

**“And this Gospel,”
shall be preached...
Matthew 24:14**

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

Why God Allows Untimely Death

By Richard Rice

Bob—a fine, upstanding Christian man—was driving home from work. Rain had been falling most of the day and the roadway was wet and treacherous. As he rounded a curve in the road, his tires began slipping and his car went skidding in circles out of control. The auto crunched to a jolting halt against a nearby embankment. Bob was thrown from the car and hurled onto the roadway pavement! His head struck the hard surface — and he never regained consciousness. An hour later, he was pronounced dead at a local hospital from massive head injuries. He was 40 years old.

His wife and children were heartbroken. They were a closely knit family—Bob being a strong spiritual leader. His little boy, upon hearing of his father's death, cried, "Why did God let Daddy die, Momma? He was good and taught us God's way, and we all prayed so many times for God's protection."

A Veil of Uncertainty

Most of us know of some such tragedy or have experienced one in our own family. "Why did God allow it to happen?" we wonder. Deep sorrows and afflictions often do touch the lives of Christians during their sojourn on earth.

Why should this be? Doesn't the Bible say that God is a *loving* heavenly Father who hears our cries, who promises protection, deliverance and healing when we are sick?

I Peter 3:12 plainly states: "For the *eyes* of the Lord are over the *righteous*, and His *ears* are open unto their prayers. . . ." The Psalmist said: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall *no evil befall thee*, neither shall *any plague come nigh thy dwelling . . .*" (Psalm 91:9-11). Jesus Christ said: "I will *never* leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

How, then, in the face of these promises, can we explain the suffering and the death that is experienced by true Christians? There is an answer.

Man—a Fleeting Vapor

Before getting down to specifics, let's notice one obvious but important point. God never intended that physical life go on forever in this temporary, fleshly human form. To the contrary, He tells us that sooner or later all must die. ". . . it is appointed unto men *once to die*, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Solomon said: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a *time to die . . .*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

Human life at its best is mortal and temporary—it's here today and gone tomorrow. When compared to eternity, even 70 or 100 years is as nothing. Looked at in reverse, the deep grueling pain of anguish and suffering—though sometimes heart-

breaking and hard to endure—is but the blinking of an eyelash compared to the vast span of eternity ahead. The Apostle Paul wrote: “For our light affliction, *which is but for a moment*, worketh for us a far more exceeding and *eternal weight of glory*” (II Corinthians 4:17).

God has given all of us life. And that life has been redeemed by the life of Jesus Christ!

Our lives belong to God. He loves us with a fervent love, and is infinitely concerned with our earthly welfare and eternal destiny! God, then, being in control, will allow only that which is BEST according to His wisdom and eternal plan! If He allows tragedy, such as untimely death, to occur, we can *trust* in God that it will serve a good and rightful purpose in His plan. “ALL things work together for GOOD to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

God Knows All Things

I John 3:20 tells us that God *knows all things*! He’s intimately acquainted with our pains and sorrows. “For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14). So, when illness strikes, God can completely cleanse the human body of ANY kind of disease. He can remove any type of affliction and hardship. “Ah Lord God! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and there is nothing too hard for thee*” (Jeremiah 32:17).

Yet, many dedicated and faithful Christians have died—some in anguish—because God did not yet intervene to heal. Why?

Seven Reasons

While we know the overall principles God uses, we cannot always know which of these principles is involved in every case. Only God knows the hearts of individual people and acts with each one to accomplish His will. The following seven reasons show why God permits death among His people and their loved ones.

1. *God allows some to die when their purpose has been fulfilled.* Many zealous Christians have walked faithfully with God and have been tremendous examples in love and service to others. In their own special way, they may have preached the gospel more powerfully than a thousand sermons. In such cases, when they have fulfilled their great pur-

pose and their life’s work is done, God has chosen to take them.

The Apostle Paul’s own life is a living testimony of this truth: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, *I have finished my course*, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness . . .” (II Timothy 4:6-8).

No one knows when one’s purpose is completed. Only God knows that.

We humans place so much emphasis on this fleeting existence, which is natural since it’s all we have experienced, but the great majestic God who inhabits eternity thinks on something far more permanent: the *spiritual character* we are building for sonship in His Kingdom. Once our spiritual lives have been molded for God’s Family—and we are fully prepared to become His sons—our purpose for this human life is complete! God in His wisdom looks down from His throne and determines when it is time to preserve our perfection intact!

Of course, the hurt and sorrow from the loss of a loved one can be traumatic! But God in His infallible wisdom knows what is best. Out of deep love and mercy, He takes those who have reached a degree of spiritual maturity from the horrors that we may have to live through during this life, especially in the Great Tribulation. Those of God’s true children who have died, have qualified for His Kingdom, will be *safe* and *secure* in the grave, no longer having to struggle against the trials and temptations in this life.

2. *Some die because of their environment, or the breaking of natural health laws.* In some nations people naturally do not live as long simply because of dietary conditions—malnourishment, disease, lack of sanitation, harsh living conditions, or many such factors.

Some people die prematurely just by “working themselves to death.” Some Christians have done exactly that—but they have lived fruitful, conscientious lives and have died in FAITH. And, God has allowed it, deeming them qualified to enter His Kingdom.

Others have difficulty learning to apply the principles of God pertaining to health. There are some who perhaps in ignorance have continued to break these life-giving precepts—and suffered the physical consequences in their bodies. God may withhold

healing until changes are made and the person starts practicing good health laws.

3. *Lack of faith in Christ as healer.* We should not deny or try to reason around the fact that some people die because they lack faith. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning their lack of faith in Christ as healer in connection with the Passover observance. He said: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and *many sleep* [are dead]" (I Corinthians 11:30).

Some have not been delivered from illness because they didn't fully trust God. Jesus said, "According to your faith, be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29).

But, even if God permits a person to die, his future life is still secure in God if he has the Holy Spirit and is striving (though imperfectly) to live God's way. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "For I am persuaded, that neither *death*, nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

4. *As a living testimony, or so that God's Work may increase and grow.* In ancient Israel, God often removed kings and leaders (both good and bad) through death in order that HIS PURPOSE could be continued! As an example, even dedicated Moses was not permitted to go into the Promised Land. The mantle of authority was placed on Joshua to lead God's chosen people, showing that some are taken when their work is completed to open up the way for others to carry on God's Work! And their death often remains a living testament of faith and endurance to those Christians who remain.

The Bible is a chronicle of history, dating the appearance and the passing of great spiritual leaders. On a lesser scale, the same has happened in individual lives of ordinary people of God. Let us not doubt or question the integrity of God in such matters.

Hebrews 11 talks of people who died in the faith, being beaten, whipped, even slaughtered for the cause of God. But, their lives helped shape the destiny of others (verses 35-38).

These people were a dramatic testimony—as was Christ's example before His persecutors—of faith and courage and perfect trust in God. It shows a belief in something far GREATER than anything this world has to offer! The flames of God's martyrs have seared the pages of history and stand as a

perpetual witness to the world. But remember, they have it made, and will shine forth with great glory in the Kingdom of God.

Remember also the example of those who were willing to give their life but were not required to, such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3). They had great faith in God and gave a great witness. They knew that God *could* save them from death, but they did not know if God *would choose* to save them *then* (verses 16-18). Their faith was absolute, though, in God's *ultimate* salvation.

Not all Christians are called to be martyrs—God does not require that all die or come face to face with death before deliverance in this way. He does promise, however, that He will not allow you to be tempted above what you're able to bear (I Corinthians 10:13).

5. *Time and chance happen to the innocent.* As we investigate the reasons for the untimely death of God's people, we must keep in mind that God is not working with every human on earth.

Thus the promises of God's protection and special care do not apply to everyone. Not because He doesn't care or has no concern for mankind, but because it is not His plan to deal with them at this time. Their day is still coming. *Every* human will have a full and ample opportunity for salvation—some now, and some later in a physical resurrection.

Jesus commented that the deaths of many people occur because they just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The ones who died were not worse sinners than others (Luke 13:1-5). But God was not working with them yet in a personal way.

This is why Solomon could say "time and chance happeneth to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Circumstances can converge at some point—an automobile accident, drowning, natural disaster—and can take the life of a loved one. But that loved one is not hopelessly lost!

The comforting hope we have in such cases is that they will be raised from their graves in a resurrection after the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:5) to be given renewed life and an opportunity to know God in a world free from the ways of Satan. If you have not yet learned of this comforting truth, write for our free article that explains this subject in depth. It's entitled: "Is This The Only Day of Sal-

vation?"

6. *To serve as a test for the living.* When Job's family was taken from him by Satan (Job 1 and 2), did he give up and quit? No! Even though he didn't understand why God allowed it, he remained true to the end. Though stricken with the natural sorrow and grief of losing his children, he confessed his allegiance to God and his confidence in the ultimate outcome of God's wisdom.

When you see loyal Christians die from maladies, accidents, or whatever causes—will YOU doubt the great wisdom of God and forsake Him? Or will you remain loyal and steadfast? This is a test some of us may face.

Remember, God does not pervert judgment, nor does He make mistakes. He is without iniquity. He's always in control, but He does *test* those He loves, to make us perfect.

Psalm 116:15 says: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." God rejoices when His people have progressed to the point that they are qualified for a job in His Kingdom. True faith is knowing that God will not allow this to happen until we reach that "right moment" in our pilgrimage on earth.

7. *A supreme, final test.* Of all the reasons why God allows death, this is probably the most significant! When one is willing to forego his life in whatever way God chooses, or for whatever purpose it serves in His Work, he has passed his greatest earthly test. *There is none greater!* Jesus Christ said: "... whosoever will lose his life for MY [Jesus] sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25).

At baptism, we should have counted the cost and resolved upon a covenant with God to be loyal to death. We said in our hearts, "I will be true to the _____ degree—dedicating my life to you in whatever capacity you decide to use it." Did we really mean it?

Sometimes God will use the forge and fire of tragedy to fashion us into tools fitting for the *eternal purpose* He has ahead! "That the trial of your faith, being *much more precious than of gold* that perisheth, though it be tried with FIRE, might be found unto praise and honour, and GLORY at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:7).

In the face of death, God's sons and daughters realize their lives are only a flicker—and their true hope lies only in God. All the inconsequential trap-

pings of life melt away. Death dissolves man's emphasis on the fleeting, material aspects of this world.

Proverbs 14:32 says "... the righteous hath HOPE in his death." Do YOU have hope? Can you trust God with your life to the very end?

When a Christian dies in faith, obeying God, he is indeed *passing* the greatest test that can ever confront a man, thus, guaranteeing his eternal reward.

Conclusion

Now, do these many points just mentioned contradict the many promises in God's Word concerning healing, protection from harm, or the watchfulness of His angels over our lives? Can you still trust God even though you realize He might at some time let you die?

Yes, of course!

God WILL keep His promises to heal and deliver and protect until we have fulfilled our earthly purpose, and qualified to rule in His glorious Kingdom! Death cannot overrule the power of God, and upset His plan. It cannot snatch us from God before He decided it's time!

Noah did not die in the flood, even though the vast majority of mankind did. It wasn't his time. David was exposed to death on numerous occasions, but he was spared. The three friends of Daniel who were cast into the fiery furnace weren't consumed. It wasn't their time. Over and over in the life of Jesus we read how He escaped from murderers for "his hour was not yet come" (John 7:30). Paul speaks of his many sufferings and persecutions. He was exposed to death often, but he did not die until God allowed it.

The righteous do not fear death—they have confidence they will live as long as their lives are serving Christ's purpose.

As long as you're walking with God, no one can take you from His love and care. Satan the devil has no authority on his own to harm or hurt you. You are protected. Death won't strike prematurely. You can live and be healed 1,000 times if necessary! But, when GOD does determine to allow you to die—because He knows you are ready or the time in His purpose is fulfilled—you'll never have to fear death!

You're in GOOD HANDS—FOR ETERNITY!