

MIDWEST

Pilgrim News

Spring 2022

Publishing Holiness Since 1967



Happy Memorial Day



EDITOR'S COLUMN

The Blessing of Death

Our title may seem puzzling to some readers for death is not typically associated with blessing. In fact, death has been known as an enemy of mankind rather than a benefactor; it's reign over our race producing nothing but pain, sorrow, and disappointment. We have been forced to live in the knowledge that our life privilege will one day be revoked and our bodies returned to the dust from which they came: no more life, no more love, and no more laughter. We do our best to ignore this fact, but death is always in our peripheral, waiting patiently to claim us. With cruel indifference, it appears to beckon us, and there is little we can do about it.

Some try to be brave and boast that "Death is the next great adventure," but such bravado rings hollow; for as Wesleyan pastor Natasha Dongella, reminds us, "Healthy humanity values life and sees death for the ugliness that it is: something evil, not of God, a dark separation that we were not designed to experience. It is not something to belittle, avoid, brush aside, or disrespect."

Her sentiment is well taken for the Bible presents death as anything but a lark. It calls death an enemy in 1 Cor 15:26, the end of opportunity in Job 7:8-10, irreversible in nature in Job 14:12, representing sadness, and fear in Ps 55:4-5, sealing us in our sinful condition in Ecc 11:3, ushering us into the Judgement in Heb 9:27, and a state of eternal damnation in Lk 16:19-31.

Is there any wonder people cry out with the Psalmist in Ps 55:4-5: "My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. 5 Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me." Obviously, death is an experience that is too much for us.

While these sentiments are understandable, we must ask if they best reflect the optimism of the gospel? After all, unbelievers may gain nothing from death, but it is a different story for the child of God. Christ's death and resurrection has counteracted the curse and provided benefits that are quite liberating in nature; benefits that can transform anxiety into peace and bitterness into praise. Consider three blessings that death provides for believers and be comforted.

Death Can Make Us More Like Jesus

The scope of Christ's atonement is nothing short of magnificent. His journey from the throne room of Heaven to his victory at Calvary is without question the most significant accomplishment in world history. There is nothing that has benefitted mankind's situation more than this amazing act of God. Notice a sampling of the benefits now available to us: We can be pardoned from our sins. (Eph 1:7) We can be adopted into God's family as sons and daughters. (Rms 8:15) We can have the assurance of eternal life with God in heaven. (Jn 3:16) We can be sanctified, or made holy. (Heb 3:12)

This last benefit is especially noteworthy. God doesn't just forgive us and write our names in Heaven, He goes farther by justifying, regenerating, filling us with His Spirit, and forming us in the image of His Son. The corruption of our old nature - envy, jealousy, pride, lust, wrath, and evil speaking, is replaced with the virtues of the God man - humility, honesty, integrity, patience, self-control, and righteousness. We do not become gods but becoming like Jesus Christ in character and attitude is now the objective of our lives. God works through an instantaneous and progressive work of grace so that we might arrive unto "a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph 4:13, Rom 8:28-29)

To Page 10

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Editor's Column	Page 2
The President's Page	Page 3
The News Board	Page 4
Tribute Page	Page 6
Seen on Facebook	Page 7
He Doeth All Things Well	Page 8
Is this All?	Page 9
Youth Page	Page 11

Editor: Rev. Timothy R. Forsee
E-Mail: midwestphc@gmail.com
Website: www.midwestphc.org
Webmaster: Daniel Plemmons:
pauldplemmons@gmail.com

Submission Policy: If you have news, articles, or photos that you would like submitted for publication, please send them to the editor at the above email address. We reserve the right to choose which information is published, as well as the right to edit the submissions in order to fit spacing requirements. The Midwest Pilgrim News is a digital publication of the Midwest Pilgrim Holiness Church and is published quarterly. There is no subscription charge. For hard copy subscriptions, send \$13 annually to the editor. (1000 Hospital Rd. Franklin, IN 46131)

Mission Statement: The mission of the MPN is three-fold: 1.) We desire to glorify God and facilitate the worship of His person. 2.) We seek to promote the Gospel of Christ with its beautiful message of heart holiness. 3.) We seek to be an encouragement to our readers spiritually, as well as an informative source of information to those who relate to, or are interested in, our Conference.

Cover Photo: The cover graphic is a pencil sketch drawn by Jacynda Manns upon the passing of her maternal grandfather, Rev. Ernest Plemmons. Jacynda is a gifted artist and also enjoys baking. She resides in Tipton, IN and attends the PHC in Noblesville.



WE ARE ALSO ON YOUTUBE
www.midwestphc.org



The President's Page

By Rev. Don Nichols

Numbers 23:10b states "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his!" The context of this verse would not suggest that this is the kind of exclamation which would have come from the mouth of Balaam. Balaam was anything but godly. The scriptural narrative of his life is short but filled with descriptions that indicate he was selfish, greedy, intemperate, and vain. He died an ignoble death at the hands of those he seemed to want to be like.

Our Pilgrim family has lost some dear saints in the last few months. It has reminded us once again of our mortality. Life so swiftly passes and all of us would do well to consider that we must be ready to meet God whether young or old. In this issue you will find some stories of the last days and thoughts of some of our friends that have gone on before us. We are reminded that to die well we must live well.

The question that now comes to mind is who will replace these who have passed from the scene? I know that none of us can take the place of another, but we can catch their vision, their passion for the Lord and His church.

Life is so uncertain. It is short at its greatest length. May God help each of us to make every day count for the Master.

Rev. and Mrs. Nichols pastor the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Lima, Ohio. They also serve as the president of the Midwest Pilgrim Holiness Conference. They have 3 children and 11 grandchildren.



NEWS BOARD



Seth and Amber Fish attend the Noblesville, PHC



Camden, Caitrin, Carter



EVANGELISTS LISTING

Rev. Craig and Jo Dahler: Phone: 317-374-1141; E-mail: craigdahler@yahoo.com

Jerald and Becky Glick: Phone: 317-796-5307; E-mail: glickmusic.jg@gmail.com

David and Connie Hilligoss: Phone: 317-474-3377

Rev. Bryan and Rhoda Line: Phone: 765-628-2522; E-mail: b.line7@yahoo.com

Rev. Mark Ranke: Phone: 812-267-3551; E-mail: mranke@juno.com

Daniel and Sarah Rundell: Home Phone: 317-502-3527, Cell Phone: 765-621-6016, E-mail: daniel84@gmail.com

Rev. William Stucker: Cell Phone: 765-461-3895, Home Phone: 765-450-6908 E-mail: sflash101@aol.com

Rev. Don and Fayerene Walden: 317-341-5237; E-mail: donandfay1963@gmail.com



Congratulations to Bro. and Sis. William Spencer. They have accepted a call to pastor the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Muncie, IN.



Congratulations to our Conference President and wife on 45 years of ministry at the PHC in Lima.
[1977 – 2022]



New Arrivals
Franklin, IN
Francesca Josephine Casalino



Evansville, IN
Jacinda Grace Jackman



Noblesville, IN
Oliver Trent Welbaum



- Happy 50th Wedding Anniversary to Rev. Stan and Linda Heddon. May God bless you with many more. (January 15)
- Congratulations to the Shiloh PHC for erasing the debt on their new Family Life Center.



Conference Ministerial 2022
The Pilgrim Holiness Church
1413 Westfield Rd, Noblesville IN 46062.

Date: May 3-5

Speaker: Rev. Jack Hooker
Singers: Barry and Monica Whittaker.

Call Pastor John Forsee for more information at 989-280-1162

www.midwestphc.org



Pilgrim Family Camp 2022

June 17-26
1058 W. Freeman St.
Frankfort, IN

Rev. Don Nichols,
Conference
President and
Platform Chairman



Speakers: Rev. Harry Plank, Rev. Nathan Purdy
Singers: The Joe Carey Family

Now More Than Ever Pilgrim Youth Camp 2022

June 13-17, Register online @ <https://pilgrimyouthcamp.com/>
Mondays from May 16 – June 6, Prayer and Fasting - Meal of your Choice.



Pastor John Forsee, Conference Youth Director

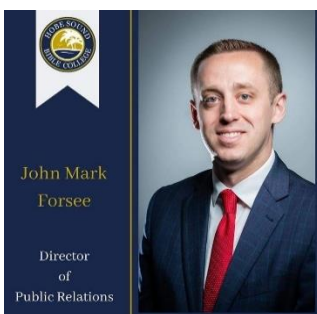
Don't miss it. We're expecting our best year yet.

Sea Breeze Camp Commissioning Service



Jeremy Hopkins (Greenup, PHC) and his wife Esther Byer Hopkins have accepted a call to Honduras as missionaries. We congratulate the happy couple on their recent marriage and new ministry calling.

Hobe Sound News



John Mark Forsee has accepted the position of Director of Public Relations at Hobe Sound Bible College. We wish John Mark well in this new responsibility.

Noblesville, IN



John Mark and Daniel Forsee with the water bottles sent down to KY to assist with tornado relief.



Logan Dahler enjoys VBS

Noblesville News

Greetings from the Noblesville Pilgrim Holiness Church! December, as you may expect, brought many events and much busyness. Some individuals in our congregation contributed to a wonderful devotional for the Christmas or Advent season. A wonderful avenue of outreach for our church in the Christmas season was our Christmas program. A lot of work and preparation went into our service on Dec. 12th. God helped so much! On December 13th, our Pastor and some of his family traveled with supplies and a monetary gift to administer to give for the Mayfield, KY tornado relief. This tornado caused widespread disaster and what a blessing to be able to contribute in some small way! January brings exciting news, also. A new little member was born into our church on January 25th. Oliver Trent Welbaum was welcomed by his parents Trent and Rebekah Welbaum and his grandparents, (our Pastor and wife) John & Martha Forsee as well as his other precious grandparents from our congregation, Dean & Hope Welbaum. Welcome, Baby Oliver! As we press forward in this new year, may God's presence guide us in ALL things. ~Amber Plemmons, Church Reporter

From the Conference Website: Attention Pastors! Pastor Jeremy Jessup is the newly elected Conference Attendance Statistician. Please use the following link on the Announcements page of the Conference Website to input your attendance numbers, and when you click "Submit", they will be redirected to his email address. Thank You. Dan Plemmons

<http://www.midwestphc.org/Attendance.html>

A Tribute to Wavelene Burge 1938 - 2022

Wavelene Burge spent her life as a pastor's wife doing all that she could for the kingdom of God and on her passing, there was much evidence of God's favor upon her.

The last four or five days of her life Wavelene alternated between two worlds. One minute she was here with her family talking and fellowshiping and the next she was hearing and seeing scenes from the glory world.

This quiet lady who never had much to say, suddenly broke out shouting, "I'm going to Heaven, I'm going to Heaven! Hallelujah!." They tried to calm her down but she didn't want to be calmed down. She wanted to tell everyone what she was experiencing. Refusing any medication, she had the following experiences:

*She saw the Heavenly City saying that it wasn't just tall and bright, but tall, tall and bright, bright.

*She saw at least 20 saints that had been gone for many years and spoke with them. For example, she saw Richard Raines but not Mary. She called for Mary to hurry so they could be together. (Mary's funeral was the day after hers.) She saw Maude Cox a lady that used to sing in their Washington Court House church 60 years ago. She even saw her mother-in-law that died 10 years before she met Curtis. She said, "Thalma, you're more beautiful than I ever dreamed, you're the mother-in-law I never met."

*She saw crowds of angels. She saw Jesus and talked with Him. She said He was precious and just keeps popping up everywhere. At one point she saw Him standing in a garden with beautiful purple flowers. She even asked Him if her nice husband could come with her, but He said "not yet, in a little while."

*She would break out praying for her lost loved ones, pleading that they would get right with God and go the old-fashioned way.

*She sent messages to many people that she knew. She told her pastor Don Raines to tell the people that Heaven is real, Jesus is real, and you have to get ready now. She told him to "not hold back, but punch them, punch them, punch them." She told Barb Brock that it wouldn't be long until she would join her.

She even called a lady whose mother she had led to the Lord. She told this lady that she saw her mother in Heaven, but if she wanted to see her again, she needed to stop drinking and smoking and straighten her life up. She needed to trust Jesus for salvation and start going to church.

Even now the stories are still coming in. Everyone it seems has a story of what they heard her say or do when they were sitting with her.

Wavelene has probably touched more people in her death than she did in her life and it is a testimony that God was governing every step of her way.

~Reported by Mark Ranke

Death to the Christian is the funeral of all his sorrows and evils, and the resurrection, of all his joys. - James H. Aughey

My Home By Mary Raines 1933 - 2022

Don't weep for me my children,
my preparations were made;
to the land eternal,
my home beyond the grave.

My life on earth has been enriched,
with children that served God;
remember all these blessings,
as you put this shell beneath the sod.

Sweet memories here were many,
and we made them one by one.
When our family got together,
was when the fun begun.

There were camping trips and Christmas,
Thanksgiving turkey too;
sweet the joys when we're together,
no one there was ever blue.

For awhile we may be parted,
but this is not for long.
Up there camp meetings never end,
we will never lose our song.

So, keep encouraged, trust and pray,
I'll wait for each of you;
up there in Heaven, that sweet home,
Away beyond the blue.

Mary Raines and her husband Richard have served for many years as missionaries to Dominica, Antigua, and Blind River Ontario, Canada. Mary was known as a "spark plug" during our Pilgrim Family Camp meeting services. Their love for Christ and model of faithfulness will be sorely missed.



"The Homecoming"



By Dr. Chris Dewhurst

18 years ago, as I was completing my BA from Union Bible College, I informed my pastor Dr. Craig Dahler that I wanted to join the Noblesville Pilgrim Holiness Church. After much heart searching and praying, my young wife Constance and I decided we wanted to identify with and hold ourselves accountable to a body of saints we trusted to hold us steady and shape our identity. Ironically, we weren't convinced that everything in the membership covenant was something we personally would have contrived, but we openly and honestly submitted ourselves to the guidelines in our discipline. In evaluating my own weaknesses and immaturity at the time, I had enough foresight to know that if I did not submit myself to a solid and consistent source of accountability, I would become subject to the winds of change and instability.

Over the past few days at Sea Breeze Camp, my friends of 18 years - the same saints I entrusted myself to as a young vulnerable preacher boy - have begun to trickle in. Along with Dr. McElwain, the Halsteads, the Glicks, the Roses, the Fishes, and Jon & Joana Stratton (who are already here in Hobe Sound with us) we have seen the Nichols, the Rolls, the Waldens, the Hopkins, our dear friends Dave and Mindy, and the Strattons (Jr. & Sr.). Over the past 2 decades, we have wept together, laughed together, and praised together. Through it all, that same consistency that drew me to them is alive and well.

As my heart wells up with joy and gratitude, I feel a strong desire to encourage my students and younger friends not to follow the spirit of individualism and independence that promises a future ministry that is free from accountability or restraint. Don't wait too long before finding a group of saints who you know will rein you in and speak the truth to you, 0 even when the truth hurts a little. You don't always want to hear it but need to hear it. If I could spend 5 minutes with my 22-year-old self, I would tell him to do just what he did. Find some people who you know are stronger than you - that are going to Heaven and that are willing to do what it takes to take you with them. Don't go this thing alone. 😊

The Lord is Risen

By James Sneed

The night of the first day of the week had worn slowly away. The darkest hour, just before daybreak, had come. Christ was still a prisoner in His narrow tomb. The great stone was still in its place. The Roman seal was unbroken. The Roman guards were keeping their watch alongside hosts of evil angels, invisible to their eyes. Had it been possible, the prince of darkness with his apostate army would have kept sealed forever the tomb of the Son of God; but a heavenly host also surrounded the sepulcher. Angels that excel in strength were guarding the tomb and waiting to welcome the Prince of Life.

“And behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from Heaven.” Clothed in the panoply of God, this angel left the Heavenly courts; the bright beams of God's glory went before him, and illuminated his pathway. “His countenance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.” Now, priests and rulers, where is the power of your guards? Soldiers that have never been afraid of human power are now as captives taken without a sword or spear. The face they look upon is not the face of a mortal warrior, it is the face of the most mighty of the Lord's host. This messenger is he whom on the hills of Bethlehem proclaimed the new Christ's birth. The earth trembles at his approach, the hosts of darkness flee, and as he rolls away the stone, Heaven seems to come down to the earth. The soldiers see him removing the stone as he would a pebble, and hear him cry, “Son of God, come forth from the grave!” They heard him proclaim over the rent sepulcher, “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” As He comes forth in majesty and glory, the angel hosts bow low in adoration before the Redeemer, and welcome Him with songs of praise.

To Page 12

The saints below have all gone to Heaven since October of 2021. Pictured are Wavelene Burge, Sue McElwaine, Lois Stainbrook, Ina Wooten, Ethel Yazell, Marjorie Morrow, Nadine Karnes, Robert Harwell, Ellen Hopkins, Richard Raines, Mary Raines, Ernest Plemmons, Nancy Laramie, Stacey Garner.



HE DOETH ALL THINGS WELL



By Justin and Sarah Jackman

"[The people] were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well" – Mark 3:37a

The goodness of God to our family along our journey to having three wonderful, healthy children has been astonishing. Adileah (5), Wesley (2), and Jacinda (1 month) have each required clear and direct answers to prayer by way of a miracle from God. It is our desire to share God's recent workings in order to bring him glory and embolden the faith of the saints.

Early in our marriage, we learned that Sarah had a challenging medical condition. The medical team with which we consulted agreed the issue would not significantly affect her ability to conceive, but would likely cause significant difficulty in carrying a pregnancy to long enough term to allow for delivery of a healthy child. This determination was followed by two miscarriages and two surgical procedures, one of which was performed by a specialist and is quite rare. Following this our families and church family began to cloak our family in prayer that we may be able to have the children we so deeply desired.

Through those prayers, Adileah and Wesley made their safe entries into our lives, with each of them requiring short NICU stays. At one point during the pregnancy with Wesley, we were told "Unfortunately, you are pros at going through this now. All you can do is try again." Just prior to that appointment, our church had anointed Sarah and prayed, and the next day, the doctor called us to come back in after a lab test was not what they had expected. By the grace of God, Wesley had survived in the womb, and has been largely quite healthy to this day. Praise the Lord!

Knowing this background, Jacinda's path into the world was covered in prayer from our support system from day one. Sarah shared answers to her prayers all through the pregnancy, from items small to large. There was significant concern during development with the placenta and cord and slower than normal growth. Once Sarah could feel the baby move, she would often pray if she had not felt movement for a while, and Jacinda would immediately begin moving again. When nearing delivery, Jacinda took a sudden growth spurt, which was a relief, but then stayed transverse or breach through the entire last trimester. After twice weekly appointments for weeks, our doctor finally recommended just scheduling a C-section, and we reluctantly agreed.

The Sunday prior to our scheduled C-section of Friday, Sarah once again requested that our church family gather to anoint and pray that if the Lord would allow, Jacinda would turn from her breach position. Sarah shared at that time that knowing her medical circumstances, this was no small feat, but kept thinking of the song which says "Tell the mountain how big your God is!" Upon checking in on the scheduled day, an ultrasound showed that Jacinda, while no longer breach, was still transverse, or directly sideways. This was typical of many of the appointments over the final weeks, so we submitted to the understanding that the Lord's will must be for the C-section to continue as planned.

Then, our doctor came down to present the idea of trying to physically turn the baby, followed by an attempted induction. Following a long discussion, we agreed.

Our doctor, who is a strong Christian lady, then turns to Justin and says "Let's make a deal. You are going to pray, and I'm going to push on this baby. Together, we can make this happen."

Justin certainly was praying as we waited a long ten minutes for the ultrasound tech to return to the room, allowing our doctor to see the baby while she attempted to turn her. When the ultrasound tech returned, it was about 45 minutes following the first ultrasound. As soon as the machine was turned out, the tech called out, "Guys, I have a head down baby!" The room erupted in cheers and praises, with one nurse shouting out "Hallelujah!" The doctor turned to Justin, and said, "You sure were praying, because I never got to push!"

This was followed by additional works of God. Jacinda tried to turn other times during labor, only to return back to head down without medical intervention. In one case included stopping medication and renewed preparation for a C-section. Even during this, it was as if God clearly showed us "I didn't bring you this far to leave you." In the end, Jacinda is our only child that did not require a NICU stay, and both Sarah and Jacinda were released to come home only 36 hours after delivery.

God's wonderful working has been a clear testimony to our medical team, co-workers, and church family. To God be the glory, great things he has done! Truly, he still does all things well!

Justin and Sarah Jackman are pastoring the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Evansville, IN. Justin also studied mechanical engineering at the University of Evansville and works at Berry Plastics Group, Inc.





By Dr. Randal McElwain

Sue and I are not great sightseers. I like to travel to teach. She liked to travel to be together - and to make sure that I have on matching shoes when I get up front to teach, but neither of us have a sightseeing “bucket list.” Yet, Sue had one thing on her list. She wanted to see the Palace of Versailles. In Junior History, she had taught about the Hall of Mirrors where the Treaty of Versailles ending World War 1 was signed. She had seen paintings of the beautiful palace, so on a trip to France, we scheduled a day to visit Versailles. She was excited to see one of the few sites on her personal bucket list. (And I was excited that I might win a “husband of the year” award, an award I rarely deserved.)

We took the train from Paris and stood in line for tickets. Finally, we made our way to the famous Hall of Mirrors. Sue was so excited. As we entered the famous ballroom, she looked around, turned to me and said with great disappointment, “Is this all?” The Hall of Mirrors was not nearly as big or dramatic as she had envisioned from the pictures. It was a nice house for people who could afford the utility bills, but after all the anticipation, the Palace of Versailles was something of a letdown.

This morning, as I woke up and tried to imagine what Sue might be doing, I remembered that trip to Versailles. Then, I imagined Sue stepping into the beautiful home that God has prepared for His people. I imagined her looking around for the first time. I don’t know what she said, but I do know that she did NOT say, “Is this all?” There was no letdown; there was no disappointment. Heaven is exceeding her greatest dreams.

Many things in life prove to be disappointing. Anytime we put our hopes for ultimate fulfillment in the things (even the good things!) of this life, we will be disappointed, but if we remain faithful, a day will come when our greatest hopes will be fulfilled - and exceeded.

Last Wednesday, I led an online discipleship group in a discussion of Matthew 16 where Jesus talks about the cost of discipleship. He says, “To follow me requires a cross.” For Jesus’ listeners, a cross was not a polished emblem at the front of a church sanctuary nor a tie clip; it was an instrument of death. Following Jesus is costly, but as we discussed this passage last Wednesday, our focus was on the next few verses. After talking about the cost of the discipleship, Jesus reminds us of the reward of discipleship. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,” and then Jesus promises the Kingdom to those who are faithful.

This morning, I am anticipating a day when all our hopes and dreams will be fulfilled. These dreams will never be completely fulfilled in this world. This life brings many joys. It is not bad; it is simply incomplete - because this world is intended to point us to a better world. It is intended to give us a taste of an even greater world that awaits us.

Sue loved life, but ultimately this world leaves us saying, “Is this all?” But if you and I will remain faithful, the day will come when we will see our eternal home. We will not say, “Is this all?” Instead, like Jewel the Unicorn at the end of the Chronicles of Narnia, we will cry out, “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.” That is the great hope of the Christian!

Dr. McElwain lives in Hobe Sound Florida and teaches at Hobe Sound Bible College. He enjoys traveling, teaching, and has authored a number of books. His wife Sue recently passed away from cancer and is enjoying the presence of the Lord.



Blessing of Death: From Page 2: Of course, God could translate us as He did Enoch, or take us to Heaven in a chariot of fire like Elijah; but He chooses the slower avenues to achieve His purposes: seasons of suffering, disappointments, discipline, and even the process of aging and death. ¹

Admittedly, His methods are not always pleasant, especially the dying part, but we need not stagger as the end approaches. God is not being cruel, nor is He punishing us for our sins. (Rom 8:1) He has simply decided not to apply all the benefits of Christ's redemptive work at once. He has ordained that we live in a fallen world and die a natural death so that we may identify with the sufferings of Christ, learn the lessons of trust and obedience, point others to Jesus, and be formed in His image. (Heb 5:5-9; Php 3:8-11)

Is this not what we want as believers? We regularly sing in our worship "To be like Jesus, ...all I ask to be like Him..." and we pray daily for God to make this so. Is this not an answer to that prayer? If we will look at death as an opportunity for spiritual growth versus a precedent for mourning, death can be regarded as a blessing. We should be encouraged to know that aging and dying can make us more like Jesus.

Death Accomplishes Divine Purposes

When the psalm writer wrote in Ps 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints", he was contributing another aspect to a correct view of death. The word precious in Ps 116 means costly or valuable and is used in the Old Testament to describe the precious stones that the Queen of Sheba gave to Solomon in 1 Kings 10:2, the rareness of the word of the Lord when there was no open vision in 1 Sam 3:1, and dear or beloved friends and relatives in Ps 45:9.

This teaches us that God isn't just sentimental about our deaths but that they are objects of value to Him. In fact, they are so connected with His purposes that Satan cannot have his way with us as he pleases. We are under God's protection and He will not only direct our steps in life, (Prov 3:5-6, Ps 37:23) He will not allow our death to take place outside of the time and circumstances He desires. Our earthly demise will only happen when good and sometimes great purposes can be accomplished through them.

This truth should totally overhaul our outlook on tragedy. This means that our loved one's car wreck or cancer was not an accident. Satan did not sneak up and assassinate them when God wasn't looking. Not only was God aware of what was taking place, He worked within the circumstances of that event for His own ends. He allowed it for the tri-fold purpose of bringing one of His children home, (an anticipated event in God's eyes) demonstrating afresh and anew the power of redemption, and advancing His kingdom in ways that we cannot always comprehend.

To further soothe the sting of death, God knows the pain of losing a loved one and stands by with sustaining grace. He is able to heal a broken heart and use our loss to further His kingdom purposes. Such consolation should generate courage for every child of God.

Death is the Doorway to God

One of the intimidating things about death is what happens when we die. Will we simply go unconscious or will we become a ghost? Will there be a tunnel and a bright light, or will we be alone in a dark place? Our questions about death are sundry and distressing, but the truth is we do not have to be afraid of what happens after we die. Once we are deceased, the suffering is over and we are safe in the arms of Jesus.

The apostle Paul speaks of this in 2 Cor 5:8 "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." [See also Luke 23:43, Matt 22:32] This happy thought contradicts the doctrines of soul sleep, annihilation, and purgatory. It comforts us with the fact that there is no memorial service, or coffin in our future; those things being for our loved ones left behind. By the time our body is committed to the ground we will have long since gone to where God dwells. Our physical bodies will remain on earth until Resurrection Day, but there will be no interruption of our personal existence. There will be a continued consciousness of our disembodied spirit in Heaven where we will joyfully and peacefully await the resurrection with Christian loved ones. ²

This is why Paul was so anxious to leave this world and be with Christ. He had been allowed to visit Heaven (2 Cor 12:1-5) and what He experienced there forever spoiled him for life on earth. He was willing to stay on earth and be a model of the service driven life, (Php 1:21-24, 2 Cor 5:1-4) but his heart was in the world to come. The eternal experience was much more satisfying than anything he had experienced here. We also can we look forward to our death knowing that death means instant union with the Lord.

Conclusion

We would never want to disparage the grief that is experienced through death. After all, Jesus Himself took moments to pause and weep over death – all the while knowing that he was "the Resurrection and the Life." Furthermore, devout men buried "and made great lamentation" over Stephen in Acts 8:2; yet is there not a precedent for joy over the positive aspects of death? The sting of death has been counteracted. What Satan intended for evil God means for our good and His glory. Let us not sorrow as others who have no hope, (1 Thess 4:13) but live in the reality of God's promises. For us, the best is yet to come. ~TF

Footnotes

¹ Being Wesleyan Arminian we reject the teaching that death is a gateway to purity. Full salvation is attained in this life through faith in the atoning blood of Christ. Our comments are offered only to emphasize that death, like any life trial, can draw us closer to God. As we see death approaching, we run to God for strength and our dependence produces greater intimacy with Him. Thus, through faith and submission to His will, we learn to be more like Jesus. Death itself is an enemy to be destroyed and offers no sanctifying grace.

² There are 3 views on what form Christians have in the intermediate state. 1. Believers are disembodied spirits upon death. 2. A temporary body is given to believers at death. 3. Upon death the believer receives their resurrection body. While Wesleyans tend to be silent about the intermediate state, the first position seems the most consistent with scripture. Dan 12:13, John 6:40 and 1 Cor 15:23 specify that the resurrection will not take place until the "end of the age", yet Revelation pictures deceased saints worshipping around the throne before that time. This suggests that deceased Christians reside in Heaven in spirit form between their death and resurrection. To see a possible example of a person in the intermediate state look in Matt 17:3. Moses' body had been buried, but he was recognizable as himself, at peace and talking with Jesus. Unless God resurrected Moses' body prior to Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of all believers, this may be the condition of all deceased Christians. Our disembodied spirit may be similar in appearance to the form we now possess. [See also Abraham and Lazarus in Luke 16.] Whatever may be the answer to this conundrum, we can rest assured that believers are in Christ's keeping and "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." (Rom 8:38-39)



Eugene the Mummy

The most well-known gravestone at the Sabina, OH Cemetery is that of "Eugene the Mummy." Who is Eugene? On June 6, 1929 the body of a 50-60-year-old African-American man was found outside the town of Sabina. The man had no identification on him, just a piece of paper with an address in Cincinnati. Law officers visited the address, but all they found was a vacant lot. No one they talked to recognized the man. They decided to call the unidentified man Eugene, named after the person they questioned who lived closest to the vacant lot.

That left the town with an unidentified dead body. Not knowing what else to do, the police contacted the Littleton Funeral home to have the body embalmed. Months went by, and there were still no leads on the case. The Sabina police decided to place the body on display in a small building near the funeral home. They were hoping that someone would pass through the town and recognize the body. Sounds a little creepy, doesn't it?!

Eugene was left in the little brick building for THIRTY-FIVE years! He became quite a celebrity - it is estimated that 1.3 million visitors came to see him. Eugene also did some traveling - high school and college kids would sometimes take him to other towns and put him on park benches. One time a fraternity at the Ohio State University "kidnapped" him and took him back to Columbus. The funeral home would always get a call from the police to come and pick him up.

Due to all of the pranks, and the fact that no one recognized him in thirty-five years, the funeral home decided it was time to lay Eugene to rest. He was buried at the Sabina Cemetery in 1964. ~Selected

Application: What a shame that Eugene had to die in such circumstances. God never intended for anyone to pass away unloved, and un-mourned. God created us to be part of a family unit that looks out and cares for one another. When we must die, we should be surrounded by family and friends that offer us comfort and support. If you have an aging parent or grandparent, please do not allow them to age and die as Eugene did. Reach out to them and do your best to be a part of their life. Your love and friendship can be a tremendous source of comfort in the declining years. You may be busy now, but remember - when you become a senior citizen, you will want people to be there for you.

Matthew 7:12 *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

Beyond the Shadow Land

One by one their names are called, and they're passing out the door,
to the land beyond the shadow where the curse exists no more;
their sweet desire to linger, savoring life's embrace,
supplanted by the summons to come and see His face.

A quickening breath, a hurried kiss, and they are caught away,
neither of us dreaming that today would be the day.
So unprepared to let them go, the tear stains mark our face,
yet knowledge soothes malicious grief that they have won the race.

They've hungered for this haven, as they labored through the years,
the sweet refrains of promise offsetting earthly fears.
Now their prayers are answered, they are safe on Heaven's shore,
they've passed beyond the shadow land where sorrow is no more.

Ironically, the tempter claimed, there was no use to pray,
for a land beyond the shadow, a place of endless day.
T'was only wishful thinking, the scriptures were a lie,
we're destined to the shadow lands where we must surely die.

But in their blackest moments, at the mercy of Hell's blast,
faith refused to acquiesce; the anchor ropes held fast.
Mustard seed rebellion; groanings in the night,
molten sparks from ringing steel setting Satan's hordes to flight.

I will ne're forsake you, strength to you I'll send,
when the world forsakes you, I will be your friend.
The waters shall not overflow, the lion shall not maim,
be thou faithful unto death and a crown of life you'll gain.

As in the holy hush I sit of these saints gone on before,
precious memories crowd my mind with a plea I can't ignore.
A testimony passionate, a deed performed with care,
a lesson taught in Sunday School; gnarled fingers clasped in prayer.

A hymn sung loud with praises, a sacrificial gift,
a sorrowful apology, the mending of a rift.
All reason with an urgency to resist my soul's dark foe,
to stay the course, to keep the faith, to reach the cherished goal,

Flesh and blood cannot inherit this land that has my heart,
strength to conquer sin and death God must to me impart.
At any cost I must prevail and join that happy throng,
in the land beyond the shadow—the place where I belong. ~TF



Mateo and Anna Gray enjoying country life



2 Timothy 4:6: "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand."

The Greek word here for departure is *analsis* which is (a) a term used of a ship which pulls anchor and sets sail; (b) a term used to describe an army breaking camp; and (c) a term describing someone being freed from their chains.

This, for the Christian, is what death is--it's setting sail, its breaking camp, it's being freed from the chains of this life so we can go home. The anchor is weighed and we set sail for the golden shore of the blessed presence of God.

If you have ever been returning home after a long journey and experienced that warm feeling of excitement as the time of your departure approached, you know what Paul is talking about here. Death for the believer is a going home experience.

~Taken from Bible.org: What Death Means for the Believer in Christ.

From Page 12: An earthquake marked the hour when Christ laid down His life, another earthquake witnessed the moment when He took it up again in triumph. He who had vanquished death and the grave came forth from the tomb with the tread of a conqueror. When Jesus laid in the grave, Satan triumphed. He dared hope that the Savior would not take up His life again. He claimed the Lord's body and set a guard around the tomb, seeking to hold Christ a prisoner. He was bitterly angry when his angels fled at the approach of the heavenly messenger. When he saw Christ come forth in triumph, he knew that his kingdom would have an end and that he must finally die. Now, the truth of Christ's words was proven; "I lay down my life, that I might take it again...I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again." Now the prophecy was fulfilled that He had spoken to the priests and rulers, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again" John 10:17-18, 2:19.

To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. Death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if were a little moment. "If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death." "He shall never taste death." To the Christian, death is but a sleep, the life is hid with Christ in God. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" John 8:51. At the Savior's resurrection a few graves were opened, but at His second coming all the precious dead shall hear His voice, and shall come forth to a glorious, immortal life. The same power that raised Christ from the dead will raise His church, and glorify Him. Praise God forever!

The article is reprinted from the April 2000 issue of the MPN.