

The Last Enemy

In this physical realm, death is part of life. As we go through life, we will all lose loved ones. Every flesh-and-blood human being we have ever known or met will one day perish. “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). God didn’t design these physical bodies to endure forever, and this world around us is only temporary.

And that includes death. Death, too, is only temporary. One day, death itself will pass away and be no more.

Of course, it’s natural and healthy to mourn the loss of a loved one. Abraham mourned for Sarah and wept over her (Gen. 23:2). Joseph, his brothers, and even the Egyptians mourned and wept for Jacob (Gen. 50:1-14). Joshua and the children of Israel mourned and wept for Moses (Deut. 34:8). And so on. Throughout Scripture, there are many examples of mourning and weeping at the loss of a loved one.

Yet it’s also important to remember that, for the righteous, death is simply a prelude to something far better. Near the end of his life, the apostle Paul explained,

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim. 4:6-8.)

For the righteous, death is rest — rest from the wickedness of this world, rest from the toils and struggles of this life, and rest from whatever health problems one might have. As Isa. 57:1-2 tells us, “The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”

Of “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12), the apostle John wrote, “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (Rev. 14:13).

An angel told the prophet Daniel, “But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days” (Dan. 12:13). And to King Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah, God promised to spare him from witnessing the punishment of his people: “Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants” (2 Chron. 34:28).

Indeed, “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Whatever God has purposed for us is only for our ultimate good. Our births, lives, and deaths are in His hand, “to do you good in the end” (Deut. 8:16). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Jesus reminded us, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Mat. 10:29). If not so much as a sparrow falls to the ground apart from God’s will, then we can rest assured that none of His saints perish apart from His will either! And whatever He wills is always, without fail, for each person’s ultimate good.

But, as already noted, death is only temporary, a prelude to something far better. Though the righteous may sleep in their graves, they will all awaken at the return of Jesus Christ. As Yeshua/Jesus told His friend Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25). And it is in this that we have hope and comfort. To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote,

13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thes. 4:13-18.)

Nothing can thwart the plan and power of God. Nothing can thwart His purpose for us. In life and in death, our great Creator is with us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39.)

Again, Paul wrote, “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living” (Rom. 14:8-9).

Death is inevitable for all of us. Even if we are still alive at the return of our Savior, these mortal bodies must perish if we are to enter into eternal life. It is necessary and unavoidable.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed —

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Cor. 15:50-55.)

For those counted worthy to be in the first resurrection, there is no more threat of death. “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has

no power” (Rev. 20:6). This will include “Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets” (Luke 13:28), all the apostles (Mat. 19:28; Rev. 21:14), and all who have loved and faithfully obeyed our Creator.

And after the Second Resurrection and the Great White Throne Judgment, death will cease forever. “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14). As Paul had written earlier, “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26).

After death has ceased, Yeshua/Jesus “delivers the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24). There will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), and we are told, “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’” (Rev. 21:3-4).

This is the goal for which we strive, the purpose for which we were born. The reward for the trials and tribulations of this life. “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13).

As we lose faithful loved ones and fellow brethren in this life, it remains for each of us who are alive to fight the good fight and to finish the race, just as they have done, and just as all the apostles and prophets have done before them. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2.)

Let us press on toward the Kingdom!

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