

GOD'S VIEW OF THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS

INTRO:

Memorial Day—originally called "Decoration Day"—was first observed to commemorate the Union and Confederate soldiers who died in the Civil War by proclamation of Gen. John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of former Union sailors and soldiers. In 1873, it developed into a holiday which honors all men and women who have died while serving in the United States Armed Forces.

Although Memorial Day is not in the Bible, the concept of honoring those who have fallen in defense of their country *is* in the Bible. The most notable instance is found in II Samuel 1 where David honored Saul and Jonathan after their death at the hand of the Philistines. This morning I want to take a different approach, however, and consider not how a **nation** should honor the loss of their fallen Soldiers; rather, I want us to consider how **God** honors the death of **His Soldiers**. Not all of us are eligible to serve in the U. S. Armed Forces, but each and every one of us does have the ability—and obligation—to serve in the Lord's army.

Turn to Psalm 116:12-19. The title is simply this: "God's View of the Death of His Saints." I realize that this verse uses the word "saint" instead of "Soldier"—and is frequently used at funerals—yet it is a wonderful reminder of how God views death and should influence the way **we** view death as well.

1. Who death is precious to

First, notice A. The Declaration of the Lord: Verse 15—"Precious in the sight **of the Lord**..."

God declares that the death of His saints is precious in **His** sight. Aren't you glad for the exactness of the Word of God? We are often times thankful for what God says, but sometimes we forget to be thankful for what God **doesn't** say. God doesn't say "Precious in the sight of **everyone** is the death of His saints." Why? Because He knows that is not true! He knows we look at things differently; He knows we often times walk by sight instead of faith and that the loss of a loved one is often not precious to us. In fact, it is most often very painful!

God knows and understands that we miss our lost loved one; that our heart aches to hear them one more time and hug them one more time and talk to them one more time. We see King David lamenting the loss of his son Absalom and can almost feel the pain in his voice: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Sam 18:33) We see Jesus weeping at the grave of Lazarus because He knows loss hurts. And we see God instructing us through Paul not to "sorrow as those who have no hope" because He knows that is how we often mourn.

Not only is there the *declaration* of the Lord, there is also

B. The Observation by the Lord: "Precious in the sight of the Lord"

How does God see? Does God see with His **eyes**? Does God even **have** eyes? Does God **need** eyes to see?

Not easily answered questions, are they?

i. The Bible refers to the Lord having eyes

II Chronicles 16:9 "For the **eyes of the Lord** run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him..."

Proverbs 5:21 "For the ways of man are before the **eyes of the Lord**, and He pondereth all his goings."

ii. The Bible says the Lord sees differently than we do

I Samuel 16:7 that "the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

Psalm 139:12 “Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”

What does God see? What God sees is probably an easier question to answer than how He sees.

iii. God sees everything!

Psalm 94:9 “He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?”

Proverbs 15:3 “The **eyes of the Lord** are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”

Hebrews 4:13 “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the **eyes of Him** with whom we have to do.

If the death of His saints is precious in God’s sight, their death most certainly is **observed** by Him! Whether God sees with His eyes or just “sees” because He knows doesn’t really matter; what matters is the fact God not only observes His saints as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death—He is **there with them!**
Psalm 23:4 “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.”

I think it is important that we let this sink in: The death of God’s saints does not take God by surprise because He decides the time, and the place, and the way—and is with us when it happens!

Second, let’s consider

2. **Why the death of His saints is precious to the Lord**

Why is the death of God’s saints precious in His sight? The word “precious” here means costly (as precious stones), dear, beloved, respected, splendid.

Barnes: “The idea here is, that the death of saints is an object of value; that God regards it as of importance; that it is connected with His great plans, and that there are great purposes to be accomplished by it.” What can God **accomplish** in the death of His saints?

First, the death of God’s saints can

A. Reveal God’s Power

How does the death of God’s saints reveal His power? Our transition from this life into the next is not something we’ve done before—it will be a brand-new experience. For that reason, many people face it with fear. God’s people—His saints—should not face death with fear, though, because it is not *really* death at all.

The great evangelist **D.L. Moody** wrote before his death: “Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be **more alive** than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.”

Being calm, peaceful, and untroubled while lying on your death-bed is one thing; being calm and peaceful while facing a **martyr’s** death is quite another! Stephen calmly faced death while being pummeled with stones as recorded in Acts 7 because God’s power sustained him, so much so that he asked for the forgiveness of those who were killing him! Martyrs throughout the years have courageously faced death under the most trying circumstances.

In 1415, **John Huss** was led to be burned at the stake. When asked to deny his faith, he replied, “God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. Today I will gladly die.” The fire was lit. As the flames engulfed him, Hus began to sing....”

In 1536, **William Tyndale** was hung by both an iron chain and a rope—over a pile of logs—so they could burn his body while he was being strangled. One brief report of the scene is as follows: “They speak much of the patient sufferance of Master Tyndale at the time of his execution.”

One other example is that of **Polycarp**, a man born in the 1st century—69 AD—and who knew the Apostle John. When asked to deny Christ, Polycarp replied: “86 years have I have served him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” When brought to the woodpile on which he was to be burned, their plan was to secure him to the stake with nails. Polycarp’s response? “Leave me as I am, for he that gives me strength to endure the fire, will enable me not to struggle, without the help of your nails.” And just before the fire was lit, Polycarp prayed:

“O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ...I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as you, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled.”

(<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp>; accessed 25 May 18).

The account of concluded by saying that Polycarp's death was remembered by "everyone"—"he is even spoken of by the heathen in every place."

Why was the death of these men precious in God’s sight? Because it was an undeniable demonstration of the **power** of God upholding them! How else can men pray for their tormentors and sing while being tortured?

Not only does the death of His saints reveal the power of God, it also

B. Reveals the Person of God

What will it be like to see Jesus for the very **first** time? Fanny Crosby was born in 1820—and died at the age of 95 in 1915. She is said to have written over 9000 hymns—one of which we will sing at the conclusion of the sermon—in spite of only being able to see for the first 6 weeks of her life!

When told by a well-meaning preacher that it was a pity she did not have normal vision, she replied:

“Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I was **born** blind?” Her reason? “Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.” Those thoughts were most certainly in her mind when she wrote the song entitled “My Savior First of All.”

Stanza 1: When my lifework is ended and I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.

Chorus:

I shall know Him, (I shall know Him,) I shall know Him,
And redeemed by His side I shall stand;
I shall know Him, (I shall know Him,) I shall know Him
By the print of the nails in His hand.

I Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

Our seeing Jesus will not just be a blessing to us, however—it will also be precious—dear and beloved—to Jesus! Why will us seeing Jesus and being with Jesus be a joy to Jesus?

i. He wants us to see His glory:

John 17:24 “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast give me, be with me where I am; that they may **behold my glory**, which thou hast given me...”

ii. He wants us to savor His gifts:

He wants us to enjoy that which He has secured. Suffice it to say that are we are not—at this moment—experiencing *all* the blessings that we will someday enjoy. In spite of the frequency and intensity of Paul’s suffering, God inspired Paul to write:

Romans 8:18 “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

I Corinthians 1:9 “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

Both of these things—us beholding His glory and us basking in the wonderful blessings of being with Him in heaven—will undoubtedly lead us to praise Him in a way that we don’t right now. For Jesus to be rightly praised will not only be joyful to us—it will also be to Him!

Lastly, let’s consider

3. Whose death is precious to the Lord

Notice again our verse: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of *His saints*.”

Once again, it is important to realize that God does not say “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of *everyone*.” There is a select group whose death is precious to the Lord—and that group is called “saints.”

What is a “saint?” The word “saint” (or “saints”) is used almost 100 times in the Bible—36 in the OT; 62 in the NT. Sometimes—especially in the OT—it refers to “angels.” In the NT, however, it comes from the Greek word “*hagios*” and literally translated would be “most holy thing.” Imagine us—you and I—referred to as being “holy”—and yet that is what God calls us! (See Acts 26:10; Rom 1:7; I Cor 1:2; Eph 4:12; Phil 1:1).

I believe at least two things stand out as we examine these verses.

1. God—not a church or another person—declares people to be saints.
2. Saints are born-again Christians; the children of God; the saved; those who been forgiven by God because they have trusted Jesus and Jesus alone for the payment of the penalty of their sins.

Whose death is precious to God? Those of saints; His children. Are you one? If not, your death will not be precious to the Lord—and it will most certainly not be precious to you. In fact, it will be a pronouncement of judgment from the Supreme Judge:

Matthew 25:41 “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”

Matthew 25:46 “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS—AND QUESTIONS:

1. Are you a saint; a child of God? If not, you *should* fear death because you are not ready to meet God. We have no guarantee of tomorrow; now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.
2. Child of God; how do you view death? Do you struggle over the loss of a loved one—or do you view it from God’s perspective?
3. Child of God; how holy are you? God calls you a saint—a holy one. Does your life match your name?