

**Rev. Bob Canode**

### **“Benefits of Christ at Death”**

The situation in which the entire world is in has forced a topic about human existence into the forefront of the minds and hearts of many people. And that topic is death. There is much that all people can learn from this pandemic.

One such thing is this: All humanity from the east to the west is connected in some way. The Chinese people are taking precautionary measures in their neighborhoods to hopefully slow the spread of the virus just as all Americans are taking precautionary measures in their neighborhoods to hopefully slow the spread of the virus. This is happening all over the world regardless of race or religion.

Why is this so? It is because there is a common bond that exists between every man, woman, and child on the planet. What that bond is exactly is interpreted or defined in many different ways in philosophy and religion, but the reality of that bond is clearly evident in what we are seeing today.

Now we as Christians, those who believe in Christ, who is the truth, we know that there is a creational bond between all people because we are all descendants of Adam. Adam and Even are the first parents to every single individual in the world, whether they believe this or not.

With this in mind, we could ask also, why it is that all the world is agreeing to take these measures? ---To curb death, to hopefully preserve life in the face of death. And that is the real issue isn't it? Again, as Christians, we know that because of the sin of Adam, from whom we all descend, death spread to all men.

Philosophy views death as something natural to human existence. But the Bible presents a very different picture. Death is not natural but comes as a result of the violation of God's commandment, it is the judgment of God against sin. It is described as the wages of sin in Scripture, and Scripture teaches us that men are subject to lifelong slavery through fear of death.

This is why Christ came, took on flesh, and died on the cross--to pay the penalty of death for sin for all His people, for all those who repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Christ's death abolishes death for the believer, and frees us from slavery to fear of death. This is certain and true. If this is true, then why do Christians still die? If our sins are forgiven in Christ, if the penalty has been paid, why do we still die?

Why does the spectre of death loom over us today, no less than those who do not know Christ? The death of our bodies, friends, is a consequence of sin, we still suffer as a result of the death of the body, and we are still liable to be frightened by the prospect of the death of our bodies,

But the reality is for every believer, death brings us benefit rather than harm, and this is so because of what Christ has done through His death and resurrection, and because of the

benefits that flow to the Christian by virtue of our union with Christ. Some of the benefits of salvation we enjoy now, some we receive only at death then others later at our resurrection.

And so we come to the question; what benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? *The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.*

At the beginning this question assumes a certain view of man's makeup, and that of course is the Biblical view, and the true one. It is the view that man is made up of a body and a soul. As creatures made in the image of God, we are given rational immortal souls. Our souls are not made immortal at death, all souls *are* immortal.

Death is not non-being, or annihilation, it is a transfer of existence. Your soul friends is what animates your body. In the beginning God formed Adam from the dust, but he only became a *living* being once God breathed into him the breath of life. The soul is the place of your conscience and your will. Thinking and knowing are activities of the soul.

When you say, "I hear a sound" it is not the case that your ear hears necessarily, but that your soul hears through the ear. The body therefore is the instrument of the soul, indeed the soul was made to be housed by the body. Physical death, the separation of the soul from the body, is a disruption of the harmony God created in human beings.

As body/soul units a consequence of sin is not only that we die, but that we are defiled in the soul by sin. James says we are lured and enticed by our own desires, in heart and soul. These desires then give birth to sin in the body. But you as a Christian, you have been given a new heart. God, through gifted faith and by the power of the His Spirit has given you a new heart. You now desire from the soul to please God, to love Him and to love your neighbor and to hate sin, but remnants of sin still remain.

So when for example Paul, with a new heart, says in Romans 7 "I do the things *I hate*" he means that his soul hates sin but he still, at times, yields to temptation and does the very thing he hates. This war between flesh and Spirit it does not end in this life for the believer. But *at death*, as the catechism states, our souls are made perfect in holiness.

This is what is taught in our Hebrews passage. There the writer is speaking of Heaven: "*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festal gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in Heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.*"

At death our souls enter into a state of perfection, whereby we no longer fall short of moral perfection, we do not fall into sin, and we don't suffer temptation. Communion with Christ is no longer disrupted in any way by sin.

And this friends is something we *experience*, our souls are conscious and living, after death in communion with Christ. The Bible teaches against the false doctrine of "soul sleep". This false teaching states that when we die our souls enter into a kind of vegetative state of unconsciousness. We don't "wake up" again until the Last Day, according to this false teaching.

This is not true as we see in our other passage: 2 Cor. 5 “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith not by sight. Yes we are of good courage. We would rather be away from the body (at death) and at home *with* the Lord.

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to *please Him*. In other words Paul knew that his aim in life, pleasing God, would be experienced in a perfected, and therefore a fuller, way when he died, and that his soul went away from his body to be at home *with the Lord*.

Pleasing God does not take place through an unconscious “sleeping” soul. So then at death the soul is perfected and then immediately passes into glory. The teaching of the catechism here, in that the soul immediately passes into glory, denies the false doctrine of purgatory taught by the Roman Catholic church. This other false teaching concerning death for the believer says that for those baptized saints who did not merit entry into heaven, by their good works on earth, go to a place between heaven and hell.

Hell for the Roman Catholic church is the place for the damned, but purgatory is a place of punishment, for those so called “yet to be perfected souls”. And as for the saints who are still alive on earth, they can alleviate the suffering of their loved ones in purgatory through the sacrifice of the mass, good works and indulgences.

This is false teaching and therefore Satanic. Scripture teaches that the souls of believers immediately pass into glory. There was a thief who hung on a cross next to Jesus. He was converted and prayed to Christ while dying-- “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom” Jesus said to him “ Truly I say to you today (day of their deaths) you will be with me in paradise (heaven). Or as the catechism states “in glory”. Notice how Jesus refers to “you” and “me” in paradise. He was talking about the soul of the thief in a living, conscious communion with the soul of Christ in Heaven on *that* day.

Now of course the thief’s body is still in the grave and Christ’s body has been raised and reunited with His soul. Christ is still in Heaven now, paradise, but this passage teaches us that the moment believers close their eyes in death, whenever that may be, because of our union by faith with the resurrected Christ, and the benefits that flow to us from Him, Jesus in effect says to us, on that day, “today you will be with me in paradise”

Death then for the believer is an immediate transfer of existence into glory. What is that glory? Seeing and experiencing the face and presence of God in light and glory. When Paul thought of this benefit at death he wanted to be with Christ which he said was “far better” (Phil. 1)

So then this is the benefit believers receive from Christ at death. It is a benefit for our souls. But what about our bodies. The SC teaches us here that our bodies being still united to Christ do rest in their graves, til the resurrection. We said earlier that the separation of the soul from the body at death is a consequence of sin and experienced by believers and unbelievers alike.

But for those who reject the overtures of the gospel, up to the point of death, their souls pass into Hell and torment, while for believers in Christ their souls pass into a state of perfected bliss in glory. And our bodies, go to the grave, they return to the dust; from dust we were taken and to dust we return. But those bodies are still united to Christ. The bible says that we die *in the Lord*.

Christ still cares for and watches over our bodies, even after death and on the last day Christ will raise and glorify those bodies, with the same power by which He Himself was raised. Our bodies even after death are precious to Christ. It is this body, that Christ will raise and reunite our souls with.

Beloved if Christ regards our dead bodies in this way, how much more than should we have a similar regard for our bodies while we are alive? This is why in times like this we should be wise and seek to preserve our lives and the lives of others. We are not our own, we were bought with a price and therefore should honor God with our bodies.

The Bible offers great comfort to the church today that Christ by His death has removed the sting and curse of death and has transformed it into a gateway for further blessing from Him. And so by God's grace we hope to be of good courage knowing while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We walk by faith and not by sight. We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. But whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please Him.