

TEXT: II SAMUEL 12:20

TITLE: ON ACCEPTING DEATH

Centuries ago, in ancient Israel, King David lost his infant son, (when he was only about a week old.) (^{The Time of his} From ~~his~~ ^{very} birth, the child was sickly and had ^{lingered} ~~hovered~~ between life and death.) ^{Now} During this period, David fasted and mourned for the life of his son.) He spent his nights lying on the earth, praying to God, while those about him tried to persuade him to eat, for he needed strength.

At the end of the week, the child died. But we read that the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead; they said: "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake with him, and he would not hearken unto our voice. How will he ^{react} ~~react~~ himself if we tell him the child is dead?"

But when David saw that his servants whispered, he perceived that the child was dead; therefore David said to his servants: "Is the child dead?"

And ^{They} ~~he~~ said: " He is dead."

Then David did the unexpected. Instead of putting on sackcloth and ashes, as was the custom in those days when death entered a family, we read that he arose, washed and anointed himself, changed his ^{Clothes} ~~apparel~~, and came into the house of the Lord and worshipped. From the house of worship he went to his own house, asked for food to be put before him, and ate.

The people of his household wondered why he was acting so strangely in the face of death. "What is this thing you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when he died, you arose and ate food."

David answered them: "While ^{my son} ~~the child~~ was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that ^{my son} ~~the child~~ may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not **return** to me."

Dear Friends

As we gather here, something of that same experience may be duplicated in our own lives. There is a period of great anxiety when any child is *Taken from us* sick. We turn to God in prayer; we miss our meals and find our sleep interrupted. There is a period of mourning when ~~that which is mortal of one's life becomes changed,~~ and death enters our household. But our lives must go on; there is work yet to be done. We are called upon to resume our lives. We enter the house of the Lord and worship. Then we go to our homes and eat.

Yet we do not go home as though nothing had ever happened. David was a changed man after this experience of the death of his ~~son~~ *son* child. From that moment on, his life was filled with deeper insights, and he knew God in a manner that only suffering can produce.

We do not know the circumstances surrounding the composition of the Shepherd's Psalm, but I like to think that perhaps David, who was himself a shepherd in his earlier days, sang that great Psalm at the time of the death of his infant son, for it expresses the thoughts that we feel as we meet to worship in the ~~presence of the death of this child,~~ *remembrance of Noelle*

How Beautiful "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

How appropriate this picture of a shepherd is as we think of death, particularly the death of a ~~child~~ ^{Naeife}. For one of the greatest characteristics of a shepherd is that of loving care. He cares for his sheep, not just the older sheep of the flock, but the little lambs seem particularly dear to the shepherd.

The prophet Isaiah, in giving comfort to a captive people, painted the picture of the great Messiah in these words: "He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11). Centuries later, when that prophecy found fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who came as a little babe, ~~he accepted the role of the shepherd~~ ^{and grew to be the Good Shepherd}: "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep." (John 10:14-15).

On another occasion, when Jesus was teaching his disciples, they asked him who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Calling a ~~little~~ child, he put him in the midst of them, and said: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me...

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:3-5; 10).

Then Jesus told the Parable of the Lost Sheep. "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more

than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:12-14).

In other words, Jesus taught us that God does care for children.

New Friends We may not know why one such as ~~this little girl~~ *Noelle* should be taken from our midst, but we have faith that no life is lived in vain. It remains for us, the living, to be here dedicated to a fulfillment of the hopes and dreams that might otherwise have been hers, ~~had she been permitted to grow to maturity in this mortal life.~~

Let ^{me} us turn again to the experience of King David at the time that his infant son passed away. Though he did not know the assurance of Christian faith which we can call upon, he did have certain insights that might prove helpful to us as we meet the heartaches of separation and death.

First, he recognized death for what it was. ~~He did not attempt to~~ *That it can come*

~~hide the fact of death as if it were a mere illusion.~~ *at any time to anyone* David did not ~~get~~ *and*

~~angry with God. For He knew that God has a purpose~~ *For He knew that God has a purpose*

~~that the child was merely sleeping, for then he might have expected to~~ *For all things*

~~awaken him again within his own household.~~

A great deal has been written of late about the attempts to mask death. We even avoid the word, "death" as much as possible. We prefer to speak of "the departed," one who has "been taken from us," or "gone on to his reward." But the fact remains that every person must die, sooner or later. There is little therapeutic value in denying the fact of death.

The Christian hope is found, not in ~~denying~~ *the* death, but in the hope of the resurrection. Jesus Christ tasted death; he was crucified, dead, buried, but this was not the final chapter. He rose from the dead!

The Apostle Paul interpreted this to us in terms of a mystery. "for this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must

put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?'...But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:53-57.)

So our first step in meeting the heartaches of this hour is the acceptance of death as a fact of life, but not as the final chapter to life. Death is defeated by a changed life, by a new dimension. Just as a seed must

first die in the ground in order to produce new growth, so must our bodies die in order to find a new life of immortality in God's very presence. *Absent From The Body is Present with The Lord*

Secondly, when David learned of the death of his child, he entered into the house of the Lord and worshipped. This is the function of this *memorial* funeral service. It is a *Christian* religious service of worship as we read from the Scriptures, offer our prayers, and give our testimonies of faith.

In the year 125 A.D., a Greek by the name of Aristides wrote to one of his friends about the new religion that sprung up in his country. He was trying to explain the reasons for the *tremendous* extraordinary growth of Christianity. *As he had this to say about Christians*
~~Listen to a sentence from one of his letters:~~ "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."

What a description he *gave* ~~was given~~ of the Christian faith in eternal life! If we believe in God, it is a part of our faith that all those who dwell in God belong to his eternal kingdom.

Sometimes it is difficult for a minister to speak words of promise for those whose very lives have been nearly complete denials of the elements of *who have never given their hearts to Jesus*

not so well Noelle. He was an
of ~~Christian~~ faith. But ~~in the innocence of childhood, there is less~~
~~hesitation.~~ *Believe - saved by the grace of God*
For it is ~~not by the merit of our deeds, but by the grace of~~
God, that such are saved. The words of Jesus have particular significance:
"Let the children com to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the
kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom
of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and
blessed them..." (Mark 10:14-16). *Thank God - For ALL who remembered
To Noelle*

Finally, King David returned to his house, had food prepared, and ate.
There is no greater denial of a faith in ~~Christian~~ *the* ~~immortality~~ *truth* than to
neglect the living for the dead. A sorrow, which saps life from the living
on behalf of those who have gone through the portals of death into the very
presence of God, shows a lack of trust and faith in the very promises and
assurances of God.

To Noelle
For ~~Debra Lynn~~ we have the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes: "Blessed
are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

For those of us who remain, we read: "Blessed are those who mourn, for
they shall be comforted."

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*May the Lord Bless you - and keep you
May the Lord Shine upon you
May your heart be comforted and keep
you in his perfect grace -
In the name of the Father, and the Son, and*

The H.S. - Amen