

Memorial Service for Vickie Barefoot Phelps December 11, 2021

I want to welcome you to the Memorial Service for Vickie Barefoot Phelps. It means a lot to Vickie's family and Steve's family that you could be with them today in remembering her, and they want to thank you for coming. I know that Vickie had a special place in each of your hearts, and that's why you're here today. You know that she loved you and you loved her, and you had good times with her, good times talking, laughing, and working, and just living life together. As her pastor and friend for over 40 years, I know that she's had a positive and godly effect on hundreds and hundreds of people. And of course, and most importantly, Vickie was a blessing to the Lord – He was very pleased with her and the life she lived for Him.

God planned out the life of Vickie Barefoot Phelps way back in eternity past. He had her come into this world on July 4th, 1954. Bunyan and Ruth Barefoot were her parents, and Dawn, Miles, Martha, Kathy, Claiborne, Penny, and Richard were her siblings. Each one of you were very special to her. She truly and deeply loved you, and she loved all her family get-togethers, and all her sister retreats. And Ted and Norraine, Vickie loved you, and I know that you loved her as your own daughter. And Steve, I know that Vickie, most of all, had a deep and special love for you, as you did for her.

When Vickie was in high school, God spoke to her heart, and she realized she had sinned against Him. Vickie believed that Jesus Christ died on a cross to pay the penalty for her sins, and then rose again, and therefore, was forgiven, became a child of God, and received eternal life. *“God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* Romans 5:8

Not long after high school, in 1974, she moved to Ames, Iowa, where she got involved in a church, and where, in June of 1976, I first met her. She moved to Maryland in 1983 where she got involved in a community church. Then in 1988, she married Steve Phelps, a wonderful husband, and they became a great team for God. She and Steve moved to Tampa in 1999, where year after year, they served with my wife and I in this church. - God used her life in all these places, and the main way was by ministering to people. She loved people with an agape love, and people loved her, and loved to be with her. She had a way of helping people open up, a way of talking to people on a personal level, in meaningful, heart-to-heart conversations. And most of you know exactly what I mean.

The key to Vickie's close relationships with people was that she had a close relationship with God. And God used the Rheumatoid Arthritis trial she had for these past 36 years to deepen her relationship with Himself. Over the years, Vickie drew closer and closer to God, her heavenly Father, experienced His love and peace to a much greater degree. She depended on His grace, His strength, to get through years of pain and suffering.

She knew the verse in 2 Cor. 12:9-10 that said, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."* You look at her journals, and you can tell she loved the Psalms, ones that touched and transformed her soul. She knew Psalm 31:7 which says, *"I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul."* She understood Psalm 23:1 which says, *"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want,* and called herself a little *"sheepie."* And you look at her smile in all these pictures, and it was God who helped her to smile and to keep on smiling through all the years.

God also used her arthritis to help her be more effective with people. (2 Cor 1:4). God worked in and through Vickie in amazing and powerful ways, helping her to greatly impact the lives of many others. Like no one else I've ever known, she could relate to and empathize with the hurting, and minister to the weak

It is encouraging to see how God fulfilled His plans for Vickie's life. Hers was a rich and full life filled with love and laughter, and good, solid relationships. She truly lived, not because she lived for herself, but because she lived for God, and she lived for others. But God brought Vickie's earthly life to an end 10 days ago, on Dec. 1st, at 5:30 am in the morning, and then, quite miraculously, God took Vickie from her body and from this earth and in no time brought her home to heaven to be with Him, and with Jesus.

Here are three vss. that sum up her entire eternal life as a Christian:

- Psalm 23:6 – *"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*
- Philippians 1:21 - *"To live is Christ, and to die is gain."*
- Psalm 73:23-24 – *"(Lord), I am always with You; You always hold me by my right hand. You guide with me with Your counsel. And afterward You will take me into glory."*

But why did God take her home? What were His reasons?

1. The days that God planned out for Vickie were over. Psalm 139:16 says, *"All the days ordained for her were written in Your book before one of them came to be."* 24,621 days
2. Vickie's work was done. Acts 13:36 says, *"David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep"* - that is, he physically died. And Vickie died, having completed, having finished all the work God wanted her to do.
3. God wanted Vickie, His child, one He dearly loved, to be with Him in heaven. Psalm 116:14 says, *"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly one."*
4. God wanted to take Vickie out of this world of sin, sorrow, and pain, and Vickie was in pain for such a long time. Rev. 21:4 says, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death, any mourning, or crying, or pain."* Isaiah 57:1-2
5. God wanted to bless Vickie with the wonders of heaven, with a great inheritance, and with all kinds of rewards for a life of service to Him. 1 Cor 2:9 says, *"No eye has seen, no eye has heard, nor has it entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."* Psalm 16:11 says, *"In Your presence is fulness of joy, in Your right hand are pleasures forever."* Eccl 7:1 tells us, *"The day of death is better than the day of birth."*

For Vickie, Dec. 1st was better than July 4th, for on Dec. 1st she left this sinful world and went to heaven, a beautiful, perfect, and most wonderful place. Heb. 12:22-24 tells us what Vickie saw when she first arrived in heaven. *“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.”*

6. Jesus wanted Vickie to be with Him, and He loves her far more than anyone else. He saved her from sin and death, and brought her to His heavenly home. And I'm sure they have already met and talked together. Ps. 11:7 says, *“The upright will behold His face.”* So Vickie is now in heaven and she's doing just fine, far better than ever before. - Since we live in the last yrs. of this church age, it won't be long before Christ comes back to rapture the church and give all believers a new body. I'm sure Vickie is looking forward to getting her new powerful, immortal, glorious and spiritual body. 1 Cor. 15:40-42

I know Vickie wants to see each of you in heaven. And that can only happen if you are perfectly holy. But none of you are holy, and so how does that happen?

1. You must understand that God Himself made you, that He is holy and just, and that you are accountable to Him for how you live your life on earth. Rom. 14:12
2. It's knowing that you have sinned against God in your thoughts, words, and actions, and that He must punish you for your sins. *“The soul that sins will die.”* Ezekiel 18:4
3. It's knowing that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ to this earth, and that He became a man, and lived a perfect life, and then died on the cross for you – that is, He was punished by His Father so as to pay for your sins. *“Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.”* 1 Peter 3:18

4. It's telling God you're sorry you sinned against Him, and believing that Jesus died for you and paid for your sins. Then you'll be forgiven, be a child of God, receive eternal life, and be with Jesus and Vickie and all the other saints and angels in heaven. Mark 1:15
- If you have not yet turned from your sin and turned to Jesus Christ, then now's the time. Put your trust in Him, believe He died to pay for your sins, and then rose again, and then you will be saved. Rom. 10:9, 13 - *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...”* This was true for Vickie, and she now has eternal life, a perfect relationship with God and with Jesus that lasts forever and ever. John 11:25-26 is a great verse about how we get victory over death, how we can live forever - *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

Vickie can now say, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.”* 2 Timothy 4:7-8

MESSAGE DURING THE VISITATION - December 10, 2021

It's good to be here tonight with family and friends, and take the time to think about the life of Vickie Barefoot Phelps. We see the slide show with all these pictures of Vickie, we see the casket which contains her body, and we look at the "Life Story" presentation - and we have all kinds of thoughts and emotions. But how does God want us to think? - Eccl. 7:1 tells us - "*The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.*" That is, for Vickie, Dec. 1st is more important than July 4th. Vickie had a very good life, and God used her for His divine purposes. And as we know, life was hard for Vickie, particularly as it related to her health. But Vickie is now in heaven, and she is doing better than ever before, free from all sin and sickness and sadness. And we should be glad and thankful for that.

But we are also sad, and one reason for that is because you miss this one who loved you deeply, and I mean, she really loved you deeply. And you loved her, being with her and talking to her and just living life together. Not having this relationship with her anymore, at least on this earth, is difficult, and makes you sad, and understandably so.

How else should you think?

- Eccl. 7:2 says, "*It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man and the living take it to heart.*" This means it's better to be here tonight than at some Christmas party. That's because being here is to sober you up, spiritually speaking, to cause you to think about your own life, and how you're living your life, and where you will spend all eternity. The truth is that Vickie is now in heaven, and she really wants you to be there with her.

- And it's not a matter of you just flying up there to be with her. The only way to get to heaven is by being forgiven of your sins. That happens when you admit you're a sinner, and believe Christ died to pay for your sins. And if you trust in Christ, you'll be forgiven, and at the end of your life you'll immediately be escorted by the angels to be with Jesus and Vickie. Titus 3:5 - "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us.*"

How else does God want you to think? It's knowing that Vickie had hope, that she was looking ahead to the future that God had for her. She knew Psalm 23:6, which says, "*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" - She knew the truth of Phil. 1:21, "*to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" She knew it was worth it to live for God, that she'd soon be in heaven where she'd be supremely and forever blessed. - Vickie knew the truth of 2 Cor. 4:17 - "*momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.*" She knew that her earthly suffering had eternal value.

She knew she'd be with family and friends forever. BFF - that's only true for Christians. For as Christians, we will see Vickie again - we will be with her forever and ever.

- She knew she'd get a glorified body, one that's powerful, immortal, glorious, and spiritual. Vickie was looking ahead to getting her brand-new perfect body, one that's like the angels.

- She knew she'd be rewarded in heaven for her life of service on earth. 1 Cor. 3:8 says, "*each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*" And Vickie is getting lots of rewards.

She knew she would be with Jesus, the One who loves her more than anyone else, who died for her and saved her from her sin and made it possible for her to be in heaven with Him. Ps. 17:15 says, *“As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness.”* Vickie is now in heaven, not in this casket, and she’s seen Jesus in His glory, and I’m sure they have smiled at each other and talked together. This prayer of Jesus’ has now been answered for Vickie - *“Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me.”* John 17:24

Vickie’s hope for the future is now being realized, and she wants you to have the hope that she had. And she wants to see you in heaven. Let me conclude by reading from Heb. 12:22, which describes what happened to Vickie 9 days ago, early on that morn of Dec. 1st. *“You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the city of the living God. You’ve come to thousands and thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.”*