

Text: Luke 16:22

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.”

Theme: Even Death Yields to the Power of God in Christ

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abr’ham’s bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end.

This last verse of our sermon hymn has been sung to and by millions of dying Christians throughout the centuries. The service in the pastor’s agenda for those who are dying ends with this verse. It is probably the most common hymn sung at the funerals for pastors. When you think about it, they are beautiful comforting words when we think about the end of the lives of those Christians who have gone before and when we realize that our own last hour will one day come. Today, I would like to look at this verse from Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, along with this hymn verse as we look at our sure hope in Christ.

I. Death is something that God manages.

It is something that we would like to manage today. One of the fears with regard to the health care legislation is how will it effect who will decide our hour of death. Will it be the doctor, the government or me? God is almost always left out of the picture. We are often given the impression today that if we eat the right foods, exercise, and get the proper tests, that we will live forever. That’s not to say that we shouldn’t be doing any of these things. We should take care of the bodies that God gives to us. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit; however, we can’t determine the time when our lives on this earth will end. In some countries such as Holland, the government does try to manage when people will die. A former neighbor of mine came from Holland. His mother had terminal cancer. One day she called him and said that the doctor said that it was time for the shot. When the cancer progressed to a certain stage, then the patient would be euthanized. We often debate about who should have the control over death today, but in reality it is not ours to control.

On the other hand, we sometimes think that it is the devil who determines our time of death. People often speak of the grim reaper. We think of a spirit with a black hood and a big sickle, who comes and takes our lives. But there is no passage of the Bible, which says that it is the devil who takes the lives of God’s people or anyone else. God told satan with regard to Job, “*He is in your hands; but you must spare His life.*” (Job 2:6) At the time of the Passover, it was not the devil who carried out God’s wrath on the Egyptians, but God’s own angels. (Ex 12:23, Ps 78:49) The devil has no power

over death. Christ has conquered death by His innocent death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. Satan or any of the powers of hell don't have the power to take one life on this earth. We are never in his hands.

The Bible makes it clear however that God determines the time. It says in our text that the angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's side. Our sermon hymn puts it this way, "**Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home.**" That is a comforting thought. It is God who determines the time of a Christian's death. It is He who sends His angels to receive our spirit and bring us to Him. For the Christian death is not something to be feared, but something that we know that God has control of. Christ took all of our sins upon us when He suffered on the cross. He should have never died, but He died in our place. Because He rose from the dead, we are sure that we will also live forever. In baptism we died to sin and all its consequences, and we rose to a new life in Christ. In Him we know that we will be with the Lord forever.

It is because of Christ that Simeon could sing, "*Lord, now let your servant go in peace, Your Word has been fulfilled. For my eyes have seen your salvation.*" (Lk 2:29,30) Like Jesus in His hour of death, we can also say, "*Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.*" (Lk 23:43)

Throughout the centuries God's people have often found that peace in Christ. Martin Luther lost his daughter Magdalena when she was just 14 years old. Just before she died, he asked her, "**Magdalena, my dear little daughter, would you like to stay here with your father, or would you willingly go to your Father yonder?"** She answered, "**Dear father, as God wills.**" He later said to his friend Philip Melancton, "**When that child should come to life again and bring me the whole Turkish empire, I wouldn't want it. Whoever dies as she did, dies a blessed death. Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord**". As a pastor I have been at the bedside of many Christians during their last minutes on this earth. It is a blessed time to prepare them for the joys of heaven. This might seem strange, but I and other pastors have also been asked by people when they were dying whether we see the angels. There have been people who have said that there is an angel waiting, and when the time comes for them to leave this earth, they have said that the angel says that it's time to leave now. For those who have been clothed in Christ's righteousness, death is a blessed part of life. Our Lord sends His angels to bring our spirits to paradise. It is as the Lord told the thief on the cross, "*Today, you will be with Me in paradise.*"

II. At that time there is a separation of the body and soul.

It says in our text that Lazarus was taken to Abraham's bosom. That is also the prayer of that final verse of our hymn. "**To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home.**" At that time our spirit's are taken to paradise. Revelation 7, our epistle lesson today, is a description of paradise. It is a place of victory as the redeemed praise Christ for their salvation. They sing, "*Salvation belongs to the Lamb who sits on the throne.*" It is a place of peace. The angel tells John, "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*" The souls of those who have gone before us in Christ are with the Lord in all of His glory.

At the same time their bodies rest in peace on this earth. The body of Lazarus was buried. Our hymns says, "**And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing.**" -The bodies that we lay to rest had been the temples of the Holy Spirit. At the resurrection on the last day, Christ will raise those very remains from the dead. Because of that we Christians treat the

earthly remains with great respect. They are not just an empty shell. They are actually very holy because of what Christ will do to them on the last day.

III. When He returns, He will raise all the dead, and our bodies and souls will be united again

That is a very blessed hope for us as Christians, which is sure because of Jesus resurrection from the dead. He said, *“Because I live, You will live also.”* He promised, *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* Revelation 21 describes the resurrection in this way, *“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and He will be their God, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* *“These words are trustworthy and true.”* (Rv 21:3-5)

Our hymn describes the resurrection in this way, **“And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace.”** We confess in the creed, “I believe in the resurrection of the dead.” Death does not have the last say. There is even something better to come than the eternal life that God gives to us at the hour of our death. God will give us our bodies back, but they will be free from the sin and weaknesses that plague us on this earth. They will be glorified bodies. We will see our Savior face to face with our own eyes, with no glasses, but with perfect vision. God will raise His people on the last day, so that body and soul we will be with Him forever.

Dear Christian friends, that is our comfort, our peace, and our hope this day. Death does bring grief and loss to our lives, but we know that the victory is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. He conquered sin, death, and all the power of the devil. Death has no power over us. Like the angel in Revelation, we can even say, “Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord!”

May God grant us that comfort and hope when we mourn, and may He grant us His blessed peace, when His angels come to call us to His eternal rest and joy.

Amen.

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