

Jerry D. Pickering - Funeral Message

11-24-20

“Changed in a twinkling of an eye” – (1 Corinthians 15:50-52)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our risen and coming Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, loved ones of Pick, Doris, Clinton, family and friends, the portion of Holy Scripture that we will meditate on this morning for much comfort and strength comes from Paul’s words to the Corinthians in chapter 15.

“50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Our brother in Christ, Jerry, or as we know him, Pick, sleeps. His earthly body rests. We are all, and especially Doris and Clinton, trying to adjust to not having Pick’s physical presence with us and among us. It is a change that will take some time and much comfort by the Holy Spirit who will ease our sadness.

We’ll miss his “top of the morning” to you greeting when he entered the church and the friendly joking before the service began. Whenever I greeted him with “good to see you, Pick”, I’ll miss him replying, “It’s good for me to be seen by you”, or something along those lines. We’ll miss him using his gift of height to change the hymn numbers. And for Doris and those close to him on a daily basis, life was never dull for you. Yes, it will be a change to get used to.

But there is another change yet to come...a change to look forward to that the Apostle Paul promises will happen. He lets us in on a mystery.

“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

Not all the brethren, the believers in Christ will be asleep at the last trumpet. Some will be alive when the last trumpet sounds, on the final judgement day. So, we’ve been hearing the call to be ready for judgement day especially on these past three Sundays in the parables from Matthew 25.

On that day, there will be another change to get used to, the best change that will have us saying “top of the morning” with the biggest smiles we can imagine. For in the blink of an eye, the dead, those who are asleep will be raised incorruptible. What does that mean? No limps, no bad eyesight or hearing, no aches or pains, in short, perfect health, never to experience a bad day again. Yes, Pick, as we all do, lamented about the changes that come with getting older. The decline is gradual over time.

But, the change that Paul speaks about will be instantaneous...a blink of an eye. It will happen that fast... to all who believe in Jesus. We will all be changed. Paul goes on to describe this change in the next verses.

“53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

**55 “O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?”**

And death will become a thing of the past, of this past world and not in our future eternity. There’s no sting... no more tears or sadness, or suffering. Well, the mystery is how and why we should believe this is all possible. In Pick’s bio, on the back of the bulletin, we learn something about him that he only liked to read non-fiction. And, God’s word is the best non-fiction! For God doesn’t lie and we can be absolute confident when He explains the mysteries of life.

Paul goes on...The mystery begins by laying out the cold hard facts.

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

There is no getting around this...not for Pick, not for you or me. God’s law is exacting and demanding. It requires absolute obedience and never, ever even one sin, one moment of weakness in not keeping God’s commandments. In short, God’s word tells us in Psalm 14 that ...

**“They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good, No, not one.”**

And the mystery of why there is death is revealed...because of sin.

But, there's a second part of the mystery is yet to be revealed – the best part! And thanks be to God, it was revealed to Pick. For though he was an imperfect, corruptible man, like all of us, there came a perfect, incorruptible Man to our rescue. Jesus Christ. Paul blurts out the mystery. He lifts the curtain and tells us once again...

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God! All glory to God that Jesus took the sting away from death by His death on the cross. We can say that our brother, Pick, sleeps. He is not eternally lost because Jesus paid for his sins on the cross. Jesus paid for your sins on the cross. He kept the law perfectly for us and took away the power of the law to condemn us. 1 Peter 3 tells us.

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,”

When? How? When Jesus rose from the dead! He beat death! And through faith in Jesus, Pick received this gift of salvation. This victory gift! It is for all of you also who trust in Jesus.

So we just heard this beautiful epistle reading from 1 Thessalonians 5 just last Sunday, the day before God called Pick to his eternal home.

“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

No wrath! Jesus received all the wrath for our sins on the cross. Only comfort. So we heard in Psalm 23.

“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness (His righteousness given to us through faith, Yes) For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Dear brethren in Christ, this is the mystery of God's incredible love revealed to you. It's Pick's mystery and yours to hold onto as you continue to run the race set

before you with your eyes upon Jesus the author and finisher of your faith. Pick received saving faith in his baptism that washed his sins away and remained faithful to death. The crown of life is the prize given to all who remain faithful. Revelation 2:10.

With all this ahead of you... your immortality, your incorruption, your change in a twinkling of an eye, Paul closes chapter 15 with a strong command to not waiver one bit in your faith.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

By the power of the Holy Spirit, our brother Pick abounded in the work of the Lord, especially helping fellow veterans go through the changes and trauma of post-traumatic stress syndrome. It was one way that Pick showed Christ’s love to others, having been loved so much by Christ, he didn’t want to leave anyone behind.

I also remember one day when he came to church with a DVD that he thought would help the youth grow in their faith. It was an old black and white movie about two brothers who went on a camping trip, had some challenges, but learned to trust in Jesus. When you cared for the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me, Jesus tells us.

Yes, Pick now rests from his labors. But most of all he rests in the work of Jesus salvation. For Pick was saved not by his works but by Jesus’ shed blood.

We continue on, knowing that our labor is not in vain. Others need to know the mystery of salvation in Jesus.

Yes, Christ didn’t leave Pick behind though he was a sinner like the rest of us, but died for us and rose again so that we have the sure confidence that He will come again. And in a twinkling of an eye, all will change. And the King Jesus will tell His incorruptible immortal righteous sheep these precious words,

“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”. Amen