

WHEN DEATH IS PRECIOUS

Feb. 21, '85

ABOUT A.D. 125 ARISTIDES, THE GREEK SCHOLAR, EXPLAINING THE SUCCESS OF CHRISTIANITY, SAID, "IF ANY RIGHTEOUS MAN AMONG THE CHRISTIANS PASSES FROM THE WORLD, THEY REJOICE AND OFFER THANKS TO GOD AND THEY ESCORT HIS BODY WITH SONGS AND THANKSGIVING AS IF ~~HE~~ WERE SETTING OUT FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER NEARBY."

^{that person} THAT IS THE SPIRIT OF THIS DAY. ^{beginning} SIR EDWARD JONES ATTENDED THE FUNERAL OF ROBERT BROWNING IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY, BUT HE DIDN'T LIKE IT. HE KNEW THIS GREAT POET, THE VIRTUES OF HIS CHARACTER, THE ABIDING FAITH IN HIS SOUL, THE INFLUENCE OF HIS LIFE, AND HE SAID THE FUNERAL WAS TOO SAD AND SOMBRE. "I WOULD HAVE GIVEN SOMETHING," HE WROTE, "FOR A BANNER OR TWO TO WAVE, AND MUCH MORE I WOULD HAVE GIVEN IF A CHORISTER HAD COME OUT OF THE TRIFORIUM AND RENT THE AIR WITH A TRUMPET."

THROUGH THE TEARS AND SADDENED EMOTIONS OF THIS DAY SHOULD BE A JOYOUS OPTIMISM, SUSTAINED BY THE FAITH THAT "PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS" Ps. 116: 15.

THE WORD PRECIOUS MEANS "OF GREAT VALUE, VERY DEAR, HIGHLY ESTEEMED." TO SAY DEATH IS EVER VERY DEAR, OR OF GREAT VALUE, OR HIGHLY ESTEEMED SEEMS UNTHINKABLE, THE COMMENT OF A HARD HEART, OR THE EXPRESSION OF A VENGEANCE-SEEKING ENEMY. MOST OF US ASSUME DEATH TO BE THE WORST THING THAT COULD BEFALL US. DEATH - WE FEAR IT, HIDE FROM IT, ATTEMPT TO EVADE IT.

BUT THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, "PRECIOUS, VERY DEAR, OF GREAT VALUE HIGHLY ESTEEMED IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS." MAN AND GOD LOOK AT EVENTS IN DIFFERENT WAYS. GOD'S OUTLOOK IS NOT THE SAME AS MAN'S. GOD SEES THE END OF THINGS FROM THE BEGINNING, WHILE MAN SEES ONLY IN PART, THROUGH A GLASS DIMLY.

NOTE, HOWEVER, NOT ALL DEATHS ARE PRECIOUS. SOME PEOPLE DISAPPOINT GOD SO! THEY MESS UP THEIR LIVES SO: THEY REBEL AGAINST THE HEAVENLY FATHER. WHEN SUCH A ONE DIES WITHOUT CHANGE, IT GRIEVES THE HEART OF GOD.

DEATH IS PRECIOUS TO GOD ONLY WHEN IT COMES TO A SAINT. GOD LONGS FOR THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS CHILDREN AND WHEN DEATH COMES TO THEM, AND THEY ARE ABLE TO COME TO HIS SIDE FOREVER, IT IS A VERY DEAR EXPERIENCE, OF GREAT VALUE - PRECIOUS TO HIM. THE VERY PURPOSE OF CREATION, OF THE UNIVERSE AND EARTHLY LIFE,

IS TO DEVELOP SAINTS WORTHY OF ETERNAL EXISTENCE WITH GOD. LIFE IS OUR TRIAL RUN WHERE WE ATTEMPT TO QUALIFY: DEATH IS THE PROMOTION. LIFE IS A SCHOOL: DEATH IS THE COMMENCEMENT.

A FARMER CULTIVATES HIS FIELD, PLANTS THE SEED, AND RAGERLY TENDS IT, THEN AWAITS THE HARVEST WHEN THE KERNEL SHALL BE SEPARATED FROM THE STALK. THE GOSPEL SEEDS HAVE BEEN PLANTED TO GROW AND DEVELOP OUR SOULS IN CHRIST'S LIKENESS. DEATH IS THE HARVEST TIME WHEN THE SOUL IS SEPARATED FROM THE OUTWORN BODY - IT IS A TIME OF REJOICING.

HOW PLEASED GOD MUST BE TODAY! I CALLED IN A HOME ONE EVENING WHERE THE ONLY SON HAD JUST RETURNED FROM THE FRONTLINE BATTLE FIELDS WHERE HE HAD BEEN FOR NEARLY A YEAR. FROM THE DANGERS OF THAT BATTLE FRONT, AND THE TEMPTATIONS OF ARMY LIFE, HE CAME HOME PURE, SAFE, AND SOUND. WHAT A REUNION! WHAT TEARS OF JOY WERE SHED! IT WAS A PRECIOUS HOMECOMING. GOD IS FILLED WITH JOY AS HE WELCOMES A FAITHFUL SOLDIER HOME, SAFE, UNBLEMISHED AND UNHARMED FROM THE TRIALS OF EARTHLY LIFE.

NOT ONLY IS DEATH PRECIOUS TO GOD, BUT ALSO TO THE SAINT. THIS IS A DAY OF VICTORY. IT IS THE CROWNING EVENT OF, ENTRY INTO THE ETERNAL KINGDOM. "EYE HATH NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NEITHER HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN, THE THINGS WHICH GOD HATH PERPARED FOR THEM (his saints) THAT LOVE HIM" (I Corinthisna 2:9)

O IT MUST BE WONDERFUL! PAUL THE APOSTLE LONGED TO DIE SAYING "FOR TO ME...TO DIE IS GAIN" HE WAS IN FLESH ONLY TO SERVE GOD. AN ELDERLY LADY SAID, "I AM GETTING A BIT ANXIOUS TO TAKE THAT JOURNEY"

THE VICTORS

THEY HAVE TRIUMPHED WHO HAVE DIED:
THEY HAVE PASSED THE PORCHES WIDE,
LEADING FROM THE HOUSE OF NIGHT
TO THE SPLENDID LAWNS OF LIGHT,
THEY HAVE GONE ON THAT FAR ROAD
LEADING TO THEIR NEW ABODE,
AND FROM CURTAINED CASEMENTS WE
WATCH THEIR GOING WISTFULLY.

THEY HAVE WON, FOR THEY HAVE READ
THE BRIGHT SECRETS OF THE DEAD:
AND THEY GAIN THE DEEP UNKNOWN,
HEARING LIFE'S STRANGE UNDERTONE.
IN THE RACE ACROSS THE DAYS
THEY ARE VICTORS: THEIRS THE PRAISE,
THEIRS THE GLORY AND THE PRIDE
THEY HAVE TRIUMPHED, HAVING DIED.

IT IS WORTH WORKING FOR, PLANNING FOR, SACRIFICING FOR, AND LAYING UP TREASURES FOR. WHEN YOU AND I DIE, ONLY ONE THING MATTERS: NOT HOW MANY FLOWERS DECORATE THE CHANCEL, NOT HOW MANY PEOPLE ATTEND, AND HOW MANY LODGES WE BELONGED TO - ONLY ONE THING - WHAT IS IN YOUR SOUL? HOW MUCH OF JESUS CHRIST IS THERE? ARE YOU IN HARMONY WITH GOD? WHAT WILL PROFIT A MAN IF HE GAINS THE WHOLE WORLD, AND LOSES HIS OWN SOUL?

BENEDICTION:

NOW OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, AND GOD, EVEN OUR FATHER WHICH HATH LOVED US, AND HATH GIVEN US EVERLASTING CONSOLATION AND GOOD HOPE THROUGH GRACE, COMFORT YOUR HEARTS AND ESTABLISH YOU IN EVERY GOOD WORD AND WORK. (II Thessalonians 2:16-17)