

Who is Blessed at Death?

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[0 : 00] I want us to turn again just for a little to Revelation chapter 14. And verse 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, write this. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors.

For their deeds follow them. Now death as we know is that thing that we cannot avoid unless the Lord Jesus returns first.

It's something, a process that all of us are going to have to go through. And there is a natural hatred of death because it takes away from us everything that we know and everything that we're familiar with.

But it is, excuse me, it is something that is inevitable and it's going to come into our lives. And the moment of death, although there's so much we don't know and we can't understand.

[1 : 10] Though the body dies, so the physical aspect of death closes in and shuts down everything. Yet our soul continues to live.

And our soul departs, our body, and our soul in Christ returns to our Lord and to our Saviour too.

And it's, I think the older I get, the more I try and think and I cannot understand how we function in glory before the resurrection.

But we will. And we will have a full enjoyment in glory. And I believe a heightened perception of everything, far beyond anything that we can experience or enjoy here.

But we will be fully aware from that moment as we continue on into glory. Now, as we said, death is this great heartbreak that comes in and tears and breaks up and robs and destroys families.

And it just leaves so much sorrow and pain. And the Bible, of course, is the only book that explains to us the nature of death, how it came about, why we die.

[2 : 33] And the Bible alone is the answer as to why, after all our time in this world, of all the thousands of years, that we cannot live one with another really any better than we've ever done.

You would think that if we're following the ideas that people have of evolving and such like of this whole area of evolution, that by now we should be living in a perfect utopia. We aren't.

And all the problems, everything that has always been, continues to be. And there is only one answer to it all. And, of course, the Bible explains everything to us.

And we understand that through the fall and through our rebellion against God, we are where we are. And yet the wonderful thing is, as we know, God, in allowing the fall, has enabled us to understand aspects of the glory of God and of his grace and of his mercy and his forgiveness and things that Adam himself couldn't have understood or been able to understand before the fall.

So that we are able to understand before the fall.

[4 : 13] And straight away, that kind of stops in your tracks and makes you wonder. And you say, well, how on earth can there be blessing in death? Because that's what it says. Blessed are the dead.

And so straight away, we see something really quite wonderful here. Because, you see, the Christian faith offers something that no other faith or no other creed or no other religion offers.

We have to ask ourselves, how is all this possible? Well, it is possible in and through the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus has done what no other leader of any other church or of any other religious organization has done.

That he has come into this world and that he has put himself under the power of death. But that he has conquered death and he has risen again.

No other, supposing you go to J.W.s or Mormons or Muslims or whatever. There is no other religion that can make that claim and point to the empty tomb.

[5 : 24] The leaders of all the world religions are buried somewhere in this world. Our head is no longer. He was in the grave, but he rose triumphant over the grave.

Everything about Jesus ended up in triumph. And even his last moment, his last breath in this world on the cross was a moment of triumph.

Because it was with a loud cry that he yielded up his spirit, where he dismissed, as it were, his spirit and gave himself his spirit back to God.

So everything speaks to us of triumph and victory. And that is the beauty and the wonder of the Christian faith. And of course, as Jesus rose triumphant over death and over the grave, he is a guarantee to all his people.

And really saying, what has happened to me, I will make sure happens to you as well. So that we will know this wonderful experience that Jesus did with regard to triumph ultimately over death.

[6 : 37] And that's why the believer can look ahead to the advancing years totally differently to the unbeliever. Because as the years go on and the body slows down and all the different things begin to fail this way and that way, a little here and a little there as the years go on.

And as the Bible talks about it, that the outward person is perishing. The wonderful thing is that the inward is being renewed day by day.

And God is at work. And while the body is slowing down and both mentally and physically, the soul is being stirred up.

The soul is being built up. The soul is being molded and shaped and being prepared for the new environment that it is going to. And so that is part of the thrill that's in the Christian life is to know that although outwardly and physically things might be on the down, that spiritually things are on the up.

And so that is one of the great things that separates the Christian from the non-Christian. And we know that the best is yet to come. And we know that as we depart, as Paul says, he was trying to work out which is better to stay or to go.

[8 : 00] He says he would rather that he could depart to be with Christ because when we die, that's what happens. We depart to be with Christ. That's what happens at the moment of death.

That's why Jesus said to the thief on the cross, today, instantly, immediately, you will be with me in paradise. Instant transportation into the presence of Christ to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

Now, of course, you'll notice that there's an emphasis on the text here. It doesn't just say blessed are the dead who die.

It's blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. See, that is the qualification. And this indicates that there is only one group, one company for whom that death is actually a blessing.

Those who die in the Lord. Because in order to die in the Lord, it's essential that we live in the Lord. It is essential that the life of Jesus Christ has to come into our life, first of all.

[9 : 13] The moment that we close our eyes in death, that is the last opportunity we have. Before we close our eyes, right up until that last moment.

And once death comes in, then the opportunity to live in Christ has gone. It is only in this life that we have that. And we believe right up until the last breath that we have always got hope, even to that point, that our soul can come into union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But after that, impossible. So in order to die in the Lord, we have to live in the Lord. There has to be life in the Lord. And that is why, you know, it seems so strange for so many people who give their whole lives to chasing after things that they're going to have to leave behind.

Because we are going to have to leave everything behind in this world. That's something that we know. But for the Christian, that is not going to be, it's going to be, it's going to be so different.

It's going to be so altogether different. Because the life that we have in Jesus, Jesus calls it eternal life. And that's exactly what it is. And when something is eternal, it cannot die.

[10 : 39] And while death severs, the body severs, life severs the body from the soul, it cannot sever the life that has been born in Jesus Christ.

That life is eternal life. And that's why Paul said, I am persuaded that neither life nor death, nor any of the other things, is able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

So the writer here says that there's blessing to those who die in the Lord. And the reason that they're blessed, well, he indicates two things. The first is that they rest from their labors.

Now, you and I know that after a hard day's work, and the harder the work that you do, the more pleasing rest is.

That when you've maybe flopped down on a couch, or when you flop down in your bed, you so give thanks for that couch, or for that bed. And you say, I am absolutely exhausted.

[11 : 40] And if we haven't worked hard, or if we haven't, we often don't appreciate how beautiful a bed is. You know, there are times when you're really tired, and you go into bed, and you thank the Lord, and you say, thank you, Lord, for this.

Because there is just this sense of the body being so absolutely whacked, and there's just something wonderful in letting yourself just go into the support and the comfort of the bed.

And so we have this idea here that at the end of the day for the believer, there is a rest from their labors. Now, the word that we have here, this word labor, carries the idea of wearisome toil.

That which has kind of pressed you down and exhausted you and drained you. And in a sense, although at one level we say to ourselves, surely working for the Lord doesn't bring that about.

But what we've got to remember is that the Apostle Paul often referred to his labor, and that he would tell the church that he labored amongst them, and he writes about laboring.

[12 : 59] Jesus himself often uses that, and he terms the servants as laborers. So that anything that we're doing for the Lord, it is, in a sense, we're laboring.

We're not just, as it were, floating about, we're laboring. And we know how difficult it is to do anything, as it was mentioned there in the prayer.

So often when you begin to pray, and you say to yourself, surely this is an easy thing when you come to have an audience with a king. But just how easily we're distracted.

A hundred thoughts come into your mind all at once. And the whole of Christian life, and the service of Christian life, is so often a battle.

And we battle even with personal things, with particular sins, a sense of our own unworthiness and our own fitness for serving the Lord.

[13 : 56] There are so many complex issues that come into the picture, so that at the end we feel that this is hard going.

In fact, as the Lord himself says, at the end of the day, we are but an unprofitable servant. That's how it is described. And so we have all these battles with sin, with self, with the world, and all these things.

But death brings an end to all of that. And we are brought then into like this eternal rest. And it's not a rest of oblivion, but it is a rest of heightened anticipation and participation, and a heightened sense of service, because we will continue to serve the Lord.

And we won't be serving with any sense of self, or any sense of pride, or any sense of failure, or any sense of inability.

It'll be a perfect service. And there won't be weariness in the service. It will be a service that is exciting, and a service that doesn't exhaust.

[15 : 13] But the tragedy, of course, for those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ, is it's going to be the very opposite. Because while the believer is going to enjoy rest, the unbeliever can't.

Because we're told in the Word, there is no rest for the wicked. The wicked are those who will die without the Lord Jesus Christ. And they go to, their eternity is one of unrest.

The very opposite of what the Christian has. And it's a deeply solemn thing, that people spend all their time, all their energies, everything, seeking after that, which is going to bring them ultimately no lasting satisfaction.

But then the other thing is, we see the blessing is, that their deeds follow them. That our deeds that follow us is everything that is of faith.

All that we did in this world, that is of faith, that is of value, that the Lord acknowledges as of service that is to us. And there'll be a lot of surprises on that day, because we have done probably so many things that we've never realised that really are of faith.

[16 : 34] Because the Lord says that even the giving of a cup of water in his name, that that will bring its own reward. And so the Lord is taking note of absolutely in everything we do.

You see, this is a wonderful thing for the Christian. And it's going to be, as we say, the very opposite for the unbeliever, because we know that at the end of the day, we are all going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ and receive the things done in the body, whether they're good or evil, good or bad.

And that's a very solemn and searching thought. But what we're reminded of here is that you and I know that when we die, we take nothing with us but our soul, with one exception.

And here's the exception. We go with our soul, our bodies will follow on later at the time of the resurrection. But our works, our deeds, what we've done in the body, that is going to follow on as well.

And I think one of the ways that maybe we can illustrate it is, remember in the book of Malachi, how it talks about there, how the Lord took note of his people and it speaks about God's book of remembrance.

[17 : 54] And when they were writing to the Jews, they would have understood that, particularly like in the time under the Persian kings, if you go back to the book of Esther, and you remember Esther's uncle, Mordecai, and there was one night the king couldn't sleep.

And so he asked for the records, like the book of remembrance, to be brought so that it would be read to him. So just like a historical diary of the events that were taking place.

And one of the things that whoever was reading to him highlighted was how Mordecai discovered a plot in order to assassinate the king. And the king said, what reward has ever been given to Mordecai?

And of course, no reward had ever been given. And remember how it was Haman, the great enemy of the Jews, had to go and take Mordecai out on the horse and say, this is what's done to the man whom the king delights to honour.

But the point is that there was this book of remembrance. Everything that took place, the king had this record. And it's almost a pointer to us of how the king of kings and the Lord of lords has this book of remembrance.

[19 : 13] And all that we are and all that we have done is there. And you know, we use the expression, no labour in the Lord is in vain. And you know, it's absolutely true.

Nothing you have ever done, the things that you think you've done badly and the things that you feel that was really a waste.

Nothing came of it. You know, on that great day, we're going to be welcomed not because of a success, but because of faithfulness. And that's what the Lord asks us, to be faithful.

To be faithful to him. Because that's how he welcomes us. Well done, good and faithful servant.

And as we say, the Lord gives us and equips us in this world in order to serve him.

Remember in the parable of the talents, those who had used well what had been given, they were actually given more. Remember what it says, well done, good and faithful servant.

[20 : 18] You have been faithful over a little. I will make you master, make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of the Lord.

And what an encouragement that is to us. That even although there are days we might feel down and particularly as the years go on and we have less and less time for service and we look back at all what we think is wasted.

And if you're like me, I look at so many opportunities wasted. Opportunities of witness, opportunities to serve. But I believe on that great day we will get a lot of surprises because the Lord sees us in a way that we don't see and he knows what's of faith and what isn't.

And so, what an encouragement to us that even here, as you read through that chapter which is full of so many dark things and yet hears this blessing to the church of God and may that blessing indeed encourage us and excite us as we journey on through this world.

May God bless these few thoughts to us. Lord, oh God, we give thanks for being able to reflect just for a wee while on what your word has taught us.

[21 : 45] Help us, Lord, to be able to reflect upon who you are and what you say and what you do with us. Lord, sometimes we feel that maybe we haven't got things right.

Sometimes we say even as we're trying to explain things, sometimes we say I didn't say that properly. But Lord, you know what we try to do and we ask Lord that you will help us.

Bless our homes, our families and all whom we love and forgive us our every sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.