

Do You Want to Win?

Sermon for February 27, 2022

Scriptures: Luke 16:19-31 and Philippians 3:12-21

Golden Verse: *"I press on toward the goal to win."* Philippians 3: 12

Dear Beloved,

As you know, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is offering us, Sunday by Sunday, a specific Scripture reading and a topic for our sermons. They divided the Bible into three different parts for three different years: Years A, B, and C. I often follow their recommendations, but sometimes I pick some topics which help us to grow in knowledge in a certain area.

At this point, I have decided to encourage our Calvin members and friends to come up with some topics which might interest you, and I will prepare my sermons around your interests. Please kindly share with me your questions by email or calling me, and I will do my very best to accommodate your request.

Today, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will see what God is teaching us about life after death.

Many are very interested in exactly what is after death. Almost weekly, I am asked whether there is a reunion after death and if we will meet those who left this earth before us or with those whom we will leave behind. Searching for an answer, let us go back to the Bible, to God's words, to see what the Everlasting God is teaching us about this topic because otherwise, based on our hope, we might use our imaginations about this topic, which might create in us false conceptions.

In the Bible, our Heavenly Father, Creator, and Sustainer, numerous times is telling us that there is a reunion after death.

When the Old Testament informs us about Abraham's death we read: *"Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people"* Genesis 25:8.

In the language of the Old Testament, that does not mean that he was buried in the family tomb, but that he went where his ancestors were. King David was terribly shaken by his son's death, but then he calmed his pain with his great compassionate faith, saying that one day *"I will go to him"* (Samuel 2 12:23). With great compassion, King David confessed his faith that after he will die, he will be with his son.

In the New Testament, we read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is in hell, but Lazarus is in heaven. Both are in a self-conscious, personal form of existence, in a recognizable form. Jesus is telling us that while alive the rich man saw that Lazarus had no food and no shelter, but he neglected Lazarus' needs, and for this, he ended up in hell. As this man looks up to heaven, he sees Lazarus there in heavenly glory. Even from hell, he recognizes the saved soul, Lazarus.

He recalls that in earthly life Lazarus was the one sitting and begging at his door.

In heaven, there will be a joyous reunion.

Try to recall that happiness when, after a long time, you met your loved ones, and you were able to hug each other again. How much greater our joy in heaven will there be when we see those who are already waiting for us over there! If we truly loved them, those who left before us, we should follow Jesus Christ more seriously to meet them there, so they would not wait for us in vain.

Let's analyze a bit another verse from the Bible, which will prove to us that there is a reunion in heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, we read: *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* The apostle says that the greatest of the three is love because it is clear that faith and hope are needed only in the earthly life. In heaven, our faith will turn into a clear vision, and our hope is fulfilled. So, in heaven, our present faith and hope will disappear because they are no longer needed.

But even after death, love is the only possible connection, a relationship between souls. There will be a perfect and sanctified love between God and us, and between us and those who are there.

Let me give you another example: Moses and Elijah, who died many hundred years before, appeared to Christ on the Mountain. The three disciples that Jesus took with him were aware that the two strangers Jesus was talking to were Moses and Elijah, although they had never seen them before. How is it possible?

God is assuring us that, even after we die, God retains the distinctive features of our identity and for this, in heaven, we will recognize those people we have already known here on earth, but also we will recognize those whom we never met face to face here on earth. We will see and get to know the Old Testament fathers and the apostles, and we will all be a great family up there. We will be together as redeemed people of Christ.

And here we finally have our basic message, which ends like this: we will see Christ face to face. Jesus declared many times that the saved souls are with Him, around Him. So, if we have the promise that we will see Jesus face to face, we will see around Jesus those who are with Him. I could go on with the testimonies of the divine revelation. From the Bible, we can see the absolute certainty that there is a reunion after death, and there we will know each other and be together again.

Since I started my studies in ministry, in these 41 years, I had many occasions standing at death beds and talking to people who were close to their final departure. In many cases, I saw and witnessed that some people, a few days or hours before their departure, received God's exceptional grace to see some of those people's faces who already left this earth before them. And they told those who were surrounding their death bed that they saw their parents, or siblings or friends, who were waiting for them.

Approximately five years ago, there was an elderly person, who was so ill that her family did not share with her that one of her daughters, Myrna, died. A few months later, it was clear that this lady would depart soon. In her last days, she turned to those who were standing at her bed and said: "I met my parents and my siblings in heaven. They are in a wonderful place. Myrna, my daughter was there too. How come she was there?", she asked? Then she was looking at those people who were with her in the nursing home and said to them: "You did not tell me that Myrna died."

Let me share with you, that there is something that makes me restless and uncomfortable. Especially here in North America, many people have false hope, thinking that all those who die will go to heaven. Many times, during a funeral service, people think that the departed person is at peace, in a good place. This belief is totally false and against the Bible. I cannot clearly tell about anybody where they will end up. This has to be our OWN PERSONAL CONVICTION, that we live with Christ Jesus, and we will die with Christ Jesus, and we know for sure that WE WILL LIVE WITH CHRIST JESUS in His glorious eternity.

In the same way, I cannot judge anybody saying that, based on their life, some people won't be in heaven. We never know how God acted or interacted in their lives, even a few moments before they died. Think about the person who was crucified with Christ. In his very last minutes, he turned towards Christ and asked Jesus to remember him in His glory.

Who will be there and who won't be there, is only up to God.

Our own personal responsibility is to accept Christ Jesus, to turn to Him, to accept Him as our Saviour, who gave Himself on the cross, who paid for my sin, who redeemed me, to follow Him as faithfully as we can. We have to have a living and joyful faith that we will be in heaven with Him. For all of us, Christ promised that we will be with Him. This is not because I deserve to be in heaven, but because Jesus loved me, loves me, and I am saved because He loves me so much.

God is asking you to be a faithful follower of Christ, and you will be in Heaven with Christ, and with all those who are there already.

We have one more major responsibility, which we have to take extremely seriously: we have to pray for our spouses, our children and grandchildren, and for our siblings so that they might get the grace to know Christ, to accept Christ, and to be with us in heaven.

If I knew that I would die in a few moments, in my last sentence, I would ask my children, and those who were close to me, to repent and to accept Christ as their Saviour, so we all should be together one day.

There is union in heaven, but only in Christ and through Christ.

Dear beloved, this is why we, as children of God, saved by Christ, can say goodbye to each other knowing that we will see each other in Jesus' glorious home. Goodbye... till we meet at Jesus' feet. Amen