

Sermon: Memorial Service of Dennis A. Willis

Text:

Revelation 21:1-8 (v.4) Theme: The Christian hope.

Goal: To lift up our eyes to heaven, where God promises relief from all earthly suffering for those who believe in Jesus.

Dear Friends,

Dear Anita and Children,

Introduction: Death always shocks us! We hear in the news daily about people killed in accidents, wars, riots, natural disasters and other tragedies and we become sadly impressed! But when death comes closer to us and reaches one of our beloved ones, a relative or a friend, we become really shocked and we stop our daily activities for a while to come to a Memorial Service, to pay a tribute to the deceased person and to offer our solidarity and support to the grieving family. And we have to ask ourselves: If it is I? When my time comes to pass away, what about my future?

God is gracious to us and He knows our worries and concerns. He lifts up our eyes and shows us a window opened in heaven, so that we can look inside and we can see what He has prepared for those who love Him and believe in Jesus. Life is not just working, struggling, eating, forming a family, and enjoying good things. God knows that our life has an end and He provides hope and the way to reach the goal He has set to humankind: to be with Him forever by faith in Jesus Christ! He says: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be there God.”

What will God do with His people in heaven? Among several blessings reported in the Bible, our text highlighted some that fit just this moment of grief and mourning we are facing today:

A) “He will wipe every tear from our eyes.” How many tears have run from our eyes during our life? How many tears have run from the eyes of Anita and of her family these past days? - Like a mother or a father who takes the little child in her/his lap who falls and hurts his knee, and wipes away the tears, giving time to calm and to rest in his arms, so does God with His children. It’s a lovely image of God wiping away our tears...

B) “There will be no more death.” What hurts us here the most is death, it hurts us more than any other kind of suffering. Heaven means eternal life, no more death. Why is this possible? Because Jesus conquered death with His death on the cross. What apparently was a defeat when Jesus died on the cross was turned into victory by His resurrection. Even on the cross He cried out in a loud voice: “It is finished!” and gave up His spirit into the hands of God, to take it over again on Easter Sunday! “There will be no more death!” and, therefore, no tears anymore!

C) “There will be no more mourning or crying or pain” caused by death, because death doesn’t exist anymore. While we are on this side of heaven we still suffer the consequences of sin and of death, as we are experiencing it these days; but not so on the other side of heaven. Giving us this hope, God wants to encourage us to walk in His ways and to follow the paths of Jesus, who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6) and the Only One who can take us to the Father’s house. It is always an advantage to follow Jesus because He knows the right way to heaven and He has the key to open the gate for us. If we try to find it by ourselves, we will never go in.

D) “For the old order of things has passed away” says our text. The Book of Revelation is considered a difficult Book in the Bible. Many people avoid reading this Book and are scared because of some

terrible images of evil described in this Book. But the final goal of this Book is to show that God is in control and that the final victory will belong to Christ and to His followers. The last two chapters of Revelation show how it will be in heaven when “the old order of things has passed away” and God “is making everything new”. - The Book was written at a time of intense persecution of the Christian Church. The Christians were suffering a lot because of their faith. God gave these Revelations to comfort His people in the midst of suffering; to lift up their eyes from the grieve, death, pain and tears to the hope, joy and splendour of the Eternal House; and to assure our salvation by faith in Jesus, who loves us, and did everything necessary to offer us forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. We are reading some chapters of Revelation in our services after Easter just to show the Resurrected Jesus sitting beside His Father and the hope that His resurrection brings to each who believes in Him. This reading of Revelation 21:1-8 was read here at our Service last Sunday.

Conclusion: I was well impressed when the Bishop of London preached at the Memorial Service of Margaret Thatcher and he began saying: *We are in a church, not in the Parliament. This is not a place for judgments, neither political judgments nor other kind of judgments. This is a place of hope!* And he preached about Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. What a good testimony of the Christian faith and hope to tens of thousands of people, authorities and ordinary people, who were attending the Service in person or by TV.

A Memorial Service is a tribute to the person who passed away, in our case today a tribute to Dennis; but above all it is a Service for the living ones, for the family and for all of us, to encourage us to prepare ourselves according to God’s orientations in the Bible, and to give us the hope that only Jesus can give us by His resurrection

from death. May God be with Anita, with Michelle, with Jonathan, with Tania and with the entire family and with the friends, guiding us all in His paths till we reach the goal God has set in front of us by faith in Jesus: the eternal life with Him in heaven. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 30 April 2013