

“Better Than Life!”

11-01-15

Perhaps you heard the story this week about the Portland, Oregon parents who are allowing their 5 year old daughter to choose heaven over the hospital. 5 year-old Julianna Snow is dying of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. It's a neuro-degenerative illness that causes profound weakness but does not affect cognition.

Her muscles are so weak she can't swallow, and even a common cold could kill her. Julianna has made it clear to her parents she doesn't want to go to the hospital again, and they've decided to honor her wishes. Listen to this conversation between mother and daughter:

“Julianna, if you get sick again, do you want to go to the hospital again or stay home?” Not the hospital.” Mom: “Even if that means that you will go to heaven if you stay home?” To which she responded, “Yes.” Mom: “And you know that mommy and daddy won't come with you right away? You'll go by yourself first.”

Julianna replied: *“Don't worry. God will take care of me.”* Mom continued: *“And if you go to the hospital, it may help you get better and let you come home again and spend more time with us. I need to make sure that you understand that. The hospital may let you have more time with mommy and daddy.”* To which she replied, *“I understand.”*

Mom, now crying said, *“I'm sorry, Julianna. I know you don't like it when I cry. It's just that I will miss you so much.”* To which Julianna responded in joy, *“That's OK. God will take care of me. He's in my heart. Heaven! It's a wonderful place. No sorrow, no pain, no problems—just the presence of God and the saints that are there with Him!”*

Open to Revelation 7. John is looking right into the throne room of heaven, and he's taking us with him to see what it's like. Verses 9-10, *“After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, “Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!”*

So what did they see? **There's a Big Crowd from Everywhere.** All nations, tribes and people and languages were there because God has brought them to His home!. John 3:16 told us that God sent His Son for all! As they stand in heaven as God's saints, **They're Rejoicing Over Salvation.** Jesus won that for them through His dying and rising for them to give His salvation to all of them.

But how did they get into heaven? They believed in the Lord, Jesus Christ! **They've been Faithful Throughout Life.** This is exactly what God promised the faithful in Revelation 2:10, *“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”* As they went through life, they weren't sinless! They sinned just like we do! As they walked and talked, not many of them signed their names with a “Prince” or “Princess”. But that's changed for them as they stand in the presence of Almighty God, and so will we as we walk by faith!

Verses 13-14. *“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.”* Right now, we hope in the glory of heaven. Martin Luther said, *“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”* That hope is what gets us through all the terrible things that go on against us personally and as Christians here.

We are in The Great Tribulation. Jesus told His disciples and us, we will go through trials and sorrows and the world will be against us. We see it and feel it every day. But **as Faithful Believers we have no worries.** We shouldn't be worried because we need to realize we're not alone! God's with us each step of the way and we're blessed to be in this community of faith!

In the Bible, “*your robe*” is your life. Today, when you confess your sins and receive forgiveness, that forgiveness isn’t just some general statement and about how God is nice and loves. No, the forgiveness of sins you receive is forgiveness that was earned by Jesus Christ, when He shed His blood on the cross. As that famous Bible passage says, “*The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.*” This morning, you’ll hear that your sins are taken away by the blood of Jesus Christ. You believe it, and you put your faith in it. That’s when you wash your life and make it white in the blood of the Lamb. In the eyes of God, that’s when a person shows they’re a saint!

Our Guilt is Removed by Jesus’ Sacrifice. As He suffered and died on the cross, **We are Washed Clean in His Blood.** You see, a “saint,” as the Bible defines it, isn’t one of those really good people. A “saint” is someone who realizes that he’s a sinner, and then washes his robe in the blood of the Lamb. That’s how you become a saint – believing that the blood of Jesus Christ takes away all of your sins. You are both Saint and Sinner!

In Baptism, God cleansed you of your sin by connecting you to the blood of His Son. You’re baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and right before your eyes, you become a saint, a child of the King! When you take the Lord’s Supper you’re receiving the very body and blood of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.

At that moment, you’re washing your robe in the blood of the Lamb. And then, as you turn around, and walk back to your seat, you’re a “saint” in the eyes of God. That’s a true reason to smile! It’s not because you did something so good, but because your sins have been taken away by Christ! **Salvation is Only Through Jesus Christ!**

Open to 1 John 3. As we look at life here on earth, we don’t always see how blessed we are as God’s children. Verse 1, “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*” As believers, our self-worth is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us His own! **We’re His Now, not just in the Future!** We’re encouraged to live like Jesus because we’re His!

Verses 2-3, “*Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*” As we grow in faith, we’re becoming reflections of God. We resemble Him! **Life is Becoming More Like Jesus.**

But We Won’t Be Complete Until We See Jesus! You were a dying sinner before God called you His child in Baptism. When Christ comes in glory, He will reveal the glory He’s given to you now. That’s the glory He’s given you and you need to have others understand this glory could be theirs too!

Our Future Should Motivate Us Into Action. God’s plan for enlarging His kingdom is so simple - one person telling another about the Savior. Yet we’re busy and full of excuses. Just remember, someone’s eternal destiny is at stake. Every person you meet. The joy you’ll have when you meet that person in heaven will far exceed any discomfort you felt in sharing the Gospel!

Heaven is a wonderful place filled with God’s glory and grace. It’s so much better than life! By faith it’s yours!