

A PRECIOUS DEATH - PS. 116:15

Those things Most Precious #9

Robert Goddard is recognized today as the father of space travel. Dr. Goddard was fascinated throughout his life with rockets and the possibility of travelling thru space at high speeds. It was Goddard who proved that liquid rocket fuel was practical, it was Goddard who launched the first 11 1/2 foot rocket from a farm outside of Auburn, Massachusetts, it was Goddard who accumulated 70 patents in rocket science before his death in 1941. But, in many ways, Dr. Robert Goddard was a man living before people were ready for his ideas. For in the early years of this century, only crackpots seriously spoke of space travel- at least that's what the majority of people thought. In fact, Dr. Goddard was arrested by the police for disturbing the peace after the test flight of his first rocket. The local newspaper printed an article the next day laughing at the "mad scientist who was trying to shoot a hole in the moon." There were a few who shared Dr. Goddard's vision of space travel in the future- but they were very few, and Robert Goddard lived the majority of his life with a great deal of public ridicule.

Our national leaders first began to take the practicality of rocket use seriously after they found that German scientists had successfully developed the V-1 and V-2 rockets. How did the Germans manage to design such rockets? How did they jump ahead of the rest of the world in their development of liquid rocket fuel? Imagine the embarrassment of many public officials when they learned that the Germany Embassy in Washington D.C. had purchased all the details for these rockets in three pamphlets authored by Dr. Robert Goddard, purchased from the Smithsonian Institute for a total of 15 cents.

Sometimes in life, something can be almost totally rejected by one person as having no value, but be considered almost priceless by someone else. And what a joy it is to a person to find something very valuable to them that is disregarded by someone else. It is like going to a garage sale and finding just what you have been looking for being practically given away by someone cleaning out their basement.

There are many values that the world around us considers to be very precious that are disregarded as being relatively worthless by God. There are also some things that the world considers to be of no value that are considered to be very precious by God. We would like to consider one of these this morning as we turn to Psalms 116.

During these summer Sunday mornings, we have been looking at those things which should be most precious to us. We have already seen many of these from the Scriptures-

*our souls that are most valuable to us than the whole world - Mark 8:34-37

*the intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that is available to each of should be of great value – it should be one of our highest priorities in life-Phil 3:10

*the word of God more precious than pure gold - Ps. 19:10

*the precious blood of Jesus more valuable than silver or gold - 1 Peter 1:18,19

*our mothers and wives and family relationships are more valuable than rubies, precious gems – Prov. 31

*godliness more valuable than physical fitness- 1 Tim. 4:8

*Jesus Christ, the precious cornerstone in our life - 1 Pet.2:6

*Even suffering unjustly for the sake of Christ is more valuable than the best treasures that this world has to offer- Heb. 11:25-27

*Now this morning, we want to look at one of the most difficult subjects for us to understand- for this precious treasure not only runs directly against the value structure of the world around us, but it also runs contrary to an instinctive drive that God has created within us.

If we were to ask almost anyone that we were to meet in the street, what is the worst possible thing that could happen to you today, most would agree that the answer would be death. Death is commonly recognized as the worst enemy of the human race. We will do almost anything that we can to avoid death. We will spend any amount of money necessary to develop medical technologies to help us live longer, we will subject our bodies to great exertion and carefully monitor our health habits if we can have the assurance of living longer, we will build machines that will help our bodies to function longer- many people are even making plans today to freeze their bodies upon their deaths in hopes that future medical advances will give them additional years of life.

And such a drive to live is good in balance- for it has been created by God himself. God created us with the drive and the will to live. When a person loses that drive and becomes suicidal, emotional depression has overtaken the normal balance that God has created for life- and that person needs help, often professional help.

Psalms 116 is a good commentary on our will to live. We don't know who exactly wrote this psalm, but whoever it was was rejoicing in the physical deliverance of God.

*This individual had just experienced a very close call with death and had cried out to the Lord for deliverance - vs. 3,4

PS 116:3 The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came upon me;
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.

PS 116:4 Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, save me!"

*God had been gracious and had delivered this individual from the clutches of death and this writer is here expressing his gratitude to the Lord for this deliverance. vs. 8,9 - 12,13,14,17

*This psalm is a testimony to our drive to live and the satisfaction that we can have with life.

*So it is most interesting that right in the midst of this psalm that really is a celebration of life, we find a verse tucked away that gives to us a divine perspective on death, the value of death in the eyes of God. Notice it with me.

READ Psalm 116:15

PS 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD

is the death of his saints.

In the eyes of God, the death of his children is a precious thing, something to be highly valued. It is natural then that as we grow in our relationship with the Lord, and as we come to the place in life where we more and more see life from God's perspective, that we will find ourselves becoming less and less fearful of death. The author of Hebrews said in Hebrews 2:14,15: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death- that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

There is a fear of death. But because of Christ's death upon the cross and his victory over death in his resurrection, we need not be held in bondage by this fear, but we can be freed from the fear of death.

Someone has wisely observed that a person is not fully prepared to live until that person is first prepared to die. If a person is living his life in fear of death, he is not in a position to really enjoy life. It is only as we see death through the eyes of God as a precious thing that we can also then enjoy the precious gift of life that he has also given to us.

Now why does the Bible say that the death of God's children is precious in the sight of God and therefore something that should be highly valued?

1. Well, first of all, God values the death of his children simply because they are his. The Psalmist says "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of **his** saints."

Now we all realize in life that we very often value articles for which we have paid dearly. When we work hard and save a long time for something, that article becomes very valuable to us. For many families, their house is most valuable to them. One of the reasons for that is the fact that most families make payments most of their lives before they finally pay for their houses. A house represents a great deal of hard work to them, and the purchase of it is a lifelong accomplishment- therefore, it is very valuable, more precious to us really than just its monetary worth.

When one considers the price that God paid for the redemption of his children, it is easy to see why they would be precious to him. For there was only one price that could be paid for our redemption from the bondage of sin. There was only one way for us to be redeemed. God's holiness is such that only a perfect sacrifice would do. So God had to be willing to sacrifice his one and only son, Jesus Christ, if we were to have any opportunity at all to know forgiveness from sin. As Jesus Christ was agonizing in the garden of Gethsemane, we can see that struggle to find another way if one were possible. "if it is possible, please take this cup from me" was Christ's prayer to the Father." But no, there was no other way. If we were to be redeemed, it would take the sacrifice of the one who was both God and man to accomplish it. God had to give that which was most precious to him- his one and only son, Jesus Christ. He was the ransom paid for our redemption. So we would consider it natural that, with such a high price paid, the saints purchased with Christ's blood would be precious in God's sight.

God longs for perfect fellowship with his people. He originally created the human race for fellowship with Him, and delighted in his daily walks with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. But sin soon put up a wall, hindering their fellowship with God. God has done what is necessary to remove that wall of sin, providing his precious son to pay the penalty for our sin. And we are able to fellowship with God in this life. What a privilege it is to pray and meditate, communing and fellowshiping with God! What a privilege it is to meet in worship and sense God's presence with us! But every one of us is painfully aware that while we are still here upon this earth in these frail bodies of flesh, we still wrestle with our sinful natures. Our sinfulness makes it impossible to have the quality of intimate fellowship with God for which we were created.

One day, we will be freed from these earthly bodies. One day, we will no longer wrestle with the sinfulness and weaknesses of the flesh. Having already been delivered from the power of sin, one day we will be delivered from the presence of sin as well as we join our savior in heaven. God is looking forward to that day, for it is only at that time that we will fully realize the purpose of our creation- to fellowship in perfect and unhindered union with God himself.

Yes, the death of his saints is precious in the eyes of God because they are **his** saints. God has purchased them with that which was most valuable to him, and he longs for each of his children to be able to realize the purpose of his or her creation. The death of a saint accomplishes this- for to be absent from this body is to be ushered into the very presence of the Lord.

2. But notice also a second reason for the preciousness of death for the Christian. Our physical death ends our work for the Lord here upon this earth and ushers us into the presence of the Lord to receive his commendation and rewards.

I don't believe it is happenstance that this verse indicating the precious nature of death immediately follows a verse of service, ministry. The psalmist in his joy at being delivered asks the question in verse 12- How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? His answer is 3-fold. He acknowledges the Lord to be his God (vs. 13), he thanks God for all of his mercies to him (vs. 17) and he fulfills the vows that he has made to the Lord (vs. 14). It is immediately after his commitment to fulfill his vows to the Lord that he speaks of the precious nature of death in the sight of the Lord.

The vows that the Psalmist are talking about are commitments for service for the Lord. As the Lord would reveal a ministry or an avenue of service to an individual during the O.T. days, the person would make a decision to do what God wanted him to do. As a public testimony, this individual would offer a votive sacrifice, vowing to accomplish a task or ministry for the Lord. The Psalmist realized that one way that he could express his appreciation to the Lord was to serve the Lord in this life. And when he was faithful in serving the Lord, he would then have the confidence that his death was God's statement that his service was completed- now it was time to go home to heaven to hear the words of commendation, "well, done, good and faithful servant" and to receive the rewards given for

faithful service.

I have worked at many jobs in my lifetime. I got my first job bagging groceries at age 13 and have worked continuously at some official job since that time. Whether it was bagging groceries, or working in a shoe factory, or sweeping floors, or flipping pancakes at the pancake house, or painting houses, or whatever, there was always something special about payday. I mean, when the end of the week came and it was time to get paid, there was a different atmosphere in the plant or store. I've met many people who dragged in reluctantly on Monday, but I've never met anyone who didn't want to pick up his paycheck. There's something about payday, being rewarded for those hours of work, that is satisfying to us- and we enjoy it.

For the Christian, the ultimate payday is going to be just after his death. It will be at that time that we will realize the rewards for his service for the Lord. The Holy Spirit said to the Apostle John, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Rev. 14:13

The closing words of God's revelation contains the words from Jesus Himself, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to every one according to what he has done." Rev. 22:12

Death is precious for the Christian because it is the final payday- a time to be rewarded for service for the Lord.

3. But notice one final reason for the precious nature of death with me. It is thru the vehicle of death, and only thru that vehicle, that we are finally released from the weaknesses of these earthly bodies.

As the verse before speaks of the vows, service, to be fulfilled, the verse following verse 15 speaks of being freed from chains. "You have freed me from my chains" the psalmist writes. And I realize that in the context he is actually speaking of the cords of death that had entangled him from verse 3. But it is also true that in a very real sense, physical death for the Christian frees him from the chains of this life, chains that continue to cause much loss of freedom.

None of us realizes the full effects of sin in our lives, the bondage that it places on us in so many ways. And I am not just speaking of our own personal sins, but I am also speaking of the accumulation of sin in this world from the time of Adam and Eve. Only Adam and Eve knew what it was like to live without any sin at all in their lives. They knew what it was like to have perfectly healthy bodies. Imagine when they felt their first pain- what a traumatic thing that must have been for them. They knew what it was like to have crystal clear thinking abilities. Imagine their frustration when their minds first became confused over an issue or when they just couldn't grasp a concept after their sin. They knew what it was like to have absolute fellowship in all human relationships- with God and with each other. Imagine their shame when they first realized what they had done and futilely tried to hide themselves from God.

You see, so many facts of life that we just take for granted are in reality just part of the baggage of sin that we carry around continuously. And it's not all our fault- it's just the fact that we live in a sinful world. Every ache and pain, every allergic sneeze, every confusing thought, every time we get tired, every problem that we face, every burden of life, they are all ultimately the result of sin in the world. And we live under this weight, often unaware of the burden that we are carrying on our shoulders.

One day, we will be fully released from the chains of sin. And to just imagine how glorious that day will be- think back to that day when you were released from the spiritual chains of sin and born again into the family of God. Do you remember the sense of joy and relief? Do you remember the inner freedom that you experienced when you realized that you were now eternally saved as a child of God? There will be a joy such as this when we are all released from the very presence of sin. The Apostle Paul said that the whole of creation is groaning in travail waiting for its redemption from sin. What a blessed day it will be! To never know a tear again; to never experience an ache or a pain; to be able to know clearly as we are known and to have perfect relationships. That day will come when we die.

Yes, death for the Christian is precious. It is precious because of the price that has been paid for our redemption so that we can fellowship with God- we will realize that fellowship intended for us when we die. It is precious because death is the payday for the Christian- it is the time when he receives commendation and rewards for his service for the Lord. It is precious because it is at death that the believer will finally be completely freed from the chains of sin.

Does that mean that Christians should long to die? No, not at all. Believers in Christ have the same drive to live that any person has. And Christians will enjoy life to the fullest of their earthly potential. But the Christian need not fear death as those who have no hope. And in a very real sense, as Christians we often face ambiguous feelings about death that the unbeliever cannot know. Listen to these words from the pen of the Apostle Paul.

READ Phil. 1:21-26.

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

The Christian need never fear death as those who have no hope. For precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints.