

A Good Death

The death of His faithful ones is valuable in the LORD's sight. LORD, I am indeed Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your female servant. You have loosened my bonds. I will offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving and will worship the LORD. - Psalms 116:15-17 HCSB

A righteous man lived in a country where it was against the law to worship God and read His Word. Disregarding this wicked law¹ and choosing to fear the Lord² rather than man, the tzaddik remained steadfast in his devotional life. Soon, an evil neighbor caught sight of the tzaddik at prayer and told the authorities. The holy man was dragged before the local judiciary, a man as famous for his hatred of God as for his cruelty.

"I heard that your God delivered three men from Nebuchadnezzar's fires!"³ the wicked man taunted. "I'm about to test the existence of your God using your worthless life. Why don't you pray for the same miracle?"

The tzaddik responded, "Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah⁴ were men deserving of such grace. Nebuchadnezzar too was a king worthy of seeing a miracle, not because of his power but because he was willing to acknowledge the truth when he saw it.⁵ I have knowingly disregarded the wicked laws of this land and am willing to reap the consequences of my behavior. I could die any number of ways anyway. Dying by your hand is only one of many at Hashem's disposal."

"But why do you think your God has delivered you into my hand? Wouldn't it be better for Him to rescue you and thus make a believer of me?" the evil constable demanded.

The child of God replied, "As He did with Pharaoh, Hashem has foreknown that you would reject His call. He has given me over to you so that you will be guilty of my blood at the judgment seat – a fate that is coming very quickly upon you."

In a rage, the wicked man fell upon the tzaddik and killed him. Before he even had time to catch his breath, two soldiers entered the room with cold, distant eyes and guns upon their belts. They seized him and dragged him to the gallows for he had lost favor with the local powers that be.

Hashem does not promise to deliver us from terrible circumstances. Indeed, the three Hebrew children themselves did not count upon that miraculous outcome.⁶ What He does promise is that our lives and even our deaths will count for something. They will have meaning and impact. If we must suffer, it will be for our betterment.⁷ If we die, it will be to our advantage.

May our eager expectation and hope be that we will not be ashamed by our actions, but that we will always, with all boldness, honor Christ with our bodies, whether by our manner of living or of dying. For the Ransomed, living is Christ and dying is gain.⁸

¹ Acts 5:29

² Psalm 147:11; Proverbs 1:7

³ Daniel 3

⁴ Shadrach's, Meshach's and Abednego's true Hebrew names Daniel 1:6-7

⁵ Daniel 3:28-29

⁶ Daniel 3:16-18

⁷ James 1:2-3

⁸ Philippians 1:20-21