

Precious in the Sight of Jehovah — December 20, 2020

Psalm 116:15; The Days of Service Completed; Enoch, Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, Peter; and Complete in Christ from Colossians

Scripture Reading: Psalm 116:15; Jude 14; Hebrews 11:5; 2 Kings 2:9–11; Matthew 14:1–11; John 21:18–19; Acts 1:9; Luke 1:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51–58; Colossians 1:12–2:10

“Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15)

“For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in him.” (Colossians 2:9–10)

Not Random: Precious in the Sight of Jehovah

Psalm 116:15 is one of the most quietly profound verses in Scripture: precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints. At the very least this verse tells us that the homegoing of the Lord’s people is not random. We are time-bound creatures and we see only the events: a sickness, a heart attack, an accident. But on the Lord’s side, something entirely different is happening. The death of his saints is precious to him because it is the means by which a believer enters his presence for all eternity. And we can think of that as our Savior himself waiting to welcome us home — a thought that cannot be fully plumbed.

The variety of ways the Lord’s people have left this world defies any single human pattern. Enoch was translated without seeing death, so pleasing to the Lord in his faithful preaching before the flood that God took him home directly

(Hebrews 11:5, Jude 14). Elijah, despite a moment of deep discouragement when he thought he was utterly alone, was received into heaven in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Moses died on the mountain at God's direction and was buried by God himself, a consequence of his failure at the rock yet without diminishing Moses' stature as a servant (Deuteronomy 34). John the Baptist was beheaded on a whim at Herod's birthday feast — not haphazard, not random, but permitted by the same God who said it was precious (Matthew 14). Peter was told in advance how he would die and that it would glorify God (John 21:18–19). And the Lord Jesus himself ascended bodily into heaven, received to the right hand of the Father, which Stephen witnessed as he died as the first martyr (Acts 1:9).

When the Days of Service Were Completed: Luke 1:23

Luke 1:23 gives the unifying principle: and it came to pass, when the days of his service were completed, he departed to his house. That is the thread that runs through every one of the diverse departures mentioned above. Enoch's days of service were completed; Elijah's days of service were completed; John the Baptist's days of service were completed. The Lord told Peter he would die by another's hands, and that that death would glorify God — which is another way of saying his service would not be complete until that moment.

This principle came home through the recent homegoing of a beloved sister. A week before she was taken to hospital she said quietly: I don't know why the Lord leaves me here. She was ready, she was longing to go home. When she was admitted and sedated, it would have seemed to the eye that her days of service were over. But they were not yet complete. Because of her condition, her brother had an opportunity to speak to a doctor about her faith, her testimony, her readiness to go home to the Lord. Shortly after that witness, she was taken home. Her days of service were completed — not when she lost consciousness, but when the final fruit of her life had been borne. Precious in the sight of Jehovah.

Prepared for the End: Christ as Object, Not Philosophy

How is a believer prepared for such a departure? The answer is in Colossians. The epistle sets before the Colossians the person of Christ in all his fullness: he is the image of the invisible God; in him all things were created; he is the head of the body; in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell; by him, having made peace through the blood of his cross, all things are reconciled. The mystery — Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27) — is the secret. Not Christ as doctrine, not Christ as system, but Christ as a living indwelling person whose presence is both the present reality and the future hope.

What was threatening the Colossians' readiness? Philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (2:8). W. Kelly observed that philosophy is one of the great destructive forces of Christianity: it overlooks creation and the fall, defiles conscience, ignores sin and God's judgment of sin, and renders grace and atonement unknown. Philosophy need not look like philosophy. It can be a gentle drift of thought, a habit of mind that mixes man's reasoning into the things of God until the clarity of Christ himself is obscured. The remedy in every case is the same: the person of Christ brought back into view, the head held fast, the mystery of God acknowledged — Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Ye are complete in him (2:10). There is nothing that can be added to what a believer has in Christ. The fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in him; he is the head of all principality and power; and we are complete in him. Philosophy, tradition, human wisdom, religious performance — none of it adds anything. They are complete. If a difficulty arises in the assembly or between believers, the first resource is not discussion among ourselves but going to the head. Epaphroditus and Syntyche were told to have the same mind in the Lord. The same mind is found by looking to the head together. What is needed is already in Christ; what is lacking is our apprehension of it.

The point for the end of life is this: if Christ is habitually before the soul — if daily life is ordered around him as object, if the mystery of God is known and enjoyed — then the moment of departure will not be strange. Someone put it as stepping across a threshold. The change will not be from the known to the entirely unknown, but from sight to sight, from seeing in part to seeing fully. The preparation is the daily occupation with Christ himself.

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