

The Death of a Christian

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[0 : 00] Come back with me to Luke chapter 23. And let's read again verses 42 and 43, where the repentant criminal says to Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And Jesus said to him, truly, I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise to death. Of a Christian. Because the passing of a believer into the glory of heaven, that's a truth that none of us should ever, ever shirk away from as if it's somehow to be left to just particular occasions only. No, the death of a Christian should be constant in your heart, constant in your thoughts, constant in your meditation, upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because when we think of the death of a Christian, we're thinking above all the Lord Jesus, who's made it possible for those who are in him to know salvation, to know eternal life.

And when we think of the Lord Jesus and what he's done for sinners who come to him by faith, when we meditate on Jesus, then we see that it's his work that's merited salvation, merited that eternal life in his presence.

[1 : 34] So the more that we think on the work of the Lord Jesus, the more that we think on what he's done for believers, the more that will cause you to praise God for the eternal blessings of the soul after the death of the body.

And as you dwell in what Jesus has accomplished for you by his death, as you contemplate the more the promise of Jesus, that promise that he is with you always, and the promise that in his Father's house are many rooms, then again this should bring us to that exaltation, that rejoicing in the Lord Jesus, that the Christian, the one who is in Christ, who knows Christ by faith, has that assurance of everlasting life.

Because surely our thoughts should be heavenward. Your thoughts should be towards that heavenly place. We might even say that heavenly palace.

Surely that has to be emphasized again and again that heaven is the goal of every believer's soul when that believer passes from earth to heaven.

Because the world is not the home of the Christian. Heaven is your home if you know Jesus as your Savior. What did the writer to the Hebrews declare?

[3 : 04] Hebrews 13 and 14, Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that's to come. And really for the next few weeks, I really want to consider the whole matter of, well, life beyond this life.

The life of the believer after he, after she has left his earthly journey, when that earthly journey is completed.

And so yes, this evening, I pray that we will use God's word to, to direct our thoughts, this evening anyway, to direct our thoughts on the death of the Christian.

What does the Bible tell us about the soul after death? And of course, when we consider what the Bible teaches us on that matter, that you're encouraged, that you have that encouragement, you who are in Christ, that you have that assurance of the eternal safety of your soul.

But also, correspondingly, there's that warning for anyone who's not in Christ. The warning of eternal damnation.

[4 : 16] Eternal damnation of the soul. So, God willing, the next few weeks, we're going to see what Scripture teaches us. Yes, as I said this evening, the death of the Christian.

God willing, next Lord's Day evening, we'll look at the heavenly home of the Christian. A week after that, the resurrection body of the Christian. And then, finally, the new Jerusalem, the new heavens, the new earth, the eternal domain of the Christian.

Well, as a church, I don't know, some of us hear different congregations, but certainly as a, this church, this congregation, that we pray is, Christ honouring, and God glorifying, we do.

And we must think on eternal matters. And as you do so, to find joy inside your tears. Because, many of you know, if not most of you know, the grief of loss. It's real. I mean, it remains real, however long the passage of time is, between the, the passing of a loved one, and the present moment.

[5 : 27] However length of time that, the grief is real. But the joy, the joy of knowing the, the glorified state of the soul in Christ, that joy is a, it's a truth that, that we should never be weary of.

And please never think, that the subject that we're looking at this evening, never ever think that somehow it's just, you know, to be treated with the arm's length, or somehow too morbid, or even irrelevant.

Absolutely not. It has every relevance. Every reason, to worship God. Because, remember us, God's word teaches us. God has created, the eternal soul.

He's created the eternal soul, in the life of man. And so God is to be worshipped, must be worshipped for the, the life, yes, the life that you, who are a Christian, the life that you enjoy now. And God is to be praised, and worshipped for the, for the fullness of that life, that will be experienced, in heaven, when, when the believer, the soul of the believer, awaits that glorious, reunion of body and soul.

[6 : 38] And in heaven, with the souls of God's people, they are even now, waiting, for that great reunion. The reunion of the glorified soul, with the, the imperishable, pure body.

and the day of days, that resurrection day, when the Lord Jesus returns. And, until Christ returns, then, well, we have breath this side of eternity.

It's good for us, to meditate, to ponder, to reflect, and, well, on the many truths, that God's word gives us. We even see the beautiful truths, of the eternal glory, of the soul, of the Christian.

And, well, what God's word teaches us, what we've been permitted, to know and understand, about the joy of the Christian, and, and glory. So, this evening we begin, then, with the death, of the Christian.

Now, of course, there are many passages, we could have used, for, our thoughts, on this matter, this evening. We could have gone, to the Old Testament, we could have looked, at different passages, in the New Testament, so much, in God's word, that teaches us, about the, the eternal safety, of the soul, after death.

[7 : 53] But, for this evening, we're going to look, at a well-known passage, a passage, that I pray, gives, gives you encouragement, where Jesus, here in Luke 23, Jesus, assures this believing thief, on the cross, that, as we read today, he will be with them, with Jesus, in paradise.

And so, I want to look at this, from three associated, truths, that accompany, what Jesus says, to this thief, on the cross. We want to look, at the soul's, immediate passing, into glory.

And then secondly, the soul, being fully awake, and in glory. And thirdly, the soul, being with Jesus. So, what about the soul's, immediate, passing, into glory?

Well, some of you, I know, were brought up, in the shorter, catechism, I certainly was, in my, very much younger days, that summary, of Christian doctrine, that summary, of Bible based teaching, and, well, one of the questions, in that summary, is what benefits, do believers receive, from Christ, at death?

And the answer, I'm sure some of you, could say it, without looking, the souls of believers, are at their death, made perfect, in holiness, and do immediately, pass into glory.

[9 : 10] And their bodies, still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection. But it's that emphasis, on the soul's, immediate, passing into glory. That's what we need, to focus on, through this passage here.

Because, this is exactly, what Jesus is saying. Truly, I say to you, today, you'll be with me, in paradise. Now, you've got to think, obviously, the context, that Jesus, uses these words, to this criminal.

And that's why, we read from verse 32, and we read there, of two, two criminals, who had accompanied Jesus, to this, the place of execution. Two criminals, who were crucified, on either side of Jesus, and Jesus, in the center, criminal on the right, criminal on the left.

Here in the center, as we read, Jesus, says, his first, of seven sayings, on the cross, where he prays, to the father, that he forgives, that the father forgives, those who, who put him to death, because they don't know, what, what they're doing.

So there's Jesus, he's in the midst, of these criminals, the people, there's mocking, going on, there's sneering, from the, from the religious leaders, and, obviously, these criminals, have heard Jesus, pray to the father, pray to the heavenly father, and, elsewhere in scripture, in fact, we read, of both criminals, at one time, hurling abuse at Jesus.

[10:40] But as Luke's account, tells us here, one of these criminals, that's what we would call, an eleventh hour conversion. There's Jesus, in the midst of sinners.

There's Jesus, hanging on the cross, exactly as, as God intended, where Jesus should, should be. The suffering servant, the one, who was numbered, with the transgressors.

Jesus counted, among sinners. Jesus bearing, the sin of the world. Jesus has, identified with sinners, he's our representative, he's our substitute, he's bearing the penalty, that our sin deserves. He's facing death. Jesus is about to pay, the price for sin. Jesus will die. Jesus will be made sin, for us.

He'll die. His soul, will enter, the hell of separation, from the father, before, the soul of Jesus, enters heaven. Of course, awaiting the resurrection, of his body, three days later.

[11:44] But what, of the repentant thief? I mean, with the rest of humanity, he's a sinner. I mean, obviously, all have sinned, Jesus accepted, of course, but, that man's life, obviously, had been a life of sin.

That life, that had alienated him, from God. His sin, deserved death, as all our sin, deserves that punishment. But there's that man, now he's hanging on a cross.

He's got, this moment left, of his life, before his death. And you might ask, is there hope, for this individual? This man, who's called on Jesus, to remember him, when he comes, into his kingdom?

This man, this repentant sinner, who's told the other criminal, well, we deserve our punishment, for this man, Jesus, has done nothing wrong. Is there hope, for that man, after his death?

And the answer is, yes, there is hope. And you say, well, how, why? How is there hope? I mean, how can this sinner, in fact, how can you, how can I, how can we, who by nature, are sinners, how can we, after death, enter the perfection, of the glory of heaven?

[12:59] And the answer is found in Scripture, Hebrews 12, 23. Because we read there, of those, in the glory of heaven, who are the spirits, of the righteous, made perfect.

It's exactly as our catechism tells us, the souls of believers, are at their death, made perfect, in holiness. I mean, how else could Jesus, have told that repentant thief, that today, you'll be with me, in paradise?

How could Jesus say that, unless the truth of Scripture, is true, the souls of believers, are at their death, made perfect, in holiness. This is, surely, giving God's people, such encouragement, and assurance.

Think of this repentant thief. After his last breath, he immediately, passed them to glory. His soul, was made perfect, so that he could, inhabit the sinless, pure place, of eternal joy, in the presence, of almighty God.

Think of what we read, elsewhere in Scripture. Revelation 21, verse 27, that tells of the eternal, presence, of Christians, and glory, that that presence, must be, in perfect holiness.

[14:22] Nothing unclean, will ever enter it. Nor anyone, who does what is detestable, or false, but only those, who are written, in the Lamb's book of life. Then you might be asking, well, what about the soul, immediately entering, the glory of heaven?

Because, as Scripture teaches us, the soul, has been perfected, in holiness, so that, the Christian, can enter heaven. So the believer, has been sanctified, to that point, where he now has, she now has, that holy perfection.

I mean, Jesus is saying, to the thief, as he says to all, today, this is the day of, your death, the day, today you'll be with me, in paradise.

Jesus isn't saying, you know, somehow, tomorrow, or maybe on a, future occasion, or maybe after some kind of, soul purification process, with a reformer, railed against, what was called purgatory. No, I mean, when Jesus says today, today means, it speaks of immediacy. It speaks about, no delay. There's no process, of purification, and you know, some kind of, halfway state, some, intermediate state, that's, supposed to link, earth with heaven.

[15:41] That is utterly wrong, it is utterly, unscriptural. It should have, no place in, anyone's thinking. Because it goes against, the truth of scripture. Jesus promised, that repentant thief, that he would, immediately, enter, into the paradise, of heaven.

Now just think of it, there, picture in your mind, there, that thief on the cross, from, from that crude cross, of Calvary, to the glorious, perfection of heaven. What's that, immediate, entry of, the soul, of that repentant thief, from the cross, to glory?

And as for the repentant thief, so for all, who die in the Lord. And, surely then, that should give, you know, you all, you, who are bereaved, you, who are, left behind, at the passing, of a loved one, in Christ.

Surely, yes, you mourn the passing, you must mourn the passing, of a, of a dearly beloved, in Christ. But, you have that, absolute peace, that, absolute assurance.

The one, who has, left, this earth, is in the glory of heaven. He's in that place, of eternal peace. He's in that place, of eternal joy.

[17:01] He's in the presence, of God your Savior. And, that surely then, highlights the, well, we might say, the eternal difference, between, well, on the one hand, the assured Christian, the Christian, who has, that knowledge, of the eternal rest, of, of the Christian, in Christ, when he knows, that's true.

He knows, that's true, as opposed to the, to the non-believer. The person, who's got no assurance. The person, who's got no confidence, in eternal life.

I mean, the very fact, in the passage, we read there, the very fact, that we're told, that there were two criminals, you know, one on either side, of Jesus. Well, again, this brings out the point, doesn't it? One was saved.

One was lost. Bringing out, the picture, of scripture itself. So, there are only, two responses, to Jesus. Either you have, that saving faith, in the, in the glorious Savior, or you have no faith, in Jesus.

Because, God's word teaches us, and shows us, that there's one, who has, by faith, there's the person, who by faith, has trusted in Jesus, for salvation.

[18:15] He has that, sure promise, of the glory of heaven, that awaits. Awaits him, awaits her, after she dies. But then, there's the other one, the other person, the person, who's not trusted, in Jesus.

And he, and she's only got, that, that promise, of, of eternal damnation, eternal suffering, outside of heaven. And that's why we read, earlier in Luke's gospel, Luke 16, that's why we read, the story that Jesus, taught about the rich man, and Lazarus.

Remember Lazarus, the beggar? Remember that man, after his death, he entered the glory of heaven. The unnamed rich man, well, after his death, he entered the torment, of hell.

And there was emphasized, in of course, that story that Jesus, told that, that absolute separation, between heaven and hell. That's what, the voice of Abraham, gave, when he told the rich man, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those, who would pass from here, to you may not be able, and none may cross, from there to us.

And so the question, has to be answered, by each and every one of you. Where will your soul be, when you die? Will it be, with Christ in heaven?

[19:40] Or will it be, separate from him, in the, in the torment of hell? Have you trusted, in Jesus, for your salvation? Just as the thief, on the cross, there at that eleventh hour, trusted in Jesus, for his salvation?

Or is your attitude, is your mindset, is your, is your thinking, like the attitude, of the unrepentant thief?

The man who wouldn't, surrender his life, to Jesus? The man who died, lost? The man, who had no hope, of salvation? His soul didn't know, the immediate entry, into heaven.

That man's soul, knew that entry, into the darkness, of the misery of hell. Of course, the question then, has to be,