

I Lost A Friend

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About 6 years ago my best friend Richard Few went home to be with the Lord. Richard is a fun loving talented person (one of the best self-taught guitar players I ever heard) who loves Jesus with all his heart. He is in heaven right now, playing the guitar of his dreams singing praises to the Lord as no one has ever before heard him sing. Richard spent a good part of his life doing the same thing while he was here with us on earth. Through his music and prison ministry, he had a hand in leading hundreds - perhaps thousands (by now) to Jesus. I can only imagine the line of people waiting to greet him and say, "thank you" when he went through the gates of heaven; people who he touched with his preaching, with his music, his words of encouragement, and even his words of rebuke. I miss him greatly, however, at the same time I rejoice in knowing we will meet again soon. Some of you may have noticed that I referred to Richard in the present tense in the second sentence of this writing. The reason I did that is because, Richard "Still IS!" He is still alive; it is just in a different realm of existence! This is the Gospel Message, the Good News! Like many of my readers, I have experienced the death of friends and family before, but I want to say to all reading this that there is a big difference when you know where they stand with the Lord. We read the words of Jesus talking about Him preparing a place for us, preparing a mansion for us in heaven... He even paid for our ticket, with His sacrifice on the cross! I don't know about you, but that brings a huge degree of joy and comfort to me knowing the Lord as I do. It also brings comfort to me when a friend or loved one makes the transition and I **know** where they stand with Jesus evidenced by their words and deeds.

Judgmental or Simply Being Observant

I have told the following story to many people before; when my father died, I cried like a baby... I was upset because I didn't know for sure where my father stood with the Lord. I never heard him confess Jesus as his Lord and Savior; in fact, when I told him that I had accepted Jesus, that I was Born Again many years ago, his reply to me was, "I thought you were stronger than that." On the other hand, I did not shed a tear when my mother died. It is not because her passing was any less painful, but because about a year before she died, I had a talk with her and asked her a simple question... "If you were standing before God and He asked you why He should let you into heaven" what would you say? My mom gave the correct answer! Do you know what the correct answer is? This story was upsetting to one of my sisters when I shared it with her; she said, "Dad was a good man, he always tried to do the right things!" My dad was indeed a good man, he had many friends and admirers, but how good do you have to be to get into heaven? The BIGGER question for most is, "How good is good enough?" The Bible has the answer to this question and many more concerning both salvation and assurance of salvation. You can find some of these answers in other sections of this web site. Yes, I Lost my Mom, and Dad years ago, but perhaps only for a little while, at least in the case of one of them. Am I being judgmental or am I simply recounting what I had observed in their words and actions? I must say again that it is good to know that we can have assurance about our friends, and our loved ones, even ourselves. Some may be wondering or questioning how we can have assurance. It comes from trusting in the Word of God! **1 John 5:12-13 (KJV)** ¹² **He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.** ¹³ **These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.** Are not these among the most comforting words you ever heard? *Think of it... according to the words of Jesus Himself, we can **know** we have eternal life!* Therefore, the question now is, "what are the indicators of a right relationship with God, both for ourselves and when we consider the words and actions of others?" The Bible gives many illustrations such as the following passages: **John 10:27-30 (KJV)** ²⁷ **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:** ²⁸ **And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.** ²⁹ **My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.** ³⁰ I

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and my Father are one. This passage not only illustrates the evidence of a true follower of Jesus, it also reinforces our assurance as followers. Another reviling passage although in context specifically directed to the subject of false prophets, is also applicable to believers in general: **Matthew 7:16-20 (KJV)** ¹⁶ **Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?** ¹⁷ **Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.** ¹⁸ **A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.** ¹⁹ **Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.** ²⁰ **Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.** The fact that there are these comparisons between believers and non-believers in the Word of God indicates that they can, and should, be used to judge not only ourselves, but others as well as to our spiritual status, this in order for us to make adjustments if necessary. This negates the negative connotations attached to being judgmental.

A Peaceful Transition

I originally wrote this particular article back in 2017 soon after my friend Richard had passed away. The day he died, I was with him, just inches away from him when he quietly closed his eyes here on earth for the last time. Just moments before, he was awake but unable to speak; we were looking directly into each other's eyes and I asked him, "Do you want to stay," to which he shook his head "no," just once, almost imperceptibly. I then asked, "Do you want to go home" which is something we had always talked about, *going home to be with the Lord*. He gave a nod with his eyes, again, almost imperceptibly answering yes. He then closed his eyes, and within a minute or two, the vital signs monitor showed a flat line... Richard was home! I have relived this story many times, as I have been reminded of Richard from time to time. Nevertheless, it never ceases to amaze me when I recall of how peaceful his journey was from here to his eternal home. It is important for everyone to understand that where we end up spending eternity is our personal choice; no one else can pray you into heaven. It is also important for all of us to understand that where we spend eternity has nothing to do with our performance, here on earth, how good or how bad we may have been while we were here. Although many are perceived to be good in relation to others, the Bible teaches, **Romans 3:23 (KJV)** ²³ **For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...** The key is Jesus, and your answer to the same question He posed to His Disciples when He asked them, *"Who do you say that I am?"* Most people if asked, "Why did Jesus die on the cross" would say, "to save me from my sins," a more accurate answer would be, *"To save the world from sin," because All have fallen short of God's standard being perfection.* The Bible teaches that Jesus died for the sins of all who have ever lived or ever will! This includes the most evil degenerates you can think of! However, is that all Jesus came to do, simply to make us feel good concerning our transgressions and past mistakes? Jesus Himself made the following statement: **John 3:14-16 (KJV)** ¹⁴ **And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:** ¹⁵ **That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.** ¹⁶ **For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** Here is something to ponder for a moment... when does Eternity begin? People often forget that when God created Adam and Eve, He had also given them eternal life when He created them! God also gave them one simple rule being not to eat the fruit of one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with a warning that if they partook of that particular fruit they would, "surely die." Most all can recall the rest of the story... they ate of the forbidden fruit and God kicked them out of the Garden. Some people will say, "I thought God was merciful... why did He kick them out of the Garden?" That is a whole teaching by itself, but the short answer is once again "Love and Mercy." You see there were really *two* special trees in the Garden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, also the "tree of life." **Genesis 2:8-9 (KJV)** ⁸ **And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.** ⁹ **And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.** Had God allowed

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Adam and Eve to stay in the Garden in their “fallen state” and they had also partook of the Tree of Life, they would have lived forever in that fallen state with no chance of reconciliation with God... they, and the rest of humanity would have been doomed forever, because God never goes back on His word. Sin always has a price and as God said, “If you eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall surely die.” Ultimately, it was for their good and the good of humanity as a whole that the curse of death remained in force. Later on, in His mercy and love for us, God would pay that penalty Himself, becoming as a man and dying on the cross in our stead, because the sacrifices offered by man were only temporary. **Isaiah 7:14 (KJV)¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.** Also see: **Matthew 1:23 (KJV)²³ Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, *which being interpreted is, God with us.*** (Emphasis Mine) This next verse sums it up well: **1 John 4:10 (KJV)¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

Is There Hope for those who have already Left Us?

So, what hope is there for the salvation of friends and loved ones who have gone on before us, those of whom we are unsure of concerning their standing with God? There is hope, which I will illustrate with a story a sister in Christ told many years ago. This woman worked in a large nursing home as an activities coordinator, which brought her into close contact with the residents thereby giving her many opportunities to share Jesus with many of them. She told a story of a Jewish Gentleman with whom she had been sharing the gospel. Of course being Jewish, he was not always receptive to her witness, sometimes arguing, but he became more cordial and as he realized his time on earth was nearing its end. Although he stubbornly claimed to cling to his Jewish faith, he kept listening. He had fallen into a coma and after a few days it became clear it was his time. My friend was in his room during his last moments and said that he suddenly started thrashing about as if fighting with someone. It looked as if he was trying to push someone away and even started to swing his arms as if trying to punch someone. After a few moments, he sunk down in the bed and he smiled... his last word as peace came over his demeanor was, “Jesus,” as he breathed his last breath. What exactly went on there we will never know; but it seems to me that at the very last moment of his life, he recognized Jesus as his Lord and Savior and he went with him into paradise just like the thief on the cross. Therefore, yes, there is hope after a friend or loved one passed away that we might see them again. Many people have had what is called, “a deathbed conversion,” however, it is much better that you erase all doubt concerning your spiritual status sooner rather than later, both for the sake of yourself, and your loved ones. You can then experience the joy of the assurance God provides, but more importantly, you will have time to pass it on to others. Today is the day of salvation!

John10:27-28(NKJV)

²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.