

Afterward you will receive me to glory

Dear listeners,

Every one of us at one time or another will face death – either our own or that of someone dear to us. Suffering, grief, affliction and death touch every home and every family – Christians and non-Christian alike. So what should we think about death? Does it make any difference to believe in Jesus? The bodies of those who believe in Jesus are placed in the same cemeteries as people who don't, and if you walk through the cemetery you will not notice any difference – other than what you might find inscribed on the tombstones.

It used to be quite common for people in our country to go to church on Sunday because they embraced the Christian faith; they believed in the after-life as portrayed in Scripture. One's final destination was either heaven (being in the eternal presence of God) or hell (being eternally separated from him and one another). Our ancestors considered these things of extreme importance -- for themselves and for following generations. This is why they also put time and money into establishing Christian schools and universities. But that is no longer the norm, is it? The prevailing winds of modern thought see absolutely no need to believe in Jesus, to hold to the truths of the Bible, and, consequently to go to church. These are considered to be relics of the past. People quite typically think life is devoid of an eternal perspective – the Christian religion just doesn't cut it in our present culture, especially not for those who are in the age group known as millennials. If you are in this age group you will be less likely to identify with the religion or thinking of your parents.

If you have written off Christianity as a religion having little or no value for today, consider the one message that runs through the Bible: the only way you will be able to make any sense out of life in the here and now is by seeing things in the bigger picture of eternity. Culture and the society in which you are born do not and cannot change that eternal truth. The Bible reminds us that we are not muddling along through life without hope, direction, purpose or future.

Psalms 73 speaks to that truth in a very real and poignant manner. After struggling with the meaning and purpose of life the psalmist confesses, “You guide me with your counsel **and** afterward you will receive me to glory.” **Afterward** – that's a word that opens to us the perspective of faith! “Afterward you will receive me into glory.” The glory into which we will be received at the moment of our death involves the deep things of God. It speaks of God's love and salvation in Christ. What that glory will be like is beyond our human comprehension. Glory is the completion, the consummation, the perfection, and the full realization of salvation in Christ. All the benefits of Christ's work come to us perfectly in glory. Glory is the place where all the love, mercy, grace, goodness and holiness of God will simply fill us. And we will be as mirrors reflecting that glory back to him. Glory is the place where sin and sadness are forever gone.

And isn't it amazing that we who “have fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), are told that we will be received into the glory of Christ? We aren't promoted into glory because of what we do; we are received into glory. When Christ returns, he will transform our bodies to be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21). Our frail, feeble, hurting, declining human bodies will one day be changed. Yes, afterward we will be received into the glory of the new earth.

When you read through Psalm 73 in its entirety it becomes clear that the confession “afterward you will receive me into glory” was not immediate, but he made this confession after wrestling with what he saw going on in the world around him. People who did not worship God didn't appear to be any worse off. In fact they often appeared to be less stressed and anxious and more prosperous! But the beauty of this psalm

is this: it does not leave me in my doubts and questions but teaches me to get my eyes off of my circumstances and to place my focus solely on God. I need to move away from a human “me” perspective – life is all about me -- and put my focus on God and the eternal “afterward” perspective he provides.

That dramatic change in thinking happens for the psalmist when he enters the temple of the Lord – to put it in today’s language -- when he goes to church. There he is taught to think outside the box of what he sees. The lesson he learns is this: the eternal nature of God’s presence and nearness surrounds and determines the present. Without this eternal perspective a person may look at his little pile of material goods and his present life, compare it to what others have who don’t worship God, and be discouraged and disappointed. Yet, how different things become when the psalmist realizes all our acquisitions and achievements are already in the process of fading away. Our only hope is in what is eternal – even as we look to the inheritance that is kept in store for us in heaven.

There are things that happen to us in life which are less than pleasant, but each of them confronts us with the “afterward” of the gospel of Christ. Such trials put us face-to-face with the reality that “if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:19). They explode the myth that this is all there is and that the goal of life is to get as much as you can. Do you get where this is taking us? The troubles and trials of life, sorrow, loss and death do not challenge the reality of God’s love, justice, truth and mercy but they preach them. The Lord guides us with his counsel so that we come to realize that we cannot set our hope and confidence on this present life. We don’t come before God with a list of all our achievements but when we die in the Lord we are rich – because we have having everything in Christ.

As we move forward into another week, we are comforted and challenged to follow in the footsteps of those who walked by faith and trusted in the Lord. Dear listeners, are you prepared to take the words of Psalm 73:24 and say, “Lord, you guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me into glory”? Today the Lord is holding us and guiding us. He provides us with the comfort, rest, hope, joy, peace, happiness and glory no other person in the world can give us . What awaits us tomorrow and into the future may not be all that different from what we have already experienced. The daily routines may bring with them the same disappointments, hardships, pain and difficulties. But there is one thing that is different – you have heard a message from the Word of God about what comes afterward – and when you accept this in faith it will change everything. When you see your life in the perspective of eternity you will do less grumbling and complaining; those things will be replaced with statements of confident faith. Believing the words, “afterwards you will receive me into glory,” changes your focus, conclusions and makes the unbearable, bearable.

Today we stand before the “afterward,” but let us go onward as Christian soldiers, moving forward in the confidence that in the presence of Jesus the best is yet to come –afterward. Doesn’t that just put a smile on your face? It gives us a beautiful perspective as we go back to our daily routines. The Holy Spirit is preparing us for glory, when no trace of sin will be left in us. May the Lord be with you and may the words of Psalm 73:24 be the confession of your life: “you guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me into glory.”