

## Precious in the Sight of the Lord

### Psalm 116:15

Sunday 14th August 2022

Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

I was due to preach on the parable of the two builders today, but as the week progressed, the Lord prompted me to speak directly to the unusual circumstance of two saints going home in one week, and to bring some comfort to the Lord's people, from his Word. Hence the change of Bible readings which include Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Many emotions accompany the passing of those we love. They may include shock, sadness, grief, perhaps even a tinge of regret. But for a few moments, this morning, I want us to focus on joy and to exhort us in the direction of rejoicing.

On the surface, joy may seem a strange emotion in a season of mourning—perhaps the opposite kind of feeling to the one we should experience, and some may even think joy an inappropriate or unworthy emotion at a time like this.

But the Scriptures insist, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4), "Rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16), and "Be joyful in hope" (Romans 12:12) - "let joy accompany your hope", we might paraphrase Paul. So let me share with you three solid reasons we can rejoice whenever a loved one dies in the Lord:

### **#1 We rejoice because they have gone to a better place**

The moment a believer dies, according to the Scriptures, their soul or spirit, goes to be with the Lord: "The dust returns to the ground it came from and the spirit returns to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7). And being with the Lord is a far better place!

Do you remember what Jesus said to the repentant thief crucified next to him? "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in *paradise*." (Luke 23:43) When Paul was contemplating the possibility that Rome might execute him, he wrote, "For me to live is Christ, to die is *gain*... I desire to depart and be with Christ which is *better by far*." (Philippians 1:21-24)

Brothers and sisters, we must never grieve for a believer who dies; we may grieve over them, but never for them! They do not yet possess their resurrected bodies, which is the final instalment of heavenly blessing, but they have been set free from their present bodies and have been liberated, for ever, from this fallen world, from all troubles and every sorrow, from anxiety and fear, from temptation and sin, from doubt, and disease and death. The hymn writers describe these wonderful truths better than I can:

*Jerusalem the golden  
With milk and honey blessed  
O city of God's presence  
His peoples promised rest  
I know not, O I know not  
What joys await us there  
What radiancy of glory  
What peace beyond compare!*

Christian poets talk about the 'Beatific Vision' to describe the moment we see Jesus Christ for the first time. The idea is taken from taken from 1 Corinthians 13:12, "now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face." One of these poets has tried to capture the moment like this:

*Face to face with Christ my Saviour  
Face to face, what will it be?  
When with rapture I behold him  
Jesus Christ who died for me*

*Only faintly now I see him  
With the darkened veil between  
But a blessed day is coming  
When his glory shall be seen*

*Face to face shall I behold him  
Far beyond the starry sky  
Face to face in all his glory  
I shall see him by and by*

We can - and we must! - rejoice that our brother and sister have gone to a place that is better by far!

## **#2 We Rejoice because we will see them again!**

A second reason to rejoice this morning is that we shall see our brothers and sisters again - Christian grief is filled with hope.

Do you remember "Friends Reunited" ? It was an early version of Facebook, which connected lost friends together. Well, if we were allowed to give heaven a nick-name it would be "Friends Reunited."

Christian grief is shot through with bright hope! And this hope makes Christian grief so different from worldly grief. Worldly grief is dark, despairing, inconsolable—even frightening—because there is no future. If the departed loved one has ceased to exist, if you will never see them again, if there is no

survival beyond the grave, then despair is surely an honest response to their parting! A voice and a face never heard or seen again, a friendship severed forever! But! But if you know you will meet that loved one again, how different the sorrow! Death is more “see you in a bit” rather than a forever farewell! Death is just an “Au (Oh) Revoir” “Goodbye until we meet again!” Death is a temporary state—which is why the Bible calls it sleep! You go to sleep and then you wake up!

“Brothers we do not want you to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope..” (1 Thessalonians 4:13) We can rejoice because Christian grief is filled with glorious hope!

*“For 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 word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until 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 one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)*

Did you catch the order of events? One day Jesus Christ will return to this world, bringing the souls of departed saints with him; in that instant the dead bodies of those loved ones will rise from the dead and be re-united with their souls. Those of us who are still on earth at that time, will then be given our new bodies and 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.” ( 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). We should note how Paul ends - he reminds us that as wonderful as it will be to be gathered with our loved ones, the focus of heaven will be the Lord: “And so we will be with *the Lord* forever.” And then after all have received their new bodies on that Great Resurrection Day, what is recorded in Revelation 21 will be fulfilled:

*Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

Shall we be sad and downcast when fellow believers fall asleep? We mourn, yes, but we have every reason to rejoice! Because departed brothers and sisters have gone to a better place and because we shall see all God’s people again.

### #3 We rejoice because the Lord rejoices!

Thirdly, and finally, we rejoice because the Lord rejoices! The death of every believer, great or small, old or young, is precious in God's sight. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). When a believer dies, the Lord God regards that moment as precious! Why? Because it's the moment he welcomes one of his adopted children to their true home! Because this moment is the end to which God the Father planned salvation from before time began! Because this moment is the end to which he sent his Son into the world to die for our sins and to be raised so that we might have eternal life!

The moment of a believer's death is the completion, the finale of God's glorious eternal purpose for his people, planned before the dawn of time!

Paul lists the four great events in every believer's journey in Romans 8:30. "Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:30)

Before time began God predestined us. Then in time, during our short lives, he called us—and by his grace we responded in faith and repentance. Immediately God justified us—he made us righteous in his sight, placing our sins on Christ who paid for them in full. Then finally, stage 4, he glorified us—he brought us to heaven. The death of a believer is this stage 4, the Lord glorifying his children. And it is precious to him because it is the culmination of his eternal plan for that loved one.

Apply God's saving work on us who remain has not yet completed yet because we're still languishing in this valley of tears! But his work has been completed in the lives of all those he, called home!

"Be joyful in hope!" (Romans 12:12). Why rejoice? Because departed saints have gone to a better place. Because we will see them again—Christian grief is tinged with hope. And because the Lord rejoices to receive his children home.

This solid and glorious hope, brothers and sisters, is based on one historical event that took place 2000 years ago—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. "After his suffering," writes Luke, "Jesus showed himself to the apostles and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days.." (Acts 1:3)

Christian hope is not wishful thinking without real-world evidence! It's based on the proven and witnessed fact that One Man rose from the dead never to die again and who says to us all, "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." (John 11:25)

Do you believe? There is only one event in your future that is certain—one day you will die. Have you prepared for that event? Strange how people diligently prepare for so many future events, holidays, business opportunities, house buying, family gatherings, and so on, events which, in point of fact are only mere possibilities, but they fail to prepare for this one certainty! How strange!

Perhaps you say you'll think about death when you get closer to that time: You've got what 40, 50, 60 years left? But you may not have that long, we've been reminded this week. "Today is the day of salvation."

Jesus says to you, "Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies."

May the Lord comfort all who mourn and may he give living faith to all.