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Isaiah 57:1-2:

## **When the Righteous Die**

- I. No One Lays It to Heart.
- II. Is Taken Away from Calamity.
- III. They Rest.

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Isaiah 57:1-2

Dear Friends in Christ,

I know most, if not all of you, remember *The Parable of the Rich Fool*, the man who couldn't get enough of this world? Recall these terrifying words: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? (Lk. 12:20).'" *This night - this time - the time set by God. This night your soul is required of you.* As Solomon said, "a time to be born, and a time to die (Eccl. 3:2a)."

We know how the disciples reacted when Jesus told them about His suffering, death and resurrection? They couldn't get beyond the death part. We often experience the same problem at the deaths of family and friends. We're comforted by the fact that Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. But death is still chilling, like a bad dream. It is a reminder of what sin has done to us.

Do you remember what Jesus said about the dying and death His people see and experience? "Let not your hearts be troubled (Jn. 14:1)." And do you remember what He promised? "...I go and prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (Jn. 14:2b,3)." While living through the most horrible time in the history of the Old Testament church, the prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies are new every morning; 'The Lord (not this world) is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him (Lam.3:22-24).'"

This world is hard. Dying and death are hard. The flesh can't avoid them. The soul looks to Jesus. We're looking at . . .

## WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS DIE

### I. No One Lays It to Heart.

Our text begins: "The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands (v.1a)."

Well, here we go. The righteous are not the worldly good people - the civilly righteous. They're not the philanthropist, or the movie star, or the young person who died a sudden death. The righteous are those who see their sinful nature, confess it and believe in Jesus for forgiveness of sin and eternal life. As Scriptures say, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Rom 3:22)." And, as Scriptures say, "'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (perfect obedience) (Rom. 4:3).'" And Scriptures say, "And to the one who does not work (avoids the delusion that God must love them because they've done their best!) but believes in him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted as righteousness (Rom. 4:5)."

The righteous are sinful humans who know God's love in Christ, walk in that love, share it and demonstrate it to others. Well....they die. It's been said many times: You're going to die - I'm going to die. God's people die and "no one lays it to heart." Outside of family and friends, no one cares. No one understands what's happening. Mercy, decency, the the love of God fade from the earth - and the world could care less! In fact, we are living in the most care less time - ever. It will get worse.

And more! We've heard it many times, but it's here, as Jesus said, "'And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12).'" I know! Many will say, this is just so negative, can't we consider the positive? I hope that's no-one here. Living in a fantasy isn't going to positively help anyone as this world hits the bottom of the barrel!

Jesus said, "'lawlessness will be (not might be, but will be) increased.'" And He said, as a result of that, "'the love of many will (not might, but will) grow cold.'" And then He gives the positive, "'But the one who endures to the end will be saved (Mt.24:13).'" It's that word "endure" most don't want to hear. It implies something negative. Basically, we just want!

## II. Is Taken Away from Calamity

God then says this: "For the righteous man is taken away from calamity (vs 1b)." Calamity. I know you know what that means, but consider these definitions from Webster: "a state of deep distress or misery caused by major misfortune or loss... an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and lasting distress and affliction."

Are we kidding ourselves? Most everyone in the sanctuary this morning could sit down and write a little history about the family members and friends who have died throughout the years - with more to come. Most everyone here has been or is going through some sort of conflict; and some are very, very hard. And we're all living with the incredible corruption and lies of many who have been entrusted with the well being of the nation.

I prefer the second definition of calamity that I gave you from Webster: "...an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and **lasting** distress and affliction." "Well, so-and-so died and will miss the birth of, or the wedding of, or the reunion of, the trip to, or the...whatever. How sad." Really? Seriously?? If "so-and-so" had faith in Christ, then died and went to heaven, just how sad is that? They're "taken away from calamity."

"Well, at least "so-and-so is looking down on us." Really? Seriously?? If they're in Heaven?? Why? For what? Because they're lonely - missing somebody - unhappy - inquisitive? Because the love, bliss and unending joy and peace of God are not enough? Do the words of Peter fit our lives?

"He (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled (without sin), and unfading (in bliss), kept in heaven for you (I Peter 1:3-4)."

Listen and remember these words: "For the righteous man is taken away from calamity." The word "man" refers to a child of God redeemed by the blood of Christ, forgiven and granted Christ's promise: "whoever believes has eternal life." ***Taken away from calamity*** - forever!

And one final truth:

## III. They Rest.

God had Isaiah write, "...he (the child of God) enters into peace; they rest in their beds (they rest from earthly labors) who walk in their uprightness (vs. 2)." Their uprightness is their faith in Christ. As Scripture states, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith (Gal 4:11)."

Commentator John A. Braun writes:

They (the children of God through faith in Christ) enter peace. For them, death is not the end; they will enter a new world where peace dominates. The Hebrew word for "peace" connotes total well-being and happiness, a blessing that cannot be found outside of God. For the wicked there is no such peace (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21), but those believers whom God has taken to himself in death have such peace... (People's Bible Commentary, Isaiah II, John A. Braun, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 2001, p.270).

While we experience the hurt and momentary removal of our Christian family members and friends, we must let these words of Scripture be a true source of comfort and strength: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them (Rev. 14:13)!" That is, their works, regardless of how seemingly small or insignificant to the world, become the evidence of the faith they professed in this life, the faith that took them to eternal joy.

And for us, left behind, we must look above the calamity of life here and hold on to these words of the Apostle Peter:

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (I Peter 1:8-9)."

The world goes on as it always has. People are born, live, die and are quickly forgotten. But for those in Christ, God is always there - with us and for us. As David said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me... (Ps. 23:4)." He's with us now and forever!

And that's the way it is ***When The Righteous Die.***

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott