

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”

(Ps.116:15)

Our opening citation from Psalm 116:15 informs us that the deaths of Yahweh's saints are precious to him. How different, then, is the estimate of human life which Yahweh forms from that which has ruled the minds of great warriors and mighty conquerors. Had Napoleon spoken forth his mind about the lives of men in the day of battle, he would have likened them to so much water spilt upon the ground. To win a victory, or subdue a province, it mattered not though he strewed the ground with corpses thick as autumn leaves, nor did it signify though in every village orphans and widows wailed the loss of sires and husbands. What were the deaths of conscript peasants when compared with the fame of the Emperor? So long as Austria was humbled, or Russia invaded, little cared the imperial Corsican though half the race had perished.

Contrast the feelings of worldly leaders with those of Yahweh toward the sons of men. The apostle Peter informs us that Yahweh is “Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet.3:9). He doesn't desire it or wish it. His nature is compassionate, and He sincerely desires the eternal happiness of all, and His patience toward sinners “proves” that He is willing that they should be saved. If He weren't willing, it would be easy for Him to cut them off, and exclude them from hope immediately. This same characteristic was manifested in Jesus, and how many times do we read that Jesus, “looking on the people was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mk.6:34).

Now let's take this up a notch according to our reading this morning: "Precious in the sight of Yahweh is the death of His saints".

This is one of the many comforting statements in Scripture concerning that great event from which the flesh so often shrinks. If Yahweh's people would more frequently make a prayerful and believing study of what the Word says upon their departure out of this world, death would lose much, if not all, of its terrors for them. But, instead of doing so, they let their imagination run riot; they give way to carnal fears; they walk by sight instead of by faith. Looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance, let's try to dispel, by the light of Divine revelation, some of the gloom which unbelief casts around even the death of a Believer.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” These words intimate that a dying saint is an object of special notice unto Yahweh - mark the words “in the sight of.” It's true that the eyes of Yahweh are ever upon us, for He never slumbers nor sleeps. It's true that we may say at all times “Thou Yahweh seest me.” But it appears from Scripture that there are occasions when He notices and cares for us in a special way. “Yahweh is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee” (Isaiah 43:2).

“Precious in the sight of the Yahweh is the death of his saints” brings before us an aspect of death which is rarely considered by believers. It gives us what may be termed Yahweh's side of the subject. Only too often, we contemplate death, like most other things, from our side, yet the text tells us that from Yahweh's viewpoint of the death of a saint is neither hideous nor horrible, tragic or terrible, but “precious”. This raises the question, Why is the death of His people precious in the sight of Yahweh? What is there in the last great crisis which is so dear unto Him? Without attempting an exhaustive reply, let's suggest a few possible answers.

1. They, in themselves, are precious to Him.

They always were and always will be dear to Him. His saints! They were the ones on whom His love was set before the earth was formed or the heavens made. These are they for whose sakes He bought with the precious blood of His beloved Son, who willingly laid down His life for them. They are His Father's gift to Him, His children, members of His body; therefore, everything that concerns them is precious in His sight. Yahweh loves His people so intensely that the very hairs of their heads are numbered and angels are sent forth to minister unto them; and because they are precious unto Him, so also are their deaths.

2. Because death terminates the saint's sorrows and sufferings.

There is a reason for our sufferings, for "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Nevertheless, Yahweh does not "afflict willingly" (Lam. 3:33). He is neither unmindful of - nor indifferent to our trials and troubles. Concerning His people of old it is written, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). "Like as a father pitieth his children, so Yahweh pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). So also are we told that our great High Priest is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). Here, then, may be another reason why the death of a saint is precious in Yahweh's sight—because it marks the end of a Brother or Sisters sorrows and sufferings.

3. Because death affords Yahweh an opportunity to display His sufficiency.

Love is happy when ministering to the needs of its cherished object, and never are we so needy and so helpless as in the hour of our death. Yet man's extremity is Yahweh's opportunity. It's then that the Father says to His trembling child, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy Elohim: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10). It's because of this very statement that the believer may confidently reply, "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 Thy staff they comfort me." Our weakness appeals to His strength, our emergency to His sufficiency. Most blessedly is this principle illustrated in the well-known words "He shall gather the lambs (the helpless ones) with his arm, and carry them in his bosom" (Isaiah 40:11). Yes, His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Therefore is the death of the saints "precious" in His sight because it affords our loving Father an occasion for His love, grace and power to minister unto and undertake for His helpless people.

It's most interesting and instructive to trace out the fullness of the Hebrew word here translated "precious." It's also rendered "excellent." "How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God!" (Ps. 36:7). "A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit" (Prov. 17:27). However worthily or unworthily he may live, the death of a saint is excellent in the sight of the Lord.

The same Hebrew word is also rendered "honorable." "Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women" (Ps. 45:9). So Ahasuerus asked of Haman "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" (Esther 6:6).

This Hebrew word is also rendered "brightness." "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness" (Job 31:26). Dark and gloomy though death may be unto those whom the believer leaves behind, it is brightness "in the sight of the Lord". Zechariah writes "at evening time it shall be light" (Zech. 14:7). So - Precious, excellent, honourable, brightness in the sight of Yahweh is the death of His saints. May Yahweh make this little meditation precious unto each of us.

A final rendering of the Hebrew "Yaqr" is the English word, "valuable".

“The death of his saints is held to be of value” - The death of His saints is an object of value; that He regards it as of importance; that it’s connected with his great plans, and that there are great purposes to be accomplished by it. The idea here seems to be that the death of a saint is in itself of so much importance, and so connected with the glory of God and the accomplishment of his purposes, that he will not cause it to take place except in circumstances, at times, and in a manner, which will best secure those ends. The particular thought in the mind of the psalmist seems to have been that as he had been preserved when he was apparently so near to death, it must have been because Yahweh saw that the death of one of his saints was a matter of so much importance that it should occur only when the most good could be effected by it, and when the ends of life had been accomplished; that God would not decide on this hastily, or without the best reasons; and that, therefore, he had intervened to lengthen his life a little longer. Still, there is a general truth implied here, that the act of removing a saint from the world is, so to speak, an act of deep deliberation on the part of our Heavenly Father; that good, and sometimes great, ends are to be accomplished by it; and that, therefore, he regards it with special interest.

We might recall the episode in the life of Jesus when “the people of Nazareth rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong”(Luk 4:29)

Yet, in the plan and purpose of Yahweh, it was not the time nor the manner in which the life of His Son should be taken from him..

Another aspect in the death of the saints is that their death is precious to Yahweh, because He has so long sympathized with them in all their trials, pains, and sorrows. He has watched all their labors and sorrows with a parent's most tender interest; He has seen them mourning, broken down with grief and penitence; agonizing in their warfare against sin and temptation; therefore when He sees all these trials end, to be renewed no more--their physical pains and trials cease--all their wants to be supplied forever; when He sees all this, how can we help but believe that He feels a certain joy, on some level? There can scarcely be a more erroneous view of Yahweh's character than that which denies to Him the attribute of sympathy and joy in the happiness of His created, who he has known from the womb.

The death of the righteous is also greatly useful to the living. Often it’s one of the most precious methods that He can employ. What does he ever do which more deeply impresses survivors than this? Let it not then be thought strange that our Father should consider the death of His saints as precious.

The death of the apostles must have had a profound effect on early believers and increased their resolve to fight the good fight.

The death of saints should be precious in our sights, as well, simply because it’s so in Yahweh’s sight.

Doesn’t He take the right views of things? Can we suppose that His views and feelings are not as correct as ours? Can we demand that He should come over to our views and conform Himself to our notions, and not we to His? He deems the death of his saints precious; should we deem it appalling, grievous, and evil? Why shouldn’t we believe that He sees all events, and this one of death in particular, in a far more just light than we do? Isn’t His view more broad and deep and in every way more perfect than ours?

Of course it is! And it’s obvious that we ought to sympathize with Him, both in our opinions and in our feelings. If He regards the death of the righteous as being precious because it places them beyond the reach of care and trouble, trial and pain, then it’s clear that every one of these considerations ought to have no less and no different influence on our minds.

Having said that, why is it that we sometimes might not consider the death of saints as precious?

Not that it's unlawful to shed tears or grieve over the loss of a brother or sister, when ties so dear are rent asunder. Our sensibilities might bleed under the wound; but yet the joy of the Lord must be such a strength to us that many of our tears are will be tears of submissive, trustful joy.

We often fail to regard the death of saints as precious, because of the selfishness that's born out of our human nature. The selfishness of surviving friends or relatives is so great that we don't look at the great glory and great gain of the departed saint. So much are we absorbed in our own loss, that we seem incapable of looking away to the glory of that dear child of God who has been permitted at last the freedom from life's trials, pain and torment.

Sometimes there may be a hidden disbelief as to the death of a loved one being the wisest and best thing possible for them to be taken away just as they in fact are. This is one reason why we do not esteem the death of saints precious. Although it's generally admitted that Yahweh has done the best possible thing; but though we may admit this in theory, we may not believe it in heart. It's no small matter in the case of death, to admit fully and believe heartily that infinite love sought the very best result; that infinite wisdom devised the best means to secure it; and that infinite power could not lack the resources to do the best thing in the best way. To take hold of these truths in their broad extent and precious application, will go far to sooth the turmoil of those afflicted with grief, and will make the death of a saint seem truly precious.

When our confidence is shaken, then it's time to let our faith counteract our weakness, and say continually--"It is Yahweh's Will". We ought to have sufficient confidence in Him to believe that He has not removed a saint from earth one day too soon. If we would only realize how Yahweh regards the death of a saint, we could see why it should be precious in his sight, and consequently why it should be so in ours. Again, many are prone to conceive of their Brethren or loved ones as gone to the grave, and scarcely think of them as being anywhere else except in the cold ground, and as long as we take this view of their case, it will not appear precious.

If our faith in the gospel be consistent and intelligent, it will lead us to look upon the death of a saint without murmuring, and without ever counting such events, as on the whole, sad and painful. Even in repentance there is joy. So when saints die, though we mourn, yet in the depths of our being we may have the joy of heaven.

"Yahweh is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".
(Psalm 34:18)

Death, if rightly viewed, is a blessing from the Yahweh's Hand. . . . to one who has shouldered the burden of malady, it's not a loss to die, it is a gain, a lasting, a perpetual, an unlimited gain.

The man is at one moment weak, and cannot move a finger; and in an instant he is clothed with power.

Don't we call this a gain?

That brow that's aching; it will wear a crown within the next few tickings of the clock. Is that no gain? The hand that's palsied; it will, in the twinkling of an eye, wave the palm branch. Is that a loss? The man is sick beyond a physician's power; but he will be where the inhabitant is never sick. Is that a loss? May we always remember to give thanks to Our Heavenly Father- for His mercy endures forever.

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