

TEACHING GOAL

To study the result of the death of the Saints.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?
- A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united with Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection..

S.C. 37, L.C. 85-86 W.C. of F. XXXII, Savoy 31, Young 140, 144-145

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: II Corinthians 5:1-10

Support Passages: Hebrews 10:23, Philippians 1:21-23, Luke 23:43, Romans 15:2-4, Revelation 15:2-4, I Corinthians 15:23, I John 3:2, Psalm 17:15, Job 19:26-27, II Corinthians 11:16-33

BIBLE STORY

II Kings 2:1-14, The translation of Elijah

.MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." (Philippians 1:21-23, ESV)

APPLICATION

Knowing that death is gain for the believer, we should not value our lives more than the good of the Kingdom.

SUMMARY

The prospect of immortality is no small comfort to the Christian. After a life of toil, disease, pain and persecution, which, says Paul, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus"¹ shall receive, it is a blessed hope indeed to look forward to eternal life in heaven with our Lord. The apostle himself desires, to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better", and "to die is gain."² One might well ask, why must I suffer a fearsome death to enter eternal bliss?

Perhaps we have observed a godly loved one suffer terribly with a protracted terminal illness and have wondered why the elect of God must be subjected to such suffering. Again, many question the doctrine that the souls of believers go immediately to be with the Lord upon death. They prefer to believe that the souls of believers "sleep" with the body in the grave and do not enter heaven until the resurrection of the dead.

The scriptures clearly indicate that the soul does not sleep with the body until the resurrection. Hebrews 12:23 refers to the "spirits of righteous men made perfect." There is a "general assembly" of such spirits already in heaven! The apostle Paul writes that the Christian has only two estates, "at home in the body" or "at home with the Lord."³ Steven, as he was stoned to death, cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁴ The believing thief next to Jesus on the cross was told, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise."⁵ And the apostle John saw countless multitudes of Saints already in God's presence before the resurrection.⁶

Now we admit that death is terrible. As Dabney notes, "death is undoubtedly a penal evil", nevertheless, "although believers are fully justified, yet according to that plan of grace which God has seen fit to adopt, bodily death is a necessary and wholesome chastisement for the good of the believers soul."⁷ As sinners we deserve anything that God desires to require of us. He is under no obligation to save or help anyone and no one can reply to the Potter "why have you made me thus?"⁸ Therefore if the holy God requires death of us, even suffering, we have no other response than "blessed be the name YAHWEH." At best we are unprofitable servants. We, in all circumstances, are subject to the sovereign mercy of God. The agonies of death are greatly to be preferred to the fires of hell and on the other hand, death brings eternal benefits to the believer.

History bears out the grace that God gives to His people in death. As the Covenanters in Scotland faced death and torture for their faith, God gave special grace to them such that they eagerly went to the gallows and were able to deal with inconceivable suffering.⁹ The Christian certainly should not fear death as many other people seem to do. Many parents refuse to teach their children about the realities of death. But how much better to face with the Song of Moses on our lips.

"And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."" (Revelation 15:3-4, ESV)

¹ II Timothy 3:12

² Philippians 1:21-23

³ II Corinthians 5:6-8

⁴ Acts 7:59

⁵ Luke 23:43

⁶ Revelation 15:2ff

⁷ Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, pp 817,818

⁸ Romans 9:14-23

⁹ Purves, *Fair Sunshine*, Banner of Truth Trust.