

Heaven Bound

“...no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.”

Isaiah 57:1 (NIV)

On perhaps 10 occasions during my years of Christian ministry I have been called on to perform the funeral of a child. These have been the most difficult times of work that I ever experienced. There seems to be something especially obscene about a person being cut off by death before they have really tasted life.

Families wonder what their child might have been if they had been given time to mature and develop into a useful citizen of society and member of Christ's church. This often happens at the time the child might have been of an age to enter university or get married.

I found that after doing a funeral of a child I had to retreat into myself for the rest of the day. Alone with the Lord I would seek some assurance that He was still with His people and that somehow this tragedy would work out for the good in the lives of those who mourned.

Some people wrongly assume that we who are in ministry never have doubts or confusion at the strange ways of the Lord. The truth of the matter is that Christian ministers will experience the same challenges that others do as we journey through life.

Our verse today has helped me put the loss of a child into some helpful context. When I grieve with a family over the loss of their child I think of all the difficulties the child is spared in this life. The child will never have to go through the loss of health, poverty, rejection by others, and so on. Our verse today talks about the righteous being “spared from evil.”

We believe that God in His mercy applies the redemptive work of Christ to the account of these little ones so that they pass from this world into the wonders and joy of heaven. What we say is that the child was given an early journey home to heaven. Such an understanding does not remove the grief we feel

here and now. What it does is help us see that our loss is the deceased person's gain.

I never suggest to the grieving parents that their child “is better off in heaven”. Such a comment is inappropriate and hurtful. What I do remind the parents of is that when Jesus was with us He seemed to have a special place in His heart for children and regularly spoke to them, took them up in His arms and blessed them.

As we grieve for our loved ones we gradually come to understand all of the amazing benefits that have come to those who have gone ahead to be with Jesus.

If you have suffered through a child making an early journey to heaven, may the Lord bring you gently to the place where you can see the truth of our verse for today.

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