Bible reveals that there is life beyond the grave.
- The purpose of this life is to prepare for the life after the grave.

But God also would teach us another lesson through sorrow and that is . .

## God Wants Us to Learn Something about His Provision

1. It is at a time sickness and sorrow in death such as we've experienced with our friend (Name) that we realize our utter helplessness and dependence on God.

2. God doesn't always choose to heal the sick but He does promise life eternal to those who accept the gift of His son.

3. If one thing is perfectly clear in the Bible it is that the love of God (which we talked about earlier) prompted Him to send His son Jesus to earth. - To die on the cross in your place and in my place.

4. The Bible reveals, and our experience confirms that we are sinners.

- And sin's penalty is death (separation).
- Christ came to pay that penalty for us.
- He died in my place and in your place.

5. He asks that we accept that gift by faith.

a. To believe that He died for you, in your place.

b. To trust Him as your Savior and in return He promises life eternal.

6. John 3:16 summarizes God's provision "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth on Him, should not perish, but have eternal life." (You can do this right now.)

7. This is God's provision.

- A provision that can be very precious at a time like this.
- A provision that God would remind us of at a time of sorrow and grief.

### Conclusion

1. Through the sorrow and grief, God is teaching us lessons:

- We need to be sensitive.
- Lessons of His love.
- He still loves us in spite of circumstances.
- He is fair and just.
- He sympathizes with us.
- Lessons about life.
- That is a gift.
- That it is short.
- That it is to be used in preparation.
- Lessons about God's provision.
- God provides eternal life to those who by faith accept Christ's work for them on the cross.

2. These lessons if heeded can provide:

- Comfort to the grieving.
- Peace in sorrow.
- And life everlasting.

MATRIMONIAL

SERVICE OUTLINE

TAGALOG AND

ENGLISH VERSION



# MATRIMONIAL SERVICE

## PART I – PRELIMINARIES

Seating of friends

- I. SONG (This is the day)
- II. Lighting of Candles
- III. Processional of Bridal Entourage:  
(Song or WEDDING MARCH)

- ❖ Candle Sponsors
- ❖ Officiating Minister
- ❖ Best Man
- ❖ Groom with Parents
- ❖ Bible Sponsors
- ❖ Veil Sponsors
- ❖ Cord Sponsors
- ❖ Ring Bearer
- ❖ Coin bearer
- ❖ Principal Sponsors
- ❖ Bridesmaid with Groomsman
- ❖ Maid of Honor
- ❖ Flower Girl
  
- ❖ Bride with Parents

PAGBATI:

Magandang \_\_\_\_\_ mga kapatid at kaibigan. Ang sabi ng Panginoong HesuKristo, kapag mayroong dalawa o higit pang nagkakatipon sa aking Pangalan, naroon ako sa kanilang kalagitnaan.

Kaya't magbigay tayo ng kaukulang pag-galang sa ating pagtitipon ngayon sapagkat kung saan naroon ang Panginoon, ang lugar na yaon ay pinapaging-banal.

The MINISTER will say:

Ngayong Ika- \_\_\_\_\_ taong \_\_\_\_\_, ang ating mga kapatid na sina \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ ay mag papahayag ng kanilang sumpaan sa harap ng Diyos at sa harap ng mga saksing naririto para sa kanilang kanilang kasal sa araw na ito.

**Tanong:**

Sino po ang nagbibigay pahintulot sa dalagang narito na ipakasal sa binatang ito?

Buong puso at kalooban kayong pumapayag sa kasalang ating gagawin ngayon?

The father will answer:

Read:

Sinasabi sa aklat ng Genesis na iiwanan ng lalaki ang kanyang ama't ina at makikipisan sa kanyang asawa at sila'y magiging isang laman.

Sa gayong kadahilanan ay ibinibigay natin ang ating pag-sang- ayon at nawa ang pagpapala ng Panginoong Diyos ay sumakanila sa araw na ito.

Note:

After this, the groom will now approach the Bride and ask the blessings of the Bride's guardian.

Then the Bride and the Groom will now march forward together to the altar.

Call to Worship: READ PSALMS 100      WORSHIP SONG

**OPENING PRAYER: BY MINISTER**

SONG: \_\_\_\_\_

(Couple may now be seated)

MESSAGE for the COUPLE

**PART III – SERVICE CONSECRATION**

Mga minamahal, Tayo ngayo'y nagkakatipon sa harap ng Diyos at ng mga saksing naririto upang pag-isahing dibdib ang ating mga kapatid na ito sa matrimonyo ng kasal

Nasasaksihan ko ang hiwaga ng pag-ibig ng Diyos at ang gabay ng banal na Espiritu sa buhay ng dalawang ito.

Nilikha ng Diyos una si Adan at pagkatapos ang babae

Sinasabi ng Bibliya na ang babae ay nilikha para sa lalake at siya'y sumasagisag ng kababaang-loob, kagandahan at kahinahunan na siyang dapat niyang katangian.

Ang lalake ang puno at ang babae ang putong.

Hinugot sa tadyang ang babae hindi sa ulunan hindi upang dominahin o kontrolin; hindi sa paanan upang sya ay tapak-tapakan;

Siya ay hinugot sa tagiliran upang maging kapantay; sa ilalim ng bisig upang siya ay pakaingatan; malapit sa puso upang siya ay paka mahal in itangi at paka-ibigin.

1Cor 13:4-8

Ang pagibig ay mapagpahinuhod, at magandang-loob; ang pagibig ay hindi nananaghili; ang pagibig ay hindi nagmamapuri, hindi mapagpalalo.

Hindi naguugaling mahalay, hindi hinahanap ang kaniyang sarili, hindi nayayamot, hindi inaalumana ang masama;

Hindi nagagalak sa kalikuan, kundi nakikigalak sa katotohanan;

Lahat ay binabata, lahat ay pinaniniwalaan, lahat ay inaasahan, lahat ay tinitiiis.

Ang pagibig ay hindi nagkukulang kailan man...

**PART IV – EXCHANGE OF VOWS**

MINISTER: **SPONSORS WILL STAND**

**HONORING OF PRINCIPAL SPONSORS** (call out their names)

You are here today to bear witness of the renewal of vows that will take place between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. May God bless you for accepting the invitation to bless the union by your sponsorship.

MINISTER: *You may be seated.*

**(The Couple will stand)**

TO THE GROOM AND HIS BRIDE:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Ito po ay araw na ginawa ng Diyos para sa inyo.

Paalala lang po na ito ay isang commitment na gagawin nyo ng buong puso at **katapatan**

**Mayroon po ba kayong nalalamang dahilan kung bakit hindi dapat ituloy ang kasalang ito?.**

For be assured that marriage done under compulsion or pressure does not carry with it the blessings of God

TO THE GROOM:

Tinatanggap nyo po ba si, (bride) \_\_\_\_\_  
Na inyong mapapangasawa; pakamamahalin nyo sya katulad ng pagmamahal ni kristo sa iglesiya, paka-iingatan nyo siya at aalagaan ng buo ninyong buhay?

RESPONSE: OPO

TO THE BRIDE:

\_\_\_\_\_ nyo po ba si,  
\_(bride) \_\_\_\_\_  
Na inyong mapapangasawa; pakamamahalin nyo sya katulad ng pagmamahal ni kristo sa iglesiya, paka-iingatan nyo siya at aalagaan ng buo ninyong buhay?

RESPONSE: OPO

MINISTER: *Repeat these vows:* **(They will hold hands)**

The couple will express their love to each other:

GROOM: TINATANGGAP KITA, \_\_\_\_\_,  
BILANG AKING MAPAPANGASAWA MULA NGAYON AT SA PANGHABANG PANAHON; SA HIRAP AT GINHAWA; SA KAYAMANAN O KAHIRAPAN MAN; SA KALUSUGAN AT KARAMDAMAN MAN, MAMAHALIN AT ITATANGI KITA HANGAGANG KAMATAYAN.

SONG: \_\_\_\_\_ (The Couple will seat)

## PART V – THE MEANING OF SYMBOLS

(The Couple will stand)

### THE RING

(The Minister asks for the rings from the Ring bearer)

MINISTER:

sa paglipas ng panahon, ang kasal ay kinapapalooban ng ibat-ibang simbolo mula pa man noong una.

*Foremost among these is a ring.*

The ring is a circle and a circle has no beginning or end. This reflects the character and attributes of God.

God who is from eternity has put love in the hearts of men.

In placing this ring on your fingers, you are not only expressing your eternal love for each other but you are also affirming that God is love.

(The Minister gives the Bride's ring to the Groom)

MINISTER:(To the Groom) Say after me the following:

GROOM:

Tanggapin mo ang singsing na ito bilang tanda ng aking pag-ibig sa iyo at nangangakong ikaw ay aking iibigin at pakamamahalin hanggang huling sandali ng aking buhay maging sino ka man.

*(The Minister gives the Groom's ring to the Bride.)*

BRIDE:

Tanggapin mo ang singsing na ito bilang tanda ng aking pag-ibig sa iyo at nangangakong ikaw ay aking iibigin at pakamamahalin hanggang huling sandali ng aking buhay maging sino ka man.

(Pledge kneel)

### THE VEIL

MINISTER: *The veil will now be put on.* (The veil sponsors will come forward and put on the veil).

MINISTER: *Ang belo ay sagisag ng kalinisan.*

Ipinakikita rito ang pagiging wagas at kalinisan ng kalooban.

(It is also white, to symbolize virginity), Isang katangian na ipinangangaral ng Kristianismo..

Ito ay nagpapahiwatig din ng inyong relasyon sa isa't isa. Inilalagay ito sa balikat ng lalake bilang siyang puno ng sambahayan na taglay ang tungkuling pamahalaan ang pamilya at syang "provider" ng pamilya.

At sa ulunan ng babae upang ipakitang siya'y dapat mahalín at pahalagahan sa kanyang pagpapasakop sa lalake,

Ang bibliya ay nagsasabi na ang lalake ang puno ng babae ay hindi nangangahulugan na sya ang diktador ng tahanan.

Sa gayunding dahilan nahahanda ang lalake na ialay ang kanyang sariling buhay upang kali

### THE CORD

MINISTER: The cord may now be put on.  
(The cord sponsors will step forward and place it on the couple).

"The cord is a symbol of unity. It speaks of the eternal reality that in marriage man and woman become one.

Jesus Himself said that man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two shall be one.

Ang tali ay sumasagisag din na walang sinomang maaaring maghiwalay sa pinag-isa ng Diyos

### THE BIBLE

(The Minister asks for the Bible, from the Bible bearer and the Minister will give exhortation).  
(Explain the Bible, and also John 10:10 - Mat 4:4)

MINISTER: Please place your hands on the Bible. The Bible is God's Word. For it we receive the wisest of counsel, I charge you to be guided by its principles.

TO THE GROOM: \_\_\_\_\_, as the head of your family, search the pages of this book often for the spiritual guidance you will need to make wise decisions for your family.

TO THE BRIDE: \_\_\_\_\_. make the reading of the Book a daily part of your life. As the wife and mother you will need guidance that can only be found there.

TO BOTH OF YOU: Let the principles of this Book be the foundation of your family.

PRAYER: (The minister will pray for the couple)

**COMMUNION WILL NOW BE SERVED:**

(Only to the Bride and Groom)

(Best Man and Maid of Honor will serve)

WHILE SERVING: SONG: “OUR FATHER”

CANDLE CEREMONY - The couple will stand

MINISTER:

The two lighted candles that you see represents the separate lives of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

To symbolize their being united in marriage, today they will each take the candle representing them and together light the candle, which will represent as one.

They will then blow out their individual candles...

**PART VI – WEDDING CHARGE**

MINISTER: *Now let me speak to your hearts.*

Itinatagubilin ko sa inyong dalawa na sana'y maging maligaya lalo kayo sa inyo pang pagsasama.

Na kayo'y lalo pang maging tapat sa inyong sumpa sa isa't- isa.

Mula ngayon hahayo kayo ng maraming mga taon pa Patuloy ninyong taglayin ang gabay ng Panginoong diyos sa inyong buhay.

(Groom) \_\_\_\_\_. Arugain mo ang iyong kabiyak. Pagsikapan ninyong mamuhay sa Panginoon upang walang anumang maging dahilan na sya ay mapighati at lumuha.

(bride) \_\_\_\_\_ malaki ang inyong ginagampanang papel sa pagiging masaya ng inyong tahanan

At sa inyong dalawa, sana'y di mawala ang inyong lambingan na katulad noong kayo'y nagsusuyuan pa.

At higit sa lahat, idambana ninyo ang Panginoong Diyos sa inyong puso sa lahat ng panahon.

**LET US PRAY. (wedding prayer)**

(Congregation – stand with hand raised)



## PART VII – DECLARATION OF MARRIAGE

MINISTER:

And now, having heard you makes pledges of your affection and take these vows of faithfulness

I, by the authority given upon me by God as a Minister of the church of God (and by the laws of the Republic of the Philippines)

...PRONOUNCE YOU HUSBAND AND WIFE – no longer two, but one in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Ang anumang pinagsama ng Diyos ay di dapat paghiwalayin ng tao.

\*Honoring of relatives by the Groom and the Bride

## PART VIII – BLESSING OF THE UNION

*(Deuteronomy 28:1-9)*

- Deu 28:1 At mangyayaring kung iyong didingging masakap ang tinig ng Panginoon mong Dios, upang isagawa ang lahat niyang utos na aking iniutos sa iyo sa araw na ito, ay itataas ka ng Panginoon mong Dios...:
- Deu 28:2 At ang lahat ng pagpapalang ito ay darating sa iyo at aabot sa iyo, kung iyong didinggin ang tinig ng Panginoon mong Dios.
- Deu 28:3 Magiging mapalad ka sa bayan, at magiging mapalad ka sa parang.
- Deu 28:4 Magiging mapalad ang bunga ng iyong katawan, at ang bunga ng iyong lupa, at ang bunga ng iyong mga hayop, ang karagdagan sa iyong bakahan at ang mga anak ng iyong kawan.
- Deu 28:5 Magiging mapalad ang iyong buslo at ang iyong palayok.
- Deu 28:6 Magiging mapalad ka sa iyong pagpasok, at magiging mapalad ka sa iyong paglabas.
- Deu 28:7 Pasaaktan ng Panginoon sa harap mo ang iyong mga kaaway na nagbabangon laban sa iyo: sila'y lalabas laban sa iyo sa isang daan at tatakas sa harap mo sa pitong daan.
- Deu 28:8 Igagawad sa iyo ng Panginoon ang kaniyang pagpapala sa iyong mga kamalig, at sa lahat ng pagpatungan mo ng iyong kamay at pagpapalain ka niya sa lupain na ibinibigay sa iyo ng Panginoon mong Dios.
- Deu 28:9 Itatatag ka ng Panginoon na isang banal na bayan sa kaniya, gaya ng kaniyang isinumpa sa iyo; kung iyong gaganapin ang mga utos ng Panginoon mong Dios, at lalakad ka sa kaniyang mga daan.

**PART IX – SIGNING OF CEREMONY  
(Bridesmaid AND Best man assisting the signing).**

SONG:\_\_\_\_\_

(Sponsors will now come to sign the contract followed by the Bride and the room and then the Minister).

**PART X – OFFICIAL PRESENTATION AND INTRODUCTION OF THE NEWLY COUPLE**

MINISTER:

Mga MINAMAHAL, IPINAPAHAYAG KO SA HARAPAN NG DIYOS  
AT SA INYONG LAHAT; ANG BAGONG MAG-ASAWA:

MR. AND MRS.\_\_\_\_\_

(The Groom gives the wedding Kiss)

POSTLUDE

THE WEDDING IS NOW ENDED GO NOW REJOICE!!!

C O N G R A T U L A T I O N

# MATRIMONIAL SERVICE ENGLISH VERSION

## PART I – PRELIMINARIES

- IV. SONG (This is the day)
- v. Lighting of Candles
- VI. Processional of Bridal Entourage:  
(Song or WEDDING MARCH)

- ❖ Candle Sponsors
- ❖ Officiating Minister
- ❖ Best Man
- ❖ Groom with Parents
- ❖ Bible Sponsors
- ❖ Veil Sponsors
- ❖ Cord Sponsors
- ❖ Ring Bearer
- ❖ Coin bearer
- ❖ Principal Sponsors
- ❖ Bridesmaid with Groomsman
- ❖ Maid of Honor
- ❖ Flower Girl
  
- ❖ Bride with Parents

GREETINGS:

Good \_\_\_\_\_ brethren, we are in the house of the Lord, for He said that if two or three are gathered in my Name, I will be in the midst of them.

So let us give reverence to our gathering for where God is, the place is holy.

Today \_\_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ together will be joined in the holy bonds of Matrimony; therefore will exchange vows in the sight of these witnesses and in the sight of GOD.

The MINISTER will ask:

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

The Father will answer:

Read:

The book of Genesis tells us that "A man shall leave his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they will become one flesh".

LET ME REMIND YOU OF TWO THINGS:

When a father agrees to give his daughter's marriage to this man, by this agreement,

1. You willingly forfeit the primary place that you and your wife have had in your daughter's life, and
2. You give your blessings to the marriage of your daughter's and her would be husband.

Note:

After this, the groom will now approach the Bride and ask the blessings of the Bride's parents.

Then the Bride and the Groom will now march forward together to the altar.

(The Parents will be assisted to the altar area)

Let us welcome the Lord and may He find favor in this wedding today.

Call to Worship: READ PSALMS 100      WORSHIP SONG

**PART II – RESPONSIVE READING**

(Gen 2:18, 21, 22, 24; Prov. 18:22; Eph 5:22-25)

Minister:

“And the Lord said, it is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Readers:

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and close up the flesh instead thereof.

Minister:

“And the rib which the Lord had taken from man made her a woman, and brought her unto the man”.

Readers:

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh”.

Minister:

“Who so find a wife find a good thing and obtain favor from the Lord.”

Readers:

“Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord.”

Minister:

“Husband, love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.”.

Readers:

“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”.

**OPENING PRAYER: BY MINISTER**

SONG: \_\_\_\_\_

(Couple may now be seated)

### **PART III – SERVICE CONSECRATION**

Dear beloved, we are gather here in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses to join together these two Christian young people in the holy bonds of matrimony.

We are witnessing the miracle of God's love and power of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. In creation, Adam, the man, was first formed then the woman.

The Bible states that the woman was created for the man thus setting forth the humility, modesty and gentleness that should characterize her.

So Eve, being made after and out of Adam sets an honor upon womanhood as the glory of man.

The man is the head with the woman as crown.

The man was dust refined but the woman doubly refined – one step further from the earth.

The woman was not created out of man's head in order to dominate over him; nor out of his feet in order to be trampled upon by him; but she was made of his side to be equal with him, from under his arms to be, protected by him, and near his heart to be loved and cherished by him.

**READ: THE MEANING OF TRUE LOVE**

It is sharing and caring; giving and forgiving  
Loving and being loved; walking hand in hand,  
Talking heart to heart; seeing through each others eyes  
Laughing together; weeping together,  
Praying together; and always trusting and believing  
And thanking God for each other...  
For love that is shared is a beautiful thing-  
It enriches the soul and makes the hearts sing!

**PART IV – EXCHANGE OF VOWS**

MINISTER: **SPONSORS WILL STAND**

**HONORING OF PRINCIPAL SPONSORS**

(Call out their names)

You are here today to bear witness of the miraculous union that will take place between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

May God bless you for accepting the invitation to bless the union by your sponsorship.

MINISTER: The sponsors may be seated.

**(The Couple will stand)**

TO THE GROOM AND HIS BRIDE:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
This is your day. May I remind you that you must enter this marriage relationship with all your heart and soul.

I, therefore, charge you that if either of you know any reason why your marriage should not be carried out let it be known now.

**If none, then forever hold your tongue in silence.**

For be assured that marriage done under compulsion or pressure does not carry with it the blessings of God

TO THE GROOM:

Do you take, (bride) \_\_\_\_\_  
to be your wedded wife, to love her as Christ loves His church and to protect her and care for her for the rest of your life; for better/worse; for richer or poorer; in sickness or in health; to love and to cherish till death do you part?

RESPONSE of the Groom: I do

TO THE BRIDE: \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you take, \_\_\_\_\_ to be your wedded husband, submitting yourself to him alone as unto the Lord, showing reverence to him as he head of this union for the rest of your life for better/worse; for richer or poorer; in sickness or in health; to love and to cherish till death do you part?

RESPONSE of the Bride: I do

MINISTER: THE COUPLE WILL EXPRESS THEIR VOWS FOR EACH OTHER.

### PRAYER WITH THE COUPLE

Dear Father in Heaven, as we come before your throne, with our offering of love, we ask you to bless our union of marriage. We pray that you will be the third strand that binds us together and cannot be broken. May You be the guiding light shining on this chosen path of lifelong commitment to each other and You. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen

SONG: \_\_\_\_\_ (The couple will seat)



**PART V – THE MEANING OF SYMBOLS**

(The Couple will stand FACING EACH OTHER)

**THE RING**

(The Minister asks for the rings from the Ring bearer)

**MINISTER:**

Down through the years, marriage has been enriched with symbols that have come to us from the living past.

Foremost among these is a ring.

The ring is round like a circle and a circle has no beginning or end.

This reflects the character and attributes of God.

God who is from eternity has put love in the hearts of men. In placing this ring on your fingers, you are not only expressing your eternal love for each other but you are also affirming that God is love.

**(The Minister gives the Bride's ring to the Groom)**

**MINISTER:**

(To the Groom) Say after me the following:

**GROOM:**

This ring I give you as a token and pledge of my abiding love and respect of what you are as well as my prayer for what you will be.

**(The Minister gives the Groom's ring to the Bride.)**

**BRIDE:**

This ring I give you as token and pledge of my abiding love and respect of what you are as well as my prayer for what you will be.

**(The Couple will both kneel)**

## THE VEIL

MINISTER:

*The veil will now be put on.*

(The veil sponsors will come forward and put on the veil).

MINISTER:

The veil is a symbol of purity. It is white, to symbolize virginity, a virtue which the Christian faith extols.

But in addition the veil also represents your relationship with each other. It is placed on the Groom's shoulder because man is the head of the family.

He has a tremendous responsibility as the head.

He has to make decisions and to see to it that his family's needs are provided. The Bible says that man is the head of the woman does not mean the man is a dictator.

This means that in loving his wife and family, the man is ready to the extent of sacrificing his own life in the care and defense of his loved ones.

At the same time, the veil is placed on the head of the Bride in mutual esteem and love. The woman was not taken from the foot to be looked down by man. She was taken from the ribs near the heart to be loved and cherished by man.

## THE CORD

MINISTER:

The cord may now be put on. (The cord sponsors will step forward and place it on the couple).

"The cord is a symbol of unity.

It speaks of the eternal reality that in marriage man and woman become one.

Jesus Himself said that man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two shall be one. The cord also symbolizes the unbreakable ties of love between the husband and his wife.

THE COIN Deut 15:4-6 there should be no poor among you

THE BIBLE

(The Minister asks for the Bible, will give exhortation).

(Explain the Bible, and also John 10:10 – Mat 4:4)

MINISTER:

Please place your hands on the Bible. The Bible is God's word. For it we receive the wisest of counsel, I charge you to be guided by its principles.

TO THE GROOM: \_\_\_\_\_, as the head of your family, search the pages of this book often for the spiritual guidance you will need to make wise decisions for your family.

TO THE BRIDE: \_\_\_\_\_, make the reading of the Book a daily part of your life. As the wife and mother you will need guidance that can only be found there.

TO BOTH OF YOU: *Let the principles of this Book be the foundation of your family.*

PRAYER: (The minister will pray for the couple)

COMMUNION WILL NOW BE SERVED:

(Best Man and Maid of Honor will serve)

WHILE SERVING: SONG: "OUR FATHER"

CANDLE CEREMONY –

The couple will stand

The two lighted candles that you see represents the separate lives of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

To symbolize their being united in marriage, today they will each take the candle representing them and together light the candle, which will represent as one.

They will then blow out their individual candles

**PART VI – WEDDING CHARGE**

MINISTER: Now let me speak to your hearts.

I charge you both as you hope for happiness in your married life to be true the vows you have made to each other. With your marriage from this day, you begin life anew with larger responsibilities.

\_\_\_\_\_ (groom) Guard well, this your Bride who now commits herself into your keeping; strive so to live in the Lord that no word or deed of yours shall cloud her brow with grief nor dim her eyes with tears.

\_\_\_\_\_ (bride) it is your solemn responsibility to strive to retain by your virtues the heart you have won by your graces.

You have major role to play in making a happy home.

And to you both, let not your voices lose this tender tones of affection nor your eyes forget the tender ray which you had shown during courtship days; and greatest of all, let God be enthroned in your hearts above all else at all times.

*LET US PRAY. (wedding prayer)*

(Congregation – stand with hand raised)

## MARRIAGE BENEDICTION

Join with me as we ask God's blessing for this new couple.

Eternal Father, redeemer, we now turn to you, and as the first act of this couple in their newly formed union, we ask you to protect their home. May they always turn to you for guidance, for strength, for provision and direction.

May they glorify you in the choices they make, in the ministries they involve themselves in, and in all that they do. Use them to draw others to yourself, and let them stand as a testimony to the world of your faithfulness.

May Almighty God bless you by the word of his mouth, and unite your hearts in the enduring bond of pure love.

May you be blessed with children, and may the love that you lavish on them be returned a hundredfold.

May the peace of Christ dwell always in your hearts and in your home: may you have true friends to stand by you, both in joy and in sorrow.

May you be ready with help and consolation for all those who come to you in need; and may the blessings promised to the compassionate descend in abundance on your house.

May you be blessed in your work and enjoy its fruits. May cares never cause you distress, nor the desire for earthly possessions lead you astray; but may your heart's concern be always for the treasures laid up for you in the life of heaven.

May the Lord grant you fullness of years, so that you may reap the harvest of a good life, and, after you have served him with loyalty in his kingdom on earth may he take you up into his eternal dominions in heaven.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, who lives and reigns with him in the unity of the Holy spirit, God, forever and ever.

Amen

## PART VII – DECLARATION OF MARRIAGE

MINISTER: And now, having heard you makes pledges of your affection and take these vows of fidelity;

I, by the authority given upon me by God as a Minister of the word (and by the laws of the Republic of the Philippines)

**PRONOUNCE YOU HUSBAND AND WIFE** – no longer two, but one in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

*WHAT GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER, LET NO MAN SEPARATE.*

\*Honoring of relatives by the Groom and the Bride

## PART VIII – BLESSING OF THE UNION

(Deuteronomy 28:1-9)

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.

All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. You will be blessed in the City and blessed in the Country.

The fruit of your womb will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

**PART IX – SIGNING OF CEREMONY  
(Bridesmaid AND Best man assisting the signing).**

SONG: \_\_\_\_\_

(Sponsors will now come to sign the contract followed by the Bride and the room and then the Minister).

**PART X – OFFICIAL PRESENTATION AND INTRODUCTION OF THE NEWLY COUPLE**

MINISTER: *BELOVED BRETHREN, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO  
PRESENT AND INTRODUCE TO YOU,*

MR. AND MRS. \_\_\_\_\_

(The Groom gives the wedding kiss)

POSTLUDE :

THE WEDDING IS NOW ENDED GO NOW REJOICE!!!

C O N G R A T U L A T I O N

## Baby D E D I C A T I O N

### **TEXT: GENESIS 22: 1- 13**

Some years later God decided to test Abraham, so he spoke to him. Abraham answered, "Here I am, LORD."

Gen 22:2 The LORD said, "Go get Isaac, your only son, the one you dearly love! Take him to the land of Moriah, and I will show you a mountain where you must sacrifice him to me on the fires of an altar."

Gen 22:3 So Abraham got up early the next morning and chopped wood for the fire. He put a saddle on his donkey and left with Isaac and two servants for the place where God had told him to go.

Gen 22:4 Three days later Abraham looked off in the distance and saw the place.

Gen 22:5 He told his servants, "Stay here with the donkey, while my son and I go over there to worship. We will come back."

Gen 22:6 Abraham put the wood on Isaac's shoulder, but he carried the hot coals and the knife. As the two of them walked along,

Gen 22:7 Isaac said, "Father, we have the coals and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" "My son," Abraham answered, "God will provide the lamb." The two of them walked on, and

Gen 22:8 *(SEE 22:7)*

Gen 22:9 when they reached the place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Next, he tied up his son and put him on the wood.

Gen 22:10 He then took the knife and got ready to kill his son.

Gen 22:11 But the LORD's angel shouted from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am!" he answered.

Gen 22:12 "Don't hurt the boy or harm him in any way!" the angel said. "Now I know that you truly obey God, because you were willing to offer him your only son."

Gen 22:13 Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. So he took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son.

Gen 22:14 Abraham named that place "The LORD Will Provide." And even now people say, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."



## (BABY DEDICATION)

**Question:** Have you ever given your children back to God? (Some of you are thinking, “I’d like to give them back—but I didn’t think God would take them back. I thought He had a ‘no return’ policy on kids! Besides, I lost the receipt!”)

□ The truth is, there is not a parent here who hasn’t had a few moments or days when they wouldn’t have liked to package up that kid and take him/her back to God’s customer service counter and demand, “I want my money back!”

□ well, I’m not suggesting you to return your kids to God and try to get your money back, when I ask you if you have ever given your children back to God.

What I am asking is, have you ever really;

Recognized that your children are a precious gift from the Lord, and they belong ultimately and always to GOD first—not to you?

**Released ownership of your children to Him**—understanding God is responsible for the way in which they were designed and already knows the plan and purpose for their future?

**Realized God has left it up to you to show them His way?**

God has been asking us to put many things on His altar recently. And today, He is asking every one of us who are parents to “BRING OUR CHILDREN AND PUT THEM ON THE ALTAR!”

### **BIBLICAL EXAMPLES:**

There are many examples of parents in the Bible who brought their children to God and gave them back to Him:

1. There is the classic example of **Hannah** bringing her son Samuel (the son for whom she had prayed), and presenting him to God, and handing young Samuel over to Eli the priest. (**1 Sam. 1:27-28**).

**27** For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

**28** Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD.

2. Of course, you remember **Joseph and Mary** brought the infant child Jesus to the temple following his circumcision at 8 days. they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (**Lk. 2:22**).

But the example of a parent surrendering his child to God that I want us to read about today is that of **Abraham** offering Isaac on Mt. Moriah.

**Genesis 22**, -- let’s see what God would have to say to us today about “Giving Your Children Back To God.”

## TEXT GENESIS 22:1-13

Abraham literally, totally, irrevocably gave Isaac back to God. That had to be hard and painful for Abraham. After all:

- Abraham loved Isaac. **V.2** God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and sacrifice him ...”
- Isaac had been a MIRACLE baby. He was born when Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100 years of age.
- Oh yes, just try to put yourself in Abraham’s place. It was incomprehensibly painful for Abraham to strap his dear son on an altar and a stack of wood, raise a knife to slash open that boy’s chest and throat, cremate the body and sit by as he smelled the stench of the burning flesh of his boy—and then watch that boy literally disintegrate into a pile of ashes!
- I don’t know if I would do that...even if God asked! But in a very real sense, I know I MUST DO THAT with all 3 of the precious children God has given me.

Do you know—the best thing Abraham ever did for Isaac was to tie him to that altar and to surrender him back to God?

- 1) Had Abraham refused to give Isaac back to God, he would have forfeited all God’s promises and plans for Isaac. Isaac would have lived and died in obscurity—a nomad, and a nobody.
- 2) Because Abraham obeyed and gave Isaac back to God, Isaac received the fullness of God’s best plan and promise for his life:
  - Isaac became a wealthy man.
  - Isaac became the forefather of God’s own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Isaac’s life is still having an impact on and blessing millions of people worldwide through his offspring—Jesus Christ.

And so, you and I need to learn from Abraham today.

If we refuse and fail to give our children back to God—we may very well be forfeiting God’s best plan and purpose for their lives.

And when we entrust our children back to God—we secure for them the covenant of God’s best purpose and plan for their lives.

## FOUR ELEMENTS OF GIVING YOUR CHILD BACK TO GOD:

- What does it mean? It means 4 things:

### 1) Giving your child to God is a CONFIRMATION of your love for God.

- ⇒ □ The first thing you are saying when you give that child back to the Lord is simply this...that you love God even more than you love that child. (Your child is a most prized possession...but don't allow them to take the place of God!)
- ⇒ [I love you, child, so much, that I want the very best for you. If that means giving you to God, spanking you, giving you limitations (holding the line), changing my life for your benefit...I'll do whatever it takes!]
- ⇒ □ This is exactly what Abraham proved by his willingness to offer Isaac. He was demonstrating that his love and fear of God were supreme in his life above all else.
- ⇒ □ Abraham loved God above the most prized treasure of his life...his only son Isaac.

### Matthew 10:37-38

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

*Not only a Confirmation...*

### 2) Giving your children to God is a CLARIFICATION of ownership.

--When you give your child back to God, you are openly declaring that:

- This child is a gift from God.
- This child does not really belong to you.
- This child belongs to God.  
(You have the privilege to love and train this child.  
But this child is not yours—but God's!)
- Was this not what had to be on Abraham's mind when he lay Isaac on the altar? Was he not saying, "Lord, this young man belongs to you—not me?" He was saying, "You do with him as you please. He's yours!"

- Hey listen! That little boy or girl does not really belong to you—they belong to God! They are a precious gift from God, on loan to you.

**Ps. 127:3** “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” (KJV).

**Note:** We'd better be careful how we treat and care for God's property!

**Note:** Let me tell you something friend... God did not authorize the MAYOR to raise children. And God did not authorize day care centers to raise kids.

God authorized the mother and the father to raise kids!

*Not only a Confirmation, Clarification...*

### **3) Giving Your Children To God Is A COMMITMENT to Raise Your Children God's Way!**

**Eph. 6:4** says we are to bring our children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

- LISTEN...To give your child to God is not just a CEREMONY...It is a COMMITMENT. It is a commitment that you are going to:
  - Be a Godly parent.  
(Parent dedication...requires getting right w/ God)
  - Teach this child of Christ.  
(they will need to be saved)
  - Keep this child in church.  
(not on bus, but w/ you!)
  - Love this child.  
(even if loving them means disciplining them/letting God discipline you!)
  - Pray for this child.
  - Train this child.
  - Stay married for this child.  
(there are other reasons for this too, but this is a great one!)
  - Make your home a holy place.
  - Put away worldliness.
  - Live a righteous life.

- I think some people see baby dedication as a magical ceremony. Let me tell you—this little ceremony means nothing—zero—if you are not making a sincere, life-long commitment to raise this child God's way!

**Ex:** I like what Joshua told the children of Israel as they settled into their new home, the Promised Land.

### Joshua 24:14-15

**14** Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served...and serve ye the LORD.

**15** And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

"I want my family to turn out right, and so, as a parent, I'm going to begin to lead them right!"

- That's the kind of commitment God is looking for in parents today!

*Not only a Confirmation, Clarification, Commitment...*

## 4) Giving Your Children to God is CLAIMING of God's plan and promises for that child's life.

- Isaac inherited God's blessings, protection and promises because his dad, Abraham, gave him back to God.

### Genesis 22:15-18 (read)

- Your children are blessed by your obedience to God AND cursed by your disobedience to God. *(they have a free will, but you stack the odds in their favor or against them by the way YOU live!)*
- As you obey God with your life, and as you give that child back to God, you are posturing that child to receive God's very best for his/her life.

### **Pr 22:6** -

**Train up a child** in the way he should go: **and** when he is old, he will not depart from it.

...So, this is what it means to give your children back to God:

- 1) It is a CONFIRMATION of your supreme love for Christ.
  - 2) It is a CLARIFICATION of ownership (God owns that child).
  - 3) It is a COMMITMENT to raise that child under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
  - 4) It is a CLAIMING of God's best plan and promises for that child's life.
- This is exactly what transpired when Abraham took Isaac up Mt. Moriah and laid him on the altar to give him to God.
    - 1) Abraham was CONFIRMING his love and fear of Jehovah.
    - 2) Abraham was CLARIFYING that Isaac really belonged to God.
    - 3) Abraham was COMMITTING to be a Godly parent.
    - 4) Abraham was CLAIMING God's plan and promises for Isaac.

# What Makes A Family Strong?

*Here are ten traits that are essential to a strong, happy family.*

## **TRAIT 1: COMMITMENT**

The most important trait in strong, happy families is commitment. Commitment to the team—putting the family first—and commitment to each individual on the family in helping him or her become everything he or she can...With commitment comes the desire to help family members reach their potential. A winning attitude is "I'll forgo my own immediate gratification to help a family member succeed, because I know the personal joy that I experience when I help another family member."

## **TRAIT 2: APPRECIATION**

Do you let your family members know that they are appreciated? Do you give them positive attention? Strong families focus on the strengths of each other—not the faults.

If you think your family needs improvement in this area, try serving a compliment at each practice..."I really like the way that you..." "One of the things I like best about you is..." "You make me happy when you..." "You have real talent when it comes to..." "You make me proud when you..."

## **TRAIT 3: TIME TOGETHER**

Healthy families enjoy being together. They work together, play together, and enjoy leisure times together. They may be very busy, but they...plan time together.

## **TRAIT 4: COMMUNICATION**

To understand each other, a family has to be willing to invest the time necessary to share their feelings and opinions. Because you are a product of your experiences, each day you are a new person. Without talking and listening to each other, family members can soon become strangers.

## **TRAIT 5: SPIRITUALITY**

Praying together, as well as, praying for one another are extremely important for a strong, happy family. worshipping together is a bonding experience.

## **TRAIT 6: SENSE OF HUMOR**

Happy families have fun together; they play together; they laugh together. Having a sense of humor during tense, troublesome moments...defuse the tension and has an immediate calming effect.

## **TRAIT 7: SHARE RESPONSIBILITY**

Flexibility is an important trait in strong families, especially when it comes to sharing responsibility and roles. If family members will do whatever is necessary to meet each other's needs, even if the task does not happen to be on their list, everyone is happier.

**T**ogether

**E**veryone

**A**ccomplishes

**M**ore!

## **TRAIT 8: COMMON INTERESTS**

The more that family member has in common, the more they tend to do together. Having similar interests and developing common goals gives the family something to look forward to, to plan toward, and to experience together.

## **TRAIT 9: SERVICE TO OTHERS**

Just as a pond grows stagnant if there is no outlet, so does the family. Your own problems and worries can become insignificant when seen from the perspective of others who have so much less than you.

## **TRAIT 10: SEEKING HELP**

Healthy families are not problem-free; they just admit to problems and get the help they need to solve them! The longer a problem drags on without a solution, the more discouraging family life becomes. Do not allow this to happen.

When you are a big enough person to admit you are not perfect and when you choose to get the help you need, not only will you gain the respect of your family, but you will find that your goal of living "happily ever after" is attainable after all.