

Crumbs – Good News for the Diaspora!

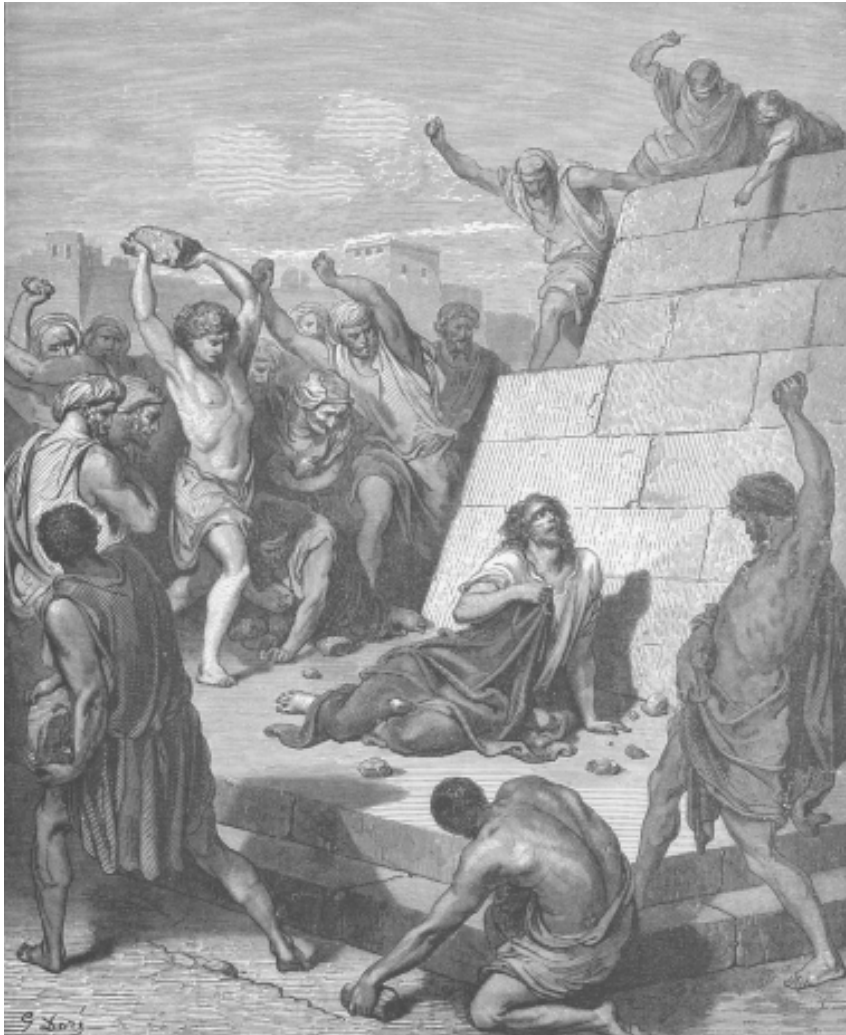


Illustration: The Martyrdom of Stephen

A Devotional for the
Week of the Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.

SUNDAY.

Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. – Genesis 3:19.

This Word was meant for Adam. And for Eve also. And it is meant for all the children of Adam, for all mankind. And all the creatures of the earth fall beneath the doom of this word. With this word God created DEATH. Death is the wages of sin. Therefore death is nothing good, nothing nice. Death is a horrible and dreadful thing.

We, the living children of men, created by God, shall return to the dust out of which we were taken. And death is the dark passage that leads to the final judgment. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment." (Hebrews 9:27.) This is the worst feature of death. Many seek death in order to escape the misery of life. They are fools. At the first moment of our existence we have the germ of death within us. No skill can eradicate that. Uncounted myriads of the germs of death completely surround us everywhere. We eat them, we drink them, we inhale them, we absorb them. And innumerable other causes of death are ever near us.

Though in the midst of life we be, snares of death surround us. And: While in the midst of life we be, hell's grim jaws o'ertake us. And: Into hell's fierce agony sin does headlong drive us.

– Where shall we for succor flee, lest our foes confound us? Who from such distress will free, who secure will make us? Where shall we for succor flee, who, O who will hide us?

Thou, O Lord Christ, Thou only!

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus Christ, only Savior, Your precious blood was shed to win peace and pardon for my sin. And You did conquer death and hell when You did rise from the dead. And You call me to come to life and to salvation through faith in You, through trust in You. I come, Lord Jesus! Here am I, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Hymn 527, 1-4.

LORD Jesus Christ, true man and God,
Who borest anguish, scorn, the rod,
And diedst at last upon the tree,
To gain Thy Father's grace for me:

I pray Thee, through that bitter woe,
Let me, a sinner, mercy know,
When comes the hour of failing breath,
And I must wrestle, Lord, with death.

When from my sight all fades away,
And when my tongue no more can say,
And when mine ears no more can hear,
And when my heart is racked with fear,

When all my mind is darkened o'er,
And human help can do no more;
Then come, Lord Jesus, come with speed,
And help me in the hour of need.

MONDAY.

I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord. – Genesis 49:18.

Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, was at the point of death. And by the Holy Ghost he prophesied concerning Christ. And then he said: "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!"

Even in death he waited for the salvation of the Lord, for the salvation which the Savior would bring. He hoped and trusted in the Word of God concerning the future Savior and His salvation. Thus did he depart. He was not disappointed in his waiting, in his hope, in his trust. He departed, and the Lord received him, the Lord, who in the fullness of time was to become Jesus Christ, the Savior. This was almost two thousand years before the birth of Christ.

– We know more of the salvation of the Lord than Jacob knew. "What the fathers most desired, what the prophets' heart inspired, what they longed for many a year, stands fulfilled in glory here. Abram's promised great Reward, Zion's Helper, Jacob's Lord, Him of twofold race behold, truly come, as long foretold."

In life and death, yes, in death we should wait for the salvation of the Lord, for the salvation which the Lord has purchased for us. We must hope and trust in the Gospel telling us of our Lord and Savior and His salvation. Thus we should depart this life. We shall not be disappointed in thus waiting, hoping, and trusting. Departing thus, we shall go to meet our

Savior. And in the midst of death He will keep us and show us His salvation. He will let us taste His salvation. In the gloom of death we shall pass into a great light.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, my Savior, when my last hour is close at hand, and I must hence be taken, then let me wait, in faith let me wait for Your salvation. Thus will I depart and go to You, Lord Jesus Christ. I will stretch out my arms to You. Peaceful and calm my sleep shall be, no human voice can wake me. For You, Lord Jesus Christ, will open heaven's portals for me and take me into Your mansions of eternal bliss. Amen.

Hymn 529, 2.

From hence I go with gladness
To Christ my Brother's side,
That I may soon be with Him,
And e'er with Him abide.

TUESDAY.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. – Psalm 91:12.

Everybody knows that he must die. No one, however, knows when he shall die. And death is so awful, so big with consequences! But who minds it? Most people are as unmindful of death as brute creation. Others, again, despair.

Regenerate Christians should learn to pray as Moses does in the oldest of Psalms: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," For to do this is a gracious gift of God. To number one's days with a proper regard to death, and to truly apply one's heart to wisdom, no one can do of himself; God, through His Word and the Holy Ghost, must teach a sinner to do this.

How should we number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom? What wisdom is able to help us against the assaults of death? We should consider that death is the wages of sin, and therefore leads us to Judgment; and we should be heartily sorry for having sinned against God and merited eternal punishment. But in numbering our days we should also

consider that our Savior has redeemed us from sin, death, and the Judgment, and we should therefore flee to Him in true faith. If we thus number our days, we shall have applied our hearts unto wisdom, and found salvation from death. And daily must we so number our days; daily our hearts must thus be applied to wisdom: daily we must pray God to teach us thus to number our days, and thus to apply our hearts unto wisdom. For death may come any day.

Such a meditation does not make us downcast and unfit for life here on earth, as some say; on the contrary, this makes us glad and courageous to run our course; for then we shall not fear death.

PRAYER. – Lord, so teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart to wisdom. Teach me to consider that by nature I am a sinner doomed to eternal death. Teach me to remember this with contrition and repentance! But make Your grace in Christ Jesus precious and mighty within my heart, that I may at all times take true comfort from it against all the terrors of death and of judgment. Give to me, O Lord, the Spirit of faith, that I may be ready every day to meet death cheerfully; through Jesus Christ, my Lord and only Savior. Amen.

Hymn 544, 3.

Teach me to ponder oft my end,
And ere the hour of death appears,
To cast my soul on Christ, her Friend,
Nor spare repentant cries and tears;
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
Thy peace may bless my dying day.

WEDNESDAY.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.
– *Psalm 116:15.*

Who are the "saints" of the Lord? All believing Christians, without exception. For God forgives all their sins to them, imputes to them the merit of Christ, and receives them as His dear children. Are they therefore not His saints? The Holy Spirit also dwells within them, and moves them to do holy and good works. But as long as they live on earth, their good works are imperfect.

What, now, is meant by the words: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints"? When one of His saints dies, this is a great and important event in the sight of the Lord. That is what these words say. Hence it is certain that the Lord will not suffer any of His saints to die unless out of great love to them He has so decreed, and at no other time and in no other manner than He has determined it.

The saints of the Lord are ever in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The Lord is their refuge and their fortress. He covers them with His feathers, and lets them trust under His wings. His truth is their shield and buckler. They need not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flies by day, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand shall fall at their side. and ten thousand at their right hand; but it shall not come near them – unless the Lord out of great love to them would have it so. He shall give His angels charge over them to keep them in all their ways.

If you are a saint of the Lord, you may defiantly boast in the Lord against all adversity. Nothing can destroy your life unless the Lord so wills it. And when death comes, the Lord sends it out of great love to you. And the Lord will deliver you, and with eternal life will He satisfy you, and will show you His salvation. Indeed, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Therefore, you, be His saint and rejoice!

PRAYER. – O Lord, my God, number me among Your saints for Jesus' sake, and protect me according to Your faithfulness and love, and let my death also be precious in Your sight. And finally give eternal life to me. Amen.

Hymn 530, 2.

Therefore, when my God doth choose it,
Willingly I'll yield my life,
Nor will grieve that I should lose it,
For with sorrows it was rife;
In my dear Redeemer's merit
Peace hath found my troubled spirit,
And in death my comfort is
Jesus' death – sweet comfort this!

THURSDAY.

The day of death (is better) than the day of one's birth.

– *Ecclesiastes 7:1.*

This is very true. The day of death is better than the day of one's birth – for God's children. True, also for the day of your birth, O child of God, you should and will praise God in all eternity. For God created you and gave you this temporal life that you might obtain eternal life through Jesus Christ. But you are conceived and born in sin, and certainly it is not God's fault. And you are born unto work and toil on this sad earth which the Lord has cursed. (Genesis 5:29.) It is not necessary to speak of all the spiritual and bodily misery into which we have been born, and the end of which is death.

But now you are a child of God. You are God's beloved child through faith in Christ Jesus. And when the day of your death comes, you may rejoice and say: "Lo! the sun of morn now rises, and the breaking day I see that shall never end for me." What day? The day of eternal and a perfectly blissful life. This day bends down to the day of your death and consumes it. The sun of this day rises as soon as the darkness of the day of your death descends upon your heart and eyes, and thoroughly illumines you with the most blessed light. Then there will be no more sin, no more curse, no more work and toil, no more misery, neither spiritual nor bodily. Then there will be nothing but righteousness, nothing but blessing, nothing but comfort and rest, nothing but bliss, both spiritual and bodily. Ah, indeed, the day of death is better than the day of one's birth.

Therefore St. Paul writes by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better." (Philippians 1:23.) And therefore our own, never-to-be-forgotten Dr. Walther once said, with eyes a-gleaming: "The day of my death? Oh, I can scarcely await it; I rejoice at the approach of it ; it will be the best day of my life!" The day of death is better than the day of one's birth. For then our true life will begin.

PRAYER. – Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You that through Jesus Christ You have made me Your dear child and an heir of eternal life. I pray You to give me Your Holy Spirit, that by Your Word I may overcome all the terrors of death, and look forward with pleasure to the day of my death, which by Your grace must be for me the gate of life. Amen.

Hymn 547, 5. 6.

Ah! Who would then not depart with gladness,
To inherit heaven for earthly sadness?
Who here would languish
Longer in bewailing and in anguish?

Come, O Christ, and loose the chains that bind us!
Lead us forth, and cast this world behind us!
With Thee, th' Anointed,
Finds the soul its joy and rest appointed.

FRIDAY.

Thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

– *Daniel 12:13.*

Thus spoke the Lord to the Prophet Daniel through the heavenly messenger. Thus the Lord says to every one of His children. Thus the Lord speaks of our death. What, therefore, is the death of God's children? It is rest, sweet, peaceful, blissful rest, which is but faintly foreshadowed by the rest we enjoy when sleeping, though it be ever so sweet and peaceful a rest. When we are dead, we rest; our body rests and our soul rests. The soul rests in the arms of Jesus, and no torment shall touch it. The body rests in the earth in God's keeping. No man can call us, no human voice can wake us, no man can disturb our rest. Nothing, nothing at all, can disquiet us. In this world, in this life, alas! no rest can be found. But for God's children death means rest.

While resting in death, we shall know nothing of this world, nothing of this present time. When resting peacefully in this life, we know nothing of what is going on in this world; hours of world-forgetfulness then pass as in the twinkling of an eye. However, this but faintly foreshadows that perfect rest in death, where we shall be entirely removed from this world and time. That rest will be like a brief blissful moment. And then we shall rise. We shall rise and stand at the end of days. The Savior will wake us. But we shall not rise, the Savior will not wake us, for renewed unrest. O no!

We shall stand "in our lot." What is our lot? Eternal life. Ah, with what youthful vigor, with what cheer, and our soul full of bliss shall we

stand in our lot at the end of the days, in eternal life! We shall rise unto fullness of life, to an overflowing fullness of life, to an ever new and eternal abundance of life. But this, too, will be perfect and joyful rest.

PRAYER. – O God, how my flesh does dread death! But how eagerly my spirit does long for that sweet rest which You will give to me in death for Christ's sake! Oh, my Father, keep me, Your child, in true faith, that I may go to sleep in You; and then let me rise with new vigor and cheer in my lot which You will graciously give me. Amen.

Hymn 540.

ASLEEP in Jesus! Blessed sleep,
From which none ever wakes to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes.

Asleep in Jesus! Oh, how sweet
To be for such a slumber meet;
With holy confidence to sing
That death has lost his venom'd sting.

Asleep in Jesus! peaceful rest,
Whose waking is supremely blest;
No fear, no woe, shall dim that hour
That manifest the Savior's power.

Asleep in Jesus! Oh, for me
May such a blissful refuge be;
Securely shall my ashes lie,
And wait the summons from on high.

SATURDAY.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

– 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

Regarding our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ, and whose resting-place in God's acre we had to prepare with bitter grief and sorrow, the Apostle would comfort us, that we sorrow not as those do who have no hope extending beyond death and the grave. We children of God (thus does the Apostle comfort us) know and believe that Jesus died and rose again. Even so will God bring them with Him that are fallen asleep in Jesus; He will bring them up from the grave as He did Jesus.

Yes, this is an unfailingly sure promise of the Lord, proclaimed by the Apostle, that all those Christians even who will be living when the Lord will come on the last day, shall in no wise precede those who are resting in their graves. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then those children of God who will then be alive, together with the dead that have been raised, will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus all the children of God, and we also, together with our loved ones who departed in faith, will ever be with the Lord.

This the Apostle says to us "by the word of the Lord." We comfort ourselves with this. We sorrow indeed when our dear ones depart from us. But we do not sorrow as do those that have no hope. Our loved ones but precede us: we follow after. And with the Lord we shall find them again and have them with us forever.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, in You all that are Yours are everlastingly joined together, everlastingly united. Though I must leave my dear ones here on earth, or stand at their graves with bitter grief, yet I know that I shall find them again with You in eternal life. Do but grant that we may be and ever remain Your own, O faithful Lord! Amen.

Hymn 559, 5.

O what the tribe, or what the glorious host,
Comes sweeping swiftly down?
The chosen ones on earth who wrought the most,
The Church's brightest crown,
Our Lord hath sent to meet me,
As in the far-off years
Their words oft came to greet me
In yonder land of tears.

CONCLUDING MEDITATION.

Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.
– *Hebrews 13:14.*

"Here have we no continuing city." We all know that we cannot remain here. The children of this world are looking into a dark future; and they will be cast into eternal darkness. We children of God, believing the Word of God, are looking into a ravishingly bright future, and we shall be received into eternal light. "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." This is what we believe and confess; and joy and a joyful longing would gladly possess our poor heart, which is encumbered with sin.

For, after all, it is well that we have no continuing city here where there is so much sin, so much sorrow and misery in and about us. And it is well, unspeakably so, that a city, the eternal city promised us in God's Word of grace, beckons us, where our eternal and blissful home shall be.

Why do we not rejoice more exceedingly, more exultantly, because we are to go there, away from here? Because our faith is weak. But still, the Spirit - the Spirit of God who dwells in us, helps our infirmities. For it is plain, we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, considering the great things He has promised us; "but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27.)

We are only pilgrims here. Hallelujah! We seek the eternal city that is to come, and shall find it. Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus Himself, our faithful Savior, is our safeguard, He Himself is our rod and our staff. (Psalm 23:4.) Hallelujah!

PRAYER. – Lord God, my Father, I thank You that You will take me from this world of sin, away from this valley of death, and into the city of eternal salvation. Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You that You have prepared this city for me, a poor sinner, by Your bitter suffering and death and by Your glorious resurrection and ascension. Lord God, Holy Ghost, I thank You that, through Your Word, You have given me faith and made me a child of God and an heir of salvation. O my God, take my hand and lead me home – home! Amen.

Hymn 559, 1.

Jerusalem, thou city fair and high,
Would God I were in thee!
My longing heart fain, fain to thee would fly,
It will not stay with me;
Far over vale and mountain,
Far over field and plain,
It hastes to seek its Fountain
And quit this world of pain.

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).
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