

# Prayer as Expression (20): Death

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 May 2020

Preacher: Colin Dow

[ 0 : 00 ] Now the reason I'm concluding our series of studies on expressing ourselves in prayer in the language of the Psalms, the reason I'm finishing it here with death, is because the ultimate expression of prayer consists in how we pray and what we pray for in this most tragic and final occasion, when God's saints are gathered to him in death.

The first reason Spurgeon offers why the death of his saints is precious in the sight of the Lord is that God loves them. God loves them.

In the most famous verse in the Bible as we prayed, we read, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever should believe should not perish but have everlasting life.

God loves this world, and he loves everything in this world. In particular, he loves the world's peoples.

Even though we may not love them, he loves them. And even though we may not love ourselves, he loves us. But he loves his own people with a very special love.

[ 1 : 18 ] He loved them before he made the sun and the moon. He loved them before the first man walked on the earth. He's always loved his people.

And he loves them infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably. He loved them.

He loves them. And they cannot die, but they are precious to him. When our loved ones die, we often say to God accusingly, How could you have done such a thing?

But don't we know that however much we love them, God loves them so much more? Spurgeon says, Where there is love, the little becomes great.

And what is of no concern to a stranger is made of great importance. Does God not know?

[ 2 : 52 ] Does he not care? That those he loves most have breathed their last. So how do we express ourselves in prayer when we know that God loved our loved one more than we did?

Does it not change the way we pray? Does it not give us comfort to know that our loved ones have gone to be with the God who has always loved them and who always will love them?

Through all the tears, we might even be able, knowing how much God loves them, to smile.

We shall mourn, but we shall not mourn as those who have no hope. We shall pray with comfort.

We shall even pray with confidence.

Their death was tragic to us, but to God it was precious because he loves them more than we ever could. And so on the day of their passing, through all the tears we shed, we might at least pray saying, Lord, I love them, and I always will love them, but I thank you that you love them even more.

[ 4 : 14 ] And to them, their death is a very precious thing. To you, their death is a very precious thing. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints because God loves them.

Secondly, because God delights in them. He delights in them. I'll admit that Victorians had a morbid fascination with deathbed scenes.

Screeds of prose are given over to the dying words of the great and good. The indignities are neatly swept under the carpet, and the dignities are raised.

And so at this stage, I see Spurgeon rather as a man of his time, a Victorian, extolling the final words of the saints, whilst perhaps overlooking the final doubts of the saints.

However that may be, Spurgeon is correct when he says, Believe me, the faith which only plays with earthly joys and cannot endure the common trials of life will soon be dissipated by the solemn trial of death.

[ 5 : 25 ] Listen to this. That which a man can die with, that is faith indeed. That which a man can die with, that is faith indeed.

And the point is that God delights in the graces shown by a Christian at the time of their passing. He delights in their childlike dependence upon him, and in the peace they sometimes exhibit as death draws near.

And yes, there is fear, but there can also be joy. God delights in their faithfulness. But the seed of the gospel he sowed in their hearts so many years before has reaped a harvest a hundred times that which was sown.

But then Spurgeon goes on to talk about something absolutely fascinating. Only a pastor could write these words. He says, How many graces are revealed in dying hours?

They were silent spirits who had laid their finger on their lips throughout their lives. But they took their fingers off their lips and declared their love to Jesus when they were dying.

[ 6 : 50 ] It's just so true. So many, we have known, were reticent to profess their faith in Christ, even though we knew they were Christians.

Yet, when the time of their death threw near, they publicly declared their love for Jesus. This really is a most delightful thing in the sight of God.

I know it to be true from my own experience as a minister here. There was an outstanding lady, and she had a most outstanding faith. But she never professed that faith publicly.

I urged her to do so, but she was always reticent, was afraid of being presumptive. But then it came time for her to die.

And on her deathbed, her very last words to me were these. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

[ 7 : 54 ] How delightful a dying profession of faith. So how should we express ourselves in prayer, knowing that the death of our loved ones is precious to God because he delights in them?

Perhaps when those we love are dying, we need to pray that they will exhibit and possess the graces of which Spurgeon speaks.

But through the fear and through the pain, they will still be able in some small measure to testify to the joy and the peace that is to be found in knowing Christ.

Perhaps we need to pray more for their holiness in death than we need to pray for their healing from death. I know it's a very difficult thing to pray in this way, but perhaps this is how to pray.

The third reason why the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord is that God shows himself in them. God shows himself in them. Spurgeon goes on to describe how it is that the death of the saints is precious to God in that he shows himself in them.

[ 9 : 19 ] He demonstrates his divine attributes in them. He fulfills his divine promises to them and in them. We learn that God is merciful. And I quote from Spurgeon here, God is gentle and pitiful to us in our time of weakness.

God is gentle and pitiful to us in our time of weakness. However Christ-like, our loved one appeared to be in life.

That Christ-likeness is only enlarged as death approaches. Their dying is rather like a projector, which enlarges all the ways in which they're becoming more and more like Jesus.

So that all can see that Jesus is gentle and humble in heart, and that all those who are weary and heavy laden can find their rest in him. And so we may express ourselves in prayer for those who are dying.

Lord, show yourself in them. Show your love and your righteousness, your gentleness, your richness. Project your glory from their dying frame, and may their greatest service to you be the way in which they look like Christ as they die.

[ 10 : 48 ] But God also shows himself in them through the fulfillment of his divine promise. The fulfillment of his divine promise. Spurgeon says, Precious promises are illustrated upon dying beds.

Precious promises are illustrated upon dying beds. He takes the example of Psalm 23, that psalm which, above all others, is precious to us.

Spurgeon says of it, you may read many commentaries upon that psalm, and we all have, I'm sure, but you will never value it as well as when you are in the valley of the shadow of death yourself.

Spurgeon points to the preciousness of God's presence with his people. 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 staff, they comfort me.

Think of all the thousands of promises of God in the Bible, promises we spoke about a few weeks ago in this series of sermons. Think then of how they may all focus down into these final few days in

the life of a believer.

[12:05] And I guess, among all others, that's how we want to express ourselves in prayer for our dying loved ones. That they would experience the fulfillment of God's promises even as they draw their last breath.

Though their bodies may be weak, their spirits may be strengthened, and though they leave us behind, God is always with them, and the joy of the Lord remains their strength.

The final reason why the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord is that God gathers them. God gathers them.

As far as we're concerned, there is nothing quite as final or as tragic as death, but not as far as those who we love are concerned.

For them, there is nothing quite so liberating, nothing quite so welcome. Their death is precious to God because it represents his gathering of them to himself.

[13:18] Spurgeon says, it's a precious sheep folded, a precious sheaf harvested, a precious vessel which has long been at sea brought back into harbor.

God loves them, and finally he gathers them to himself even as a hen gathers its chicks under his wings. He must gather them to himself because this is the fulfillment of the eternal promises of redemption and salvation.

Spurgeon writes, God the Father sees the fruit of his eternal love at last gathered in. Jesus sees the purchase of his passion at last secured.

The Holy Spirit sees the continual workmanship at last perfected. The gathering of God is the declaration of victory, both of his victory over sin and death and the victory of his beloved child and their perseverance to the very end.

He gathers them to himself, and that in and of itself is a very beautiful thing. The world may suppose that our loved ones now dwell in the darkness of the grave, but we know that they live not in deep darkness, but in the great light of the immediate presence of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

[14:55] And that's marvelous, utterly marvelous. us. That even though we might have wanted to hold them to ourselves a little longer, in mercy God has gathered them to himself.

Could this not be a matter of great comfort for us? That though we may have been left desolate, their last breath was in reality a cry of victory.

That though they have succumbed to their final illness, they are more than conquerors. And so we express ourselves in prayer when through our tears of grief and there are tears we pray, Lord, I love them, but you love them more.

Now you have gathered them to yourself. We all have different ways to describe death. For some we call it passing away. The widow of the late Dr. David Ford communicated his death to me by saying David has gone to be with Jesus.

Yes, and they're all true, but there's one also. God has gathered my loved one to himself where he is even more dearly loved.

[16:17] when one of their loved ones died, the Greeks would place coins over their eyes to help them to pay for passage over the river Styx and into paradise.

When our loved ones die, there is no journey to heaven, for they are already there and they have no need of our coins. A loving father has gathered his children to himself.

He couldn't bear to be without them for even one second longer. with this we close. Spurgeon recounts the dying words of the famous English Puritan Richard Baxter.

I quote, When Baxter lay dying and his friends came to see him, almost the last word he said was an answer to the question, Dear Mr.

Baxter, how are you? Baxter replied, almost well, and so it is. Death cures, it is the best medicine, for they who die are not only almost well, but healed forever.

[17:40] Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints. We're going to sing now the hymn Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine, all with a foretaste of glory divine.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.