

THE HOUR HAS COME

Why the LORD Laid Down His Life When He Did

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On a number of occasions during His ministry people wanted to kill Jesus, but we are told, “No one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come” (John 8:20, 7:30; cf. 7:6-8, 2:4). But in the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John, just after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus began to speak of “His hour” as being upon Him.

The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.... Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it produces much grain.... Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say, “Father, save Me from this hour?” But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. (23-24, 27-28)

The Gospels present the death of Jesus as a purposeful thing. Of course, it was not the Lord’s will that people should kill Him. Nor were His murderers helpless pawns in His scheme; they were free agents. We gather this from what He said to Judas: “The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed” (Matthew 26:24). People freely chose to betray Him and kill Him. They were culpable for it. At the very same time, Jesus insists:

I lay down My life for the sheep.... I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. (John 10:15, 17-18)

We have here a facet of providence which is difficult for us to understand! In all death there is a Divine purpose, and yet the means of that death are often not from the Lord but are only permitted by Him. He is in charge, but evil is still allowed a role. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the death of our Lord Himself.

The work *Spiritual Experiences*, number 5003, tells us “the

reasons why some die children, some youths, some adults, some old people....”:

1st. On account of the usefulness to people in the world.

2nd. On account of the usefulness, while he is [living] in the world, to spirits and angels; for a person is with spirits as to his interiors....

3rd. On account of the usefulness to himself [of his being] in the world, either that he may be regenerated, or that he may be let into his evils....

4th. Therefore, on account of the usefulness afterwards in the other life, after death, to eternity....

We are going to use these four reasons as a springboard for reflecting on the timing and meaning of the Lord’s death and resurrection.

Having loved His own in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1)

The first factor mentioned in determining when people die has to do with their *“usefulness to people in the world.”*

Obviously the Lord has to consider where people are most needed. If it is absolutely essential that a certain person be with loved ones in this world—either to serve them or be served in some special way—would the Lord allow him or her to be moved? There are vital uses to be served in this world that cannot be served by people who are in the spiritual world.

The Lord came into the world to be of use to people here: “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22: 27). Obviously, He was involved in the lives of the people around Him—Mary and Joseph, His brothers and sisters, His disciples, and many others. Surely His usefulness to them was a factor in His time of death. We see Him preparing His disciples for His leaving (e.g. in His three predictions and at the Last Supper—especially in John’s account, chapters 13-17). We see Him on the cross assigning the disciple John to take care of Mary (John 19). Or was His plan so big that He had to “sacrifice” the needs of individuals? No, each human being is important to Him, as He assures us: “Are not five

sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.... Therefore fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).

But, more broadly, the Lord’s usefulness in this world was to people of all times. He was here to do a few things for us that He could not do from the spiritual world.

One of these things was to teach people the truth in natural terms, to show Himself in such a way that people here could see and accept Him. His actual presence here and teaching would inspire the writing of the Gospels. They would establish the church. The Lord could not leave the world before this work was finished. And, indeed, as “His hour” dawned He could pray:

Father... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world....I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. (John 17: 6,8)

It is worthy to note that in this prayer Jesus says: “I have given to them the words which You have given Me; *and they have received them.*” The Lord’s work was not just giving His disciples the truth, but also enabling them to receive it.

The other thing that the Lord came to accomplish for people in the world (people of all time) was the regeneration of the mind He had taken on. We call this His “glorification.” By this He was able to free us from the grip of evil and falsity. And He could do this only by struggling with hell from the vantage point of a developing person in the world.

The Lord could not leave the world until He had accomplished these things—glorified His human and successfully transmitted new truth to people in the world.

Serving the heavens from earth

The *second reason* for a person’s time of death (mentioned in *Spiritual Experiences* 5003) is the person’s “*usefulness, while he*

is [living] in the world, to spirits and angels.” “For a person is with spirits as to his interiors; and he is there as long as he is in the world.”

While we are in the world, we share feelings and thoughts with “like minds” in the other world. Spirits and angels experience these feelings and thoughts on a higher level, while we experience them as they sink into our natural consciousness. We serve each other in this relationship (*Last Judgment* 9). We rely on spirits and angels for our mental life: their thoughts and affections are “grounded” in ours. As a result of this dependency between the worlds, our usefulness, whether we live here or there, extends to people in the other world.

Now, the most vital service that we can provide those in the spiritual world is to have thoughts based directly on the Word. When angels are with people *who think from the Word*, they are “in light.” In other words, they are then able to think clearly and wisely; they are able to enjoy an exquisite perception of the Divine life that flows into them because there is a full “grounding” of their thoughts. In short, the Word serves as a foundation for heaven when it “lives” in people’s minds.

When the Lord came into the world, the Word was not “living” in people’s minds. The heavens were faltering. But He became the living Word, the Divine Word made “flesh”! He restored the Word as heaven’s basis by bringing new and old truth to light here: first in Himself (in His natural mind) and then for others. In this way He served those in the other world while He was on earth.

The Lord served spirits and angels in another way while He was here. Remember that the Lord developed gradually. He willed that a Divine awareness develop *in the human* as it grew and learned. So, like us, He made an ascent through levels of mental states. And mental states are nothing but communities of minds in the spiritual world. The Lord had spiritual associates just as we do.

In fact, the Lord's associates were not all good. His "natural man" began in ignorance and obscurity. This obscurity was not just from ignorance, but from the fact that the *constant tendency* of the natural man is to think selfishly and from a worldly perspective. This meant that the Lord had to deal with these tendencies, and with the spirits who shared them. In dealing with them, the Lord caused a judgment to take place.

Here is how it happened: When He was with a given set of associates, the Lord would first glean what He could through their shared mental states. But then He would go a step beyond them and draw increased light into His mind. This would bring into greater definition and order what He had received through them. He would share His greater clarity with them. This would always cause a judgment; for every community of minds was in disorder. People were associated together based on false criteria of likeness. Especially in the world of spirits, evil people appeared to be good, because there was no means of unmasking their deceptions. But when the Lord became associated with a group, it would enable the good spirits there to enter into greater clarity, thus into greater wisdom and goodness; and from this, the evil spirits among them would become apparent. After a struggle, the evil would be forced to depart and the community would reorganize based on what the Lord had revealed.

From this we can see how the Lord served spirits and angels while He was in the world. In fact, it might be said that when He was through, all good spirits and angels had been, and remained, His associate spirits. And in the process (before judgment came) all evil spirits had been His associates as well!

For their sakes I sanctify Myself" (John 17:19)

The *third factor* that determines our duration of life in the world has to do with the *usefulness of our being here for our own spiritual development*.

Regeneration can happen with us only while we are here. It

takes place through our chosen life patterns while we are in the natural world. To be permanent, our choices must be “etched” in the outermost substances of our minds, which are natural and fixed. Our spirits gain and retain a border or covering from our life on earth. After death, this natural covering becomes the subconscious vehicle by which our spirits have permanence and a needed foundation for all our mental operations. Because this fixed border is gained here, there is a pressing purpose for us to be here long enough for our choices to be realized.

Personal development was also a factor in determining the time of Jesus’ death. He, too, was being re-born as to His outer person. We just spoke of His work of dealing with the selfish tendencies in the mind that He took on through Mary. He dealt with them at each level of His mental growth.

Let’s think of this again in terms of His associate spirits. As He entered each state of mind, He entered into a community in the other world. In each community He would cause a judgment, and the evil people there would fight back. In fact, we are told that the Lord was being resisted and assaulted by evil spirits every moment of His life. But at every step He was victorious. Each victory brought His outer mind into greater order even as it brought the spiritual world into order and the evil spirits under greater control. At the end of this lifetime of inner struggle He could say, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31). “I will no longer talk much with you, for the prince of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Thus, usefulness to Himself, to His own development or glorification, was a factor in the Lord’s time of death. And yet, as we see from this prayer to the Father, there was nothing selfish here: He said: “*For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth*” (John 17:19). The Writings

confirm that He did indeed have “an end for the sake of self”: namely, “that it may be from self to save the human race” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4593). He sought no personal prize other than this (*Arcana Coelestia* 1789).

It is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16: 7)

The *fourth* and final factor (in *Spiritual Experiences* 5003) determining when people die is the *usefulness of their being in the other world, both to themselves and to others there.*

Spiritual Experiences 5003 points out here:

Everyone who will be in heaven has his place in the Grand Man, or, on the other hand, he has his place in hell—wherever forces fail they are balanced, and, of the Lord’s providence, people are brought to that place. In this way also, the Lord’s kingdom is cared for, whose welfare is the universal [concern of] providence.

Every person is born to serve a useful function in the body of humanity and to experience heavenly joy in this association. This happens most fully (for good people) after death. In leaving the world, they lay aside their material bodies with their gross limitations. They also lay aside a lot of struggles and prejudices and evils which have become external to their *ruling* aspirations, yet which have impeded their usefulness and happiness here.

Why are people called to their places in the other world when they are? We can think of it this way: consider a cell in a human body. The cell lives from the body and, as a part of it, enjoys the soul’s life. Each cell has a function to serve. As a body grows and changes, different parts of it need new cells. So it is with heaven. The goal of providence is to create and oversee the development of a heaven from the human race, not just a heaven for individuals (*Divine Providence* 64, 201-202). There can be no heaven for individuals if not for the whole. The Lord “grows” the human race with this in mind. People are born to serve a useful function in the developing Grand Man. The changing

balance of forces (which are uses) within the whole creates opportunities-to-serve for every individual whom the Lord brings into the world. People are born into time and brought to their place in their own due season.

This is one factor in determining our time of death. Will we be most useful to people in the other world by being among them? Are we ready to receive the happiness of heaven and contribute to it? Is the transition at a given time vital to our eternal welfare? The Lord knows.

What about the Lord? One great difference between Him and us in this regard is that our potential for usefulness in heaven is finite. We have a single function and place there. The Lord was not a finite person—not when He “ascended to the Father.” He was not a receiver of life. “As the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5: 26). “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14: 6). “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11: 25). As a result, the Lord did not have *a place* in heaven when He left the world. *He was heaven!* He became *its soul and life!* All people of heaven and the church then dwell in Him as branches dwell in the vine or as cells dwell in the body.

Was the Lord more useful to those in heaven after He “ascended?” Yes, because He then was the soul and life of a *new* heaven! He had given it a new order. People there could receive the Divine life more clearly and fully. And now, because He had worked from a Human taken on in the world, which He retained, He would have a *new base* in the outmost level of life, from which to maintain the health of the human race in both worlds. He had become “the first and the last”! So, yes, the Lord became more useful to the angels by rising in glory.

But in rising He became more useful to people in the natural world, too. As He said to His disciples:

I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not

go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. (John 16:7)

In leaving the world the Lord would complete His work. He would become fully Divine *in and through the Human He had taken on*. Because of the connection that this Human had both with heaven and with ultimate creation, He could touch people in a new way. A new Spirit could go forth from Him and work with us. This Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, which “was not” until Jesus was glorified (John 7:39). From this Spirit He would be able to lead and guide people more surely, intimately, and freely.

In addition, as long as He was in a physical body, He was limited to some extent. He was certainly limited by people’s rigid perceptions of Him as being in space and time. After He had risen, He would have greater power to affect people—greater power, because *they could realize* that He was not just a man but was Divine! He had risen as no other!

I am with you always” (Matthew 28: 20)

We assure people who have lost loved ones that they will see them again. The Lord assured His disciples of the same thing concerning Himself: “You now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22). In the literal sense the “seeing” that the Lord referred to here was a reference to His appearing to the disciples after the resurrection. But spiritually understood it is a reference to our mind’s ability to see God. After His work was complete the Lord would be able to be present with us more clearly, fully, and intimately. This was the very purpose of His coming!

Of that day and hour no one knows...but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36)

Timing in eternal matters requires infinite wisdom. It is so with

each human life:

The life of every person is foreseen by the Lord, as to how long he will live, and in what manner. Wherefore he is directed from earliest infancy with regard to a life to eternity. (*Spiritual Experiences* 5002)

The reasons why “some die children, some youths, some adults, some old people” all relate to uses which we can grasp in a measure. Yet these uses are of a scope that can be truly fathomed by the Lord alone. The same is true of the timing of the Lord’s advents. Both were brought about in the fullness of time with infinite wisdom and care. And it was with such wisdom and care that the Lord oversaw His life while in the human so that His love’s goals could be achieved. This love and wisdom shine forth in His words as He prepared to “lay down His life for His friends”:

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer....” (Luke 22:14-16)

“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.... Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it produces much grain.... Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name” (John 12:23-24, 27-28). *Amen*.

Lessons: John 12:23-32; John 17; *Spiritual Experiences* 5002-5003

Every Life is Foreseen

The life of every man is foreseen by the Lord, as to how long he will live, and in what manner; wherefore he is directed from earliest infancy with a regard to a life to eternity. The Providence of the Lord, therefore, commences from earliest infancy. (*Spiritual Experiences* 5002)