

Friday, January 29, 2016 - Ready for Heaven through God's Grace

"What if I'm not ready to die..."

'Dad, I can't begin to understand the feelings you are experiencing. Death is going to come to each of us but reality brings a different perspective than concept of what is to come. Fear of dying is normal.

From my youngest days, I remember you as a man who started your day with God's word in hand. You've forgotten more of God's word than I will ever know. I know you aren't perfect but there has never been a doubt in my mind that you accepted the bible as God's word and your life was going to be guided by His will. These are the values you and mother instilled in us, your children: God before all else.

Your teaching was to have the mind of Christ. What should a Christian do, how should a Christian live their life? You taught that the more you studied, and understood God's will, the more it becomes the standard for how a person conducts their life. I know the brilliance of that training because as my life spun out of control, God was never on my mind. Life had no purpose.

I remember when I was eight years old and my best friend died from cancer. You explained to me that she was with God and that someday we would see each other again. I remember watching you try to comfort the grieving parents with the same thoughts; you will see her again.

I remember when I was young, spending hours with you either working or riding in the pickup talking about the bible and you answering my endless litany of questions about Old Testament stories.

You taught me to put my faith in God and not in men (Philippians 2:12). My obedience and lifestyle needs to be real and genuine, not something I put on to impress or gain the favor of others. People you highly respect will come and go and inevitably disappoint you — if your faith is in them, what then? My faith needs to be my own (Joshua 24:15).

You taught me to take responsibility for my own life. Shifting blame is cowardly and ineffective (Genesis 3:12-13). When we sin, it is our fault — When we choose a path away from God it is because of our desires (James 1:14). You always have a choice to do right (1 Corinthians 10:13). Blame builds a wall that keeps us from humility and repentance.

You taught me to know my bible. Was I going to work out my own salvation, or was I going to risk letting someone else work it out for me (2 Peter 1:10)? It's sad to think how many people have been willingly led to spiritual destruction

because of their unwillingness to learn for themselves God's will (Matthew 15:14; 2 Peter 2:1-2).

You taught me to hold fast to the Words of the Lord. In knowing God's word, I needed to be able to ensure that false teaching was opposed. Just as Paul charged Timothy to stop the mouths of false teachers, you implanted in me all Christians need to be able to distinguish between right and wrong and stop the mouths of those who would pervert the Holy Scriptures. You stood firm several times through the years against false teaching. Your example exhibited to me the importance of standing firm for souls are at stake. In doing so, you will be lied about, called names, betrayed and feel the pain that it can cause your family. God's word is NOT to be corrupted by those selfish, servants of Satan.

Dad, you have always looked forward to heaven. Nothing about the wonders that lay in front of you have changed. You and mom will live forever in the presence of God. Those of like mind who have fought the good fight, have finished the race, and have kept the faith will forever surround you. You will no longer experience pain, suffering, temptation, fear or sadness.'

My two previous articles, and up to this point in this one, are all points I could and wished I had talked with dad about to reiterate the confidence Christians should have in their eternal destination. Unfortunately, that opportunity has passed.

Here is how our conversation went:

'Dad, all the things you have taught us through the years about God, do you believe them?' 'Yes,' he said.

'Do you believe in God? Do you believe that Jesus is His son and that he came, died on the cross, shed His blood for us and then rose again?' His answer to all these questions was 'yes.'

'Did you have your sins washed away in the waters of baptism? Do you believe that Jesus went to prepare a home for those who are obedient to His words?' 'Yes.'

'Dad, God tells us about His mercy and He extends it to His own. Instead, we are covered by His grace. The grace that comes from being His child. None of us are perfect but we are perfected in Jesus (Heb. 10:14). Jesus made one sacrifice good for all time for those who are sanctified. We (Christians) are sanctified by the blood of Christ. Sanctified means to be set apart (In this context sanctified means to be set apart into the right relationship with God).'

Ephesians 2:4-9 - But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together,

and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Titus 2:11-12 tells us, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." 'Dad, you know God keeps His promise. His promise is that we will be with him forever.'

That's the last conversation I had with my dad. Within two days mom had passed away and dad slipped into a coma.

As I think about what I hoped to accomplish with this series of articles, it is to convey the fact, that for Christians, there are no human words that can bring better comfort to one who dies in Christ than that which they already hold in their remembrance. Paul puts it perfectly when he says:

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words