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Order Of Worship (Liturgy)

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Title: Since Christ Died for Us, Why
do We Still Have to Die?

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Pastor Ted Gray
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"Since Christ Died for Us, Why do We Still Have to Die?"

Genesis 5:21-24; John 5:24; HC Q&A #42

Of all the people in the Bible whom we might envy, perhaps the most envied are Enoch and Elijah, for both of them walked with God and were translated into heaven. Neither one of them faced physical death. God simply called them home to glory. Enoch, we read, *walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.*

The same was true for Elijah. 2 Kings 2 describes how as Elisha and Elijah were walking together, suddenly *a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up into heaven in a whirlwind.*

In a sense Question 42 is asking, "Lord, why can't we be like Enoch? Why can't we be like Elijah? After all, Jesus died for us, so why do we still have to die?" It is a good question, but the answer is even better, because the answer reminds us of the positive side to physical death. We don't often

think of death in a positive sense, but the catechism, as it follows Scripture, points out that physical death for a believer is our entrance into glory.

When we think of physical death we so often think of the negatives. We think about the suffering, pain, and the sorrow of loved ones who are gathered around the dying person's death bed. From our earthly eyes, we don't seem to think many positive things about death.

That is understandable. Death is a reminder of our sin, *for the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23a). Adam and Eve, our first parents, would have lived forever had they not sinned. But their sin brought on death, not only for them, but for all that God had created.

The first death of an animal recorded in Scripture, the first shed blood pointing to Christ, is that of the animals God killed in order to clothe Adam and Eve. They had tried to clothe themselves with fig leaves, which represents their "good works." But their good works could never cover their sinful disobedience. Their sinful disobedience was now painfully obvious by their awareness of being naked, naked before God and each other.

Consequently, God graciously shed the blood of animals and made garments for Adam and Eve, which points ahead to Christ. We who believe in Jesus are accepted by God because of the shed blood of His Son and His righteousness which is imputed - credited - to us. That is why Scripture speaks of us as being clothed in righteousness, for we are clothed in "the righteous robes of Christ".

Whenever we go to a funeral home for visitation or attend a funeral service, or stand in the cemetery and reflect on a loved one's death, we should be reminded of these realities; we should be reminded of the stark and tragic truth of Romans 6:23a, *The wages of sin is death*. But also the wonderful redemption that the second part of the verse speaks about, Rom. 6:23b: *But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Death, being the wage of sin, inevitably brings sorrow. That should not surprise us, because sin always leads to misery, to sorrow, frustration and pain. As He experienced the pain of life in a sin-stained world, Jesus also grieved at a loved one's grave. The shortest verse in our English Bibles is that well known statement describing Jesus at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. John simply writes: *"Jesus wept."*

No wonder Jesus is such a perfect high priest. He has experienced our sorrows, our temptations, our suffering on earth in every dimension, so that He can sympathize with us and effectively help us.

Although physical death brings great earthly sorrow, the catechism, as it follows Scripture, teaches us that "our death does not pay the debt of our sins." The Scripture that the catechism uses is

Psalm 49:7, a Scripture that has arisen frequently in our study of the catechism and its Biblical teaching on redemption. It says: *No man can redeem the life of another or give God a ransom for him - the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.* (Psalm 49:7-8).

It is only the crucifixion, death, burial and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ that can pay that debt. He alone is perfect, being truly God, and yet He is also truly human, our perfect representative.

Whenever we say that phrase in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus was "crucified, dead, and buried," we acknowledge that Jesus has conquered death for us in all its forms: physical, spiritual and eternal. Death in the Bible refers to separation. Physical death is the separation of body and soul. Spiritual death is the separation from God that all of us have unless we are born again, born from above. Eternal death is eternal separation from the love of God in the reality of hell. Our death can never pay the debt of sin; only Jesus, by His death and resurrection can, and did, pay the debt of your sin and mine.

The End of Sinning and the Entrance into Heaven

Although our physical deaths have that negative reminder of the wages of sin, the catechism points out a very positive aspect to physical death as well. After explaining that our death does not pay the debt of our sin, the answer to Question 42 says: "It (death) puts an end to our sinning and is our entrance into eternal life."

The Catechism is teaching us that God brings good out of physical death. First, physical death puts an end to our sinning. Our sanctification is not complete until the day we die. And until the day we die, we sin.

But when God calls us home to glory, when we die that physical death, our sanctification is complete and we will no longer sin. In describing the glory and beauty of our heavenly home, of *Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem* the author of Hebrews writes: *You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel* (Hebrews 12:22b-24).

That phrase in Hebrews 12:23 *to the spirits of righteous men made perfect* is referring to the truth stated in the catechism, that death puts an end to our sinning.

Because death puts an end to our sinning and is our entrance into glory, it should not surprise us that our physical deaths are precious in God's sight. Psalm 116:15: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*

The reason our death is precious in God's sight is that it marks our crossing over from this life of sin into our eternal life in the presence of God where we will never again sin. We already possess eternal life here and now, but our soul enters into that life in perfection at physical death. The catechism, as it speaks of this, refers to John 5:24 where Jesus declares: *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*

What does it mean to *cross over from death to life* in the sense of physical death? Lorraine Boettner, in his book, *Immortality*, likens the death of a believer to the voyage on a ship that many of our ancestors made when they immigrated here from one side of the ocean to the other.

On the one side are the loved ones who are left behind. How they miss this person who is going on the long voyage! They exchange their last hugs, a tearful kiss is given, there is that final wave of goodbye from a distance, and there are the shed tears.

But Boettner points out in his book that if we could see the arrival of that same ship to its port of entry, we would see a scene of unspeakable joy. And it is the same when a believer's soul arrives in heaven. There is a crowd without number praising God and receiving another into their fellowship of praise. There is the angelic host marveling over God's redeeming love, longing to look into the truths of salvation more fully. And there is God Himself. God the Father who loved us so much that He gave us His Son. The Son who loves us so much that He gave of Himself on Calvary. There is the Holy Spirit who loves us so much that He lives in the hearts of believers, making our weak and sinful bodies His very temple.

And this triune God, looking down at the death of the person He has redeemed, says in effect, "How precious! How precious that now this one for whom I sacrificed my Son is coming home. Coming home to live forever with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and all the redeemed of all the ages, forever and forever. How precious! He has crossed over from death to life, in its fullest sense."

The catechism teaches wonderful truths of comfort in this question and answer, as it does in so many others. But how do we apply the teaching of the catechism as it follows Scripture?

Always Be Prepared

One application is that while we need not fear our own physical death, we are always to be prepared for it by having our faith in Jesus alone for salvation.

Being prepared for death is especially important for you young people. We might think of a message on death and dying as being for us older folks. After all, when you get up in years the tent of this body wears out, and we die, going on to our eternal home in heaven, just as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5.

But Scripture reminds us that young people need to be prepared for death, too. Remember what the Speaker of Ecclesiastes says? *"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'"* (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

I have already buried many people far younger than I am. I know off hand, without thinking too hard, of young people - teenagers - who had unexpected deaths. A couple were through car accidents. One in a sledding accident. Another a farm accident. Yet another an unusual illness that sapped his life away.

The New Testament counterpart to Ecclesiastes 12:1 is found in 2 Corinthians 6:2: *Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

It doesn't matter what age you are, young or old, we must all be prepared for the inevitable. Hebrews 9:27 says, *It is appointed unto man to die once, and then to face judgment.*

There are some appointments you and I might cancel. But this is an appointment that everyone of us will keep unless the Lord returns during our lifetime. How crucial that each one of us is always prepared by having saving faith in Jesus Christ alone!

Our Only Comfort

When believing loved ones die we have comfort even as we mourn. We still mourn. Jesus mourned the death of Lazarus and wept at his tomb. Death brings sorrow, but in the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 *we do not grieve as those who have no hope.*

We know that Jesus is victorious over death, in all its forms: physical, spiritual and eternal death. He is pictured in Revelation 1 as holding the keys to death and Hades. Those who trust in Him share in His victory. Death has no mastery over them, but instead brings them into the presence of God.

When a loved one dies we can take Jesus at His word. Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die."* (John 11:25-26).

When unbelieving loved ones die, we also have the comfort of knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right. Do you remember Abraham's prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah, in Genesis 18:25, *"Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

The Scripture declares that the Lord will judge the world with equity and justice. We can have assurance and comfort in knowing that the Judge of all the earth will indeed do what is right in the judgment of our loved ones and every other person who has ever lived.

Our comfort includes the certain knowledge that we are victorious over death through saving faith in Christ. Although we cannot escape physical death - unless we are still living when Jesus returns in glory - we can find our comfort in Him, both in life and in death. As Lord's 1 teaches us, our only comfort in life and death is:

That I am not my own,
but belong—
 body and soul,
 in life and in death—
to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
He also watches over me in such a way
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven:
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to Him,
Christ, by His Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for Him.

He is the One who was "crucified, dead and buried," so that all who have saving faith in Him alone are justified by His resurrection and given eternal life.

Even in the face of death we take comfort in knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even the last enemy to be destroyed, which is death. Even in the face of death we can exclaim with the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, *Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!*

- Outline -

For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. – Psalm 49:10-11

"Since Christ Died for Us, Why Do We Need to Die?"

Psalm 49:1-20; H.C. Q&A 42

I. Physical death is a reminder of the wages of sin (Romans 6:23a) and invariably brings deep sorrow (John 11:35), but death (Q&A 42):

1) Doesn't pay the debt of our sins (Psalm 49:7)

2) Puts an end to our sinning (Hebrews 12:23)

3) Is the entrance into heaven for the believer (Luke 23:43)

II. Applications:

1) We need not fear our own physical death (Psalm 23:4; Philippians 1:23), but are always to be prepared for it by having our faith in Jesus alone for salvation (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 9:27-28)

2) When believing loved ones die, we *do not grieve as those who have no hope* (John 11:25-26; 14:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

3) Even when facing death, we are victorious through saving faith in Christ alone (Romans 8:36-39; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

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