

DEATH AS A FRIEND

SCRIPTURE: The invitation of the Lord is: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30)

INVOCATION:

O Lord, our heavenly Father, you did give to us in your son, new meaning to life, new strength for weakness, new comfort for sorrow and a renewed hope in time of loss. In the power of your Spirit may our grief be transformed into understanding, our infirmities into strength, our sins into repentance, and our doubts into full assurance. We pray this in the name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.

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MEDITATION:

Death does not always appear the same. Where it lays its hand upon a child while in the midst of their formative years, it seems premature. When death snatches a middle-aged man in the prime of life, it is an unwelcomed guest. When death tears an infant out of the arms of its sobbing mother, it is without mercy. When death reaches into a home to remove a father or mother, leaving crushing responsibilities upon the companion, death is no respecter of persons.

However, when one has lived a long, useful life, or when one has toiled through long, trying days looking to "some enchanted evening"; when one's friends and family are equally on the other side, or when illness lingers through endless days and nights, and hope for recovery is gone---then death comes as an angel of mercy. It is the answer to the often repeated prayer: "LORD, NOW LET YOUR SERVANT DEPART IN PEACE. FOR MINE EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION." These words were spoken originally by the patriarch, Jacob, when he had little strength in his dying body. And surely indicate to us today that to the aged, death comes indeed as a friend.

Cheryl

Now, I would like to share a couple of principles that Jesus teaches us that causes one to say that death ^{is precious} comes as a friend.

(1) Death is a ^{precious} friend because it brings release. After death that follows an illness, it is not uncommon to hear relatives say, "Through it is hard for us, yet we know death has come as a blessing. We know it is best for her .

The thought which prompts such statements is the release from sleepless nights, from agony, and long days of suffering.

I shall always remember reading the Bible to a suffering hospital patient. I was reading from the book of Revelation these words, "there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain...."

And from jaws clenched in pain, came the reply, "Won't that be wonderful, no more pain." And that is why I can say that death ^{is precious} comes as a friend.

It means freeing one self from the limitations of a wornout, diseased body, and setting the spirit free for further development. It means vacating a house that has been ruined by storm, and moving into a large, spacious mansion with a beautiful view of the mountains and the sky. It means harvesting the precious grain from a stalk bent by the last frost of fall.

Death came ^{is precious} as a friend to marie because it brings release.

(2) But, Jesus also teaches that for a Christian DEATH IS A ^{precious} FRIEND BECAUSE IT IS A TIME OF REWARD. This is a fact that we often forget. But, for a Christian death brings our eternal reward.

Too often we think of death as coming to destroy everything for which we have lived; ~~we~~ should picture death as coming to save those we love. Many times we think of death as the end; but ~~our~~ ^{our} faith causes us to think of death as the beginning of a more abundant life. We often think of losing, when we should ^{think of} gain. We think of parting, instead of arrival. It is not closing the door; it is opening the gate to eternity. It is not paying a debt; it is taking a note to a bank and obtaining gold in exchange. It is not a passing to ~~w~~ourn; rather it is a promotion to enjoy.

8 I once knew a man who had the right spirit, for he said to his dying mother, "I'm going to let you go now, Mother. Have a good time. You have earned this ^{reward} ~~joy~~."

The Bible says it beautifully, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:16-17)

In heaven the Bible tells us that all the hungers of life shall be satisfied. Here on the earth people hunger - not ~~only~~ physically but spiritual. Here on earth - the deep, inner, fundamental longings of the human heart are not satisfied, but in heaven they are. Here we strive for shelter and security, but in heaven we ^{live} ~~sleep~~ in the perfect peace of God. Here ^{our} ~~their~~ eyes are damp with tears, all life is filled with some heartbreak and disappointment; but in heaven, tears shall be wiped away, wrongs shall be righted, and there shall be no pain." How wonderful. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

~~Book 23~~ Poem - I am standing

You are not dead - life has but set you free
Your years of life were like a lovely song,
The last sweet notes of which, held long,
Passed into silence while we listened, we
Who loved you, listened still expectantly.
And we about you whom you moved among
Would feel that grief for you were surely wrong.
You have but passed beyond where we can see.

For us who knew you, dread of age is past.
You took life, tiptoe, to the very last;
It never lost for you its lovely look,
You kept your interest in its thrilling book;
To you, Death came, no conqueror, in the end.
You merely smiled to greet another friend.

For, ~~as~~ the Apostle Paul stated, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8.18)

Shall We Pray

Benediction:

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever." Amen. (I Peter 5.10-11)