

We bow our hearts in prayer: Our heavenly Father, lead us not into temptation of misbelief, despair and other shameful sin and vice by the deception of our spiritual enemies. But when we fall into such temptations by our own fault and sin against You, wash our sins away and declare us blessed through Jesus' blood and righteousness, so that we overcome and retain the victory. Amen.

Dear fellow Redeemed,

Today we remember God's grace upon all those who have died in the faith before us.

In particular, today we remember those who have died in the faith this past year from among us. While ministering to Jane's family after her death, one of her children had a wonderful question, "Pastor, what is Mom experiencing now?"

Part of my answer was reading our text for mediation today... *We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve Him day and night in His temple;
and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and He will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

Some people may find this hard to believe, but many pastors find that funeral sermons are some of the easiest sermons to write to comfort the assembly.

(This, obviously, isn't the true about all Christian funerals, but for many.)

Why? Because the pastor gets to speak of the pain and suffering, the trials and temptations, as things of the past... experiences that are no longer endured by the deceased.

Instead, we get to preach about the eternal joys and comforts he or she now experiences; and we get to encourage those in the assembly to take comfort in Jesus' salvation as their own, that they too will one eternal day, share in that glory;

Often times, there are opportunities to tell of the Christian virtues displayed in the person's life.

The beauty of this in a funeral sermon, is that this person will no longer be tempted to pride, thinking that the virtues they acquired were because of something natural in them.

Of course, speaking of these virtues is never an attempt to prove the person was a Christian, nor is it trying to "preach him or her into heaven."

It is simply an opportunity to thank God for the examples and blessings we received through that particular loved one.

It is also true that there will be opportunity to speak of the departed's need for Jesus, his/hers Savior.

Tactfully, the pastor will remind those in attendance that the individual was not perfect, nor did he or she confess to be so, though he may certainly have struggled with this confession. This is not to speak ill of the dead, but to bring out his or her mortality.

Like you, when they heard the beatitudes in the Gospel lesson, they were tempted by their *own flesh* to **misbelieve** that they needed to attain such rewards based on their own efforts;

or were *deceived by the devil* to **despair** because they could not find themselves in those characteristics and virtues;

Like you, they followed the *deceptions of the world* and the culture around them and willingly, perhaps also guiltily, joined in the *shameful sins and vices* of peers.

These, too, prayed the 6th Petition: **Lead us not into temptation**, because they were tempted.

They knew that they shouldn't rely on themselves to flee temptation, but to seek God's help and mercy.

Of course, none of them did this perfectly.

In fact, those closest to them could probably think of various examples of when the departed seemed to enjoy a particular sin, or numerous vices.

Sometimes it even happens as we reminisce about our loved ones that we are tempted to glorify some of their misbehaviors by telling such stories in humorous, approving tones, misbehaviors, or sins, of which the departed, now having a perfect knowledge of good&evil, would be perfectly ashamed, *if* such stories could be brought before them.

But, of course, these stories can't and won't be brought before them,

because, as our text says, **God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Neither God, nor Satan, nor their own flesh can now accuse or tempt them, since Jesus was punished for, and paid the full price of, their sins.

They mourn over their sins no longer, because they are now perfectly comforted in Christ.

...

Notice how when speaking of the joys of heaven, the elder, speaking to John, speaks both in positive and negative terms.

Positively, **they are before God's throne, and serve Him ... and He shelters them w/ His presence.**

He shepherds and guides them to living water.

But lest our corrupted flesh thinks little of this because it cannot fathom the joy this will be,

God also tells us what won't be there: suffering... and, perhaps worse,

the fear and anxiety of suffering things like **hunger** and **thirst**.

Nor will there be any **tears**, brought on by our own sins, or the sins of others.

No tears because of the ruin and suffering of others in this broken world.

No tears because of loneliness or loss or weariness.

Nor will we even be tormented by discomforts, like the **scorching heat of the sun**.

This is what Esther Rose, Allen Hinz, Linda Quick, and Jane Balmer are experiencing right now.

It is a comfort to know that they have made it out of the *great tribulation* that is this earthly life.

But the funeral sermon isn't only to give us confidence that the sainted so-and-so is now at peace.

That is a means to many ends,

1st it gives all glory to God who elected, created, called, redeemed, and sanctified the departed;

2nd it teaches you to examine your life and consider the eternal outcome of it;

3rd it proclaims that you too will attain to these eternal joys only by endurance in the Christian faith.

Obviously, then, the funeral sermon is for the survivors who now continue in the *great tribulation* that is this tempting, sin-filled, corrupted life – full of *deception, misbelief, despair, sin and vices* where **hunger, thirst, scorching heat & tears** are a daily reminder of our sin & separation from God.

How are you to go on, when the guilt of your conscience weighs you down?

How are you able to attain the reward of paradise when you don't feel the **blessedness** of the **poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, or the peacemakers**?

When you fear that you have given in so much to the temptations of this world

to avoid **being persecuted for righteousness' sake**, or being **reviled**,

or having **all kinds of evil uttered against you falsely on Jesus' account**? Matthew 5:3-12

How do you shake the loneliness left by the absence of your loved one?

Any Christian funeral worth being preached, then, has as its goal to set Jesus before you as the **only way, truth, and life** of the blessed.

In such a sermon, Jesus' suffering and death will be spoken of as something that Jesus endured not only for the loved one but for all people... and especially you.

He suffered hunger in the wilderness of temptation, yet was without sin.

He cried tears for grief at the death of His friend Lazarus, as well as the sins of Jerusalem who **reviled, persecuted and uttered all kinds of evil against Him falsely**.

He suffered thirst on the cross, but only drank after His work of redemption was **finished**.

This He did for you, so that you could **wash your robe** in His perfect, divine **blood**...

and instead of it coming out covered in the crimson of guilt,

it is **washed white**, pure and holy, as Jesus' **poverty in spirit, His meekness, mercifulness, and purity in heart** are given to you.

He has made peace between you and God, taking away the separation of sin and uniting you to Himself and His work of redemption,

so that you are, even now, declared **blessed** by His Father and yours. You are His saint.

This washing and uniting was accomplished for you already in your Baptism.

There God declared you His child and gave you the right and tender invitation

to ask Him with *all boldness and confidence* those things needed for your life and salvation.

And among those is certainly your need and desire to flee temptation.

And so we pray: *Lead us not into temptation.*

You know that He hears you because He has faithfully answered that prayer of the many saints who have passed before you already.

Not that they avoided and perfectly fled from all sin, but in that though they *were thus tempted, still in the end, they overcame and retained the victory* through Jesus Christ.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy...

be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 24-25