

God's Profitable Promise

‡ Here

‡ Hereafter

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of life and death, dear loved ones of our departed brother:

A pastor on vacation saw something very troubling in the hotel hallway. Sunday morning about 9:00 AM, and one door after another said, "Do not disturb." Understandable, and yet so descriptive of our America today. We don't want to be disturbed, especially not by Jesus Christ. Listen to religious leaders pontificating but rarely mentioning the Name of God's own Son whom He gave into death for us all. And there's another "Do not disturb!" sign. We have so sanitized death that professionals now take care of all the details. We go about our busy lives as Americans worshipping our work, working at our play, and playing at our worship. Then a friend or family member dies, and here we are – disturbed.

If you find it hard to be here today it's only natural. Death is a violent intrusion into God's perfect creation. But I need to tell you how glad my departed brother is that you came and why I'm not mentioning his name. He demanded absolutely no eulogies and told me about a favorite pastor who refused to mention the deceased in his funeral sermons. Our brother and friend, husband and father, wanted us to focus on Someone else, Someone who first disturbs us, but only in order to take away our fears and replace them with comfort, peace and rest. A doctor's diagnosis can be disturbing...until you find there is a cure. This cure is 100%. We find it in **God's Profitable Promise** – first of all for...

‡ Here

It was another Sunday, May 12, 1929, at the little Lutheran church in Wentworth, South Dakota. Pastor Ferdinand Oberhue gathered the confirmands in front and gave to each a special Bible verse to strengthen faith and give guidance in the years ahead. "This verse helped me overcome doubt and temptation which confronts Christians continually," our brother told me when he asked that it be used for his funeral text. He loved it so much that he requested it for the Confirmation verse of treasured son Curt. We actually pick up on Paul's God-inspired thought part way through 1 Timothy 4:8. Here is the entire verse in the favorite King James Version: "*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"

At first glance if we pulled this passage out of context, one might think God is telling us how to save ourselves. To some it might sound like work-righteousness until you go back to the beginning of the chapter. The Lord's Apostle Paul is instructing young Pastor Timothy about dreadful days: "*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*" (1 Timothy 4:1-5 NIV) Sound familiar? Human works of celibacy and dietary rules are rejected along with "*godless myths and old wives' tales*" which obsessed pastors and theologians even back then. Some actually echoed Greek philosophers who said the body itself was bad. Their misguided Christian followers treated God's physical creation of this body in harsh ways until the Lord set the record straight through Paul.

Go ahead, Americans. Work those "abs." But realize this body is passing away. What we really need is to go to the gym for this other promise, **God's Profitable Promise** for life **Here**. But how do you

even get into the health club without a membership? And who can pay God's price? He says, ***"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."*** (Leviticus 19:2) In Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* He commands, ***"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*** (Matthew 5:48) And that, dear friends, is what disturbs us about days like this. Who of us has loved our God with all our heart and soul and mind, with all our strength? Who of us has loved our neighbor as ourself? (Matthew 22:37-40) None of us is perfect and holy like God. Our conscience confirms that if we try to get into heaven by what we accomplish **Here**, we will find heaven's door locked, and nothing left for us but eternal torment the very real place God calls "hell." This fear foils all our hopes and dreams **Here**. We need God to disturb us first.

But God does not want it to stay that way, not **Here**, not now, not ever. He sent His perfect Son to live the perfect and holy life in your place and mine. By His innocent death on the cross, Jesus first washed away every sin, every reason we have to feel guilty before God. With His holy blood Jesus purchased a ticket for you and me and every sinner who ever lived or will live to find heaven's doors wide open and the loving arms of Jesus waiting. But before we get there, we have a life to live. Each day is a day of Christian training, not to keep paying on that ticket. Do you keep sending in mortgage payments after you're "Paid in full"? Why do we sinners think God wants or will accept our works, sinful as He says, like ***"filthy rags"*** (Isaiah 64:6). Only the good works of Christ can count for any and all of us?

What fear this takes away! What joy to live in Jesus! To know that you absolutely cannot pay for what God has already purchased, your immortal soul, leaves one thought, one goal for life: How do I say, "Thank-you!" to God who died for me? Does someone need help in our community? Maybe I'll run for office and do what I can. Does someone far away whom I don't even know need glasses just to see? I'll gather all I can in the Name of Jesus and send them with fellow Christians who will make the love of Christ real and tell the blind how He came to give sight to our souls. I'll do everything I can from my deathbed to tell doctors and nurses the love of Jesus for them and help them see past **Here** to ...

† Hereafter

Our brother asked me, "Why did God let my life end in such tragedy?" I reminded him of God's promise for His people, ***"They will still bear fruit in old age."*** (Psalm 92:14) "Dear brother," I told him, "I have never seen so many men from our church so eager to find their brother and comfort him as with you. These good works glorify God because they are done out of thanks to Jesus and in His Name." And when he confessed his sins again, I told him what God says to lead us safely into the **Hereafter**: ***"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*** (Isaiah 1:18 NIV) He was so at peace. All he kept saying how thankful he was for all God's blessings, how comforted at this time of his life. "I love my God! I love my wife! I love my son!" And, dear friends, I hope and pray to be so loving then.

Our loved one is now enjoying the **Hereafter**. His pain is gone. All the doubts and fears are gone. He now enjoys the perfect peace of nestling in the arms of God's Son Jesus, held close to that loving heart that poured out such kindness for every sinner – for everyone here too. Before God took him home, our brother had but one dying wish, that everyone he knew and loved might follow Jesus. He wanted no eulogy, no words of praise to him, only praise to Jesus for what He has done for us all.

Soon, perhaps today, the last trumpet will sound and each of us will stand before the righteous Judge. Do you have your ticket? Jesus, to whom God has entrusted the final judgment, says, ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:16 NIV) Just believe because faith is the hand that receives the ticket from God which opens heaven's door. What sign is on your heart's door today? Whatever it was before, I hope now it reads: "Please Disturb!" Disturb me, Jesus. Do whatever you have to do to take me home to that beautiful bliss and glory of heaven. Give me the grip of faith that won't let go of you. Take my hand and lead me to life eternal. I hear you calling, ***"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*** (Revelation 3:20) Come in, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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