

The Old Paths

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“A Precious Death”

Jarrod Jacobs

Death is something that all the living will one day face (Ecc. 9:5; Heb. 9:27). At times, death can be a fearful thing, and at times, it can be seen as a welcome release from this earth. God views man’s death in a unique way. In the Psalms, it is declared, *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints”* (Ps. 116:15). Perhaps we have not thought of death as being “precious,” but when God witnesses the death of one of His saints, He says that death to Him is “precious.” Why is this? What makes a person’s death “precious” to God? What would make that death “precious” to us? Let us study Psalm 116:15 and see why one’s death could be called “precious” by God.

Put simply, one’s death is said to be “precious” when one is a saint! In the Old Testament, those considered “saints” were those Jews who were faithful to God during their lives. In the New Testament, when God talks about “saints” (Acts 9:13, 32, 41, 26:10; Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1; etc.), He is referring to those who are Christians; those who have obeyed His plan of salvation (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12-13). Are you a “saint”? If not, you need to become one before it is too late (II Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:7-8).

Another question that arises when we think about the subject

of a “precious” death, is why is this death called “precious”? Our instinct for self-preservation would suggest it is better to live than to die. Yet, when we objectively contrast the realities of this life with the realities of eternity, the choice of which is better is obvious. The apostle Paul put it this way: *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”* (Phil. 1:21-23).

The apostle makes clear what is “better” and what is “gain,” and it is not to be found in this life! Therefore, there is a “precious” nature in the death of one who has lived according to the word of God, suffered at times for his faith, and then left this world, having the confidence in the love, mercy, forgiveness, and promises of God. To the Thessalonians it was written, *“I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope”* (I Thess. 4:13).

While we will miss a beloved Christian on earth when he passes away, we can be assured that God sees this death as “precious.” A beloved brother or sister’s passing ought to give us the determination to do what they did (Matt. 5:16), living according to the Bible standard (Jn. 12:48; Col. 3:17). In so doing, God can look upon our eventual death as a “precious” thing as well.

Public Reading Of The Scriptures

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I’m not sure that the public reading of the Scriptures is given the place that it had in Bible times. I wonder if it is not minimized in the mind of some today as one of the less important things we do as we assemble.

Some may think that those who read Scriptures publicly are doing something “less” than those who preach or lead the singing. After all, it takes some ability to preach and some musical talent to lead singing and anyone can read the Scriptures. So, maybe Scripture reading is for those who can’t lead singing.

To the contrary, in the Bible, public reading of the word of God was treated with the utmost respect.

Examples

God’s word has always been read publicly to his people. After all, it is his word and it is how he communicates his will to them.

1. Moses — Exodus 24:7: *“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.’”*

2. The Priest — Deuteronomy 31:11-13. Moses gave the written law to the priest and told them to read the law every seven years. He said, *“When all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing”* (v. 11).

3. Joshua — Joshua 8:34. As the children of Israel gathered (half in front of Mount Ebal and half in front of Mount Gerizim), Joshua read the law

that Moses gave to them. *“And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them”* (vv. 34-35).

4. Ezra — Nehemiah 8:5, 8, 18; 9:3. Ezra worked with post-exile Israel trying to restore the law in their hearts. In so doing he read to them from the word of God. They stood in respect as he read for long periods.

5. Baruch — Jeremiah 36. This chapter records the reading of the scroll in the temple (vv. 1-15). *“Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord’s house, in the hearing of all the people”* (v. 10).

6. Jesus — Luke 4:16-19. Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth. *“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read”* (v. 16).

7. The Jews — Acts 13:27. It was the practice of the Jews to read from the Old Testament Scriptures every Sabbath day in the synagogue.

8. The Thessalonians — 1 Thessalonians 5:27. When Paul concluded his letter to the Thessalonians, he told them to read his letter to all the brethren.

Thus, we conclude that there has always been a place for the public reading of the will of God.

Points To Consider

1. It is important. The public

reading of the Scriptures is very important. It is as important as prayer. Prayer is man talking to God. Through the reading of the Scriptures, God talks to man. That’s important!

The reading of God’s word was thought to be so important that the people stood when Ezra opened the book (Neh. 8:5). Let’s not minimize Scripture reading whether we are the reader or the listener.

2. Prepare. Those who are assigned to read the Scriptures should think of themselves as privileged. If you were asked to be the one to read a letter that the President sent to the local church, would you be honored? How about being asked to be the one to read what God, the creator, has written to us?

That being the case, the reader should be well prepared as the song leader, preacher, and class teacher should be. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing it well. Read over the verses more than once to make sure you can read them well. Make sure you know how to pronounce the words.

Don’t forget how that Ezra read *“distinctly”* to the people (Neh. 8:8). Speak out loud and clear; else the listener can’t hear.

3. The listeners should listen. I wonder if we don’t think that the

“Scripture reading” is just good “space filler” during our services. Many of us don’t even bother to follow along.

We must listen with respect. Remember, those in Ezra’s day stood when he read from the law. I don’t think that’s a bad idea for us today. Literally! The reading of the Scriptures ought to be given great reverence.

Our listening should accomplish more than showing a little respect. In the case where the Priests were reading the law it was for the effect it would have on God’s people:

“Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law” (Deut. 31:12).

Public reading of the Scriptures has an important place and purpose. Let’s lift our attitude and practice to the level that we have described.

Editor’s Note:

Let us pay special attention to this article on the importance of Bible reading. Brother Rader will be with us in a gospel meeting next week, Lord willing. He will bring his Bible and be ready to teach us the truth. Let us be in attendance, let us invite others, and be ready to hear the truth that is taught.

- JJ

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