

The Greatest Pilot

Celebration of Mary Jane Hoge

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We're going to turn in our Bibles today because I want to talk about the greatest fighter pilot that Cal Hoge every knew, and Cal Hoge knew some great fighter pilots. But in order to do that, we've got to go back prior to 1957, because it was well after that, fighter pilots had to have maps because if they didn't have maps, they got lost.

So I want you to find a map, and if you don't have a map in front of you, I want you to raise your hand because you're going to get lost, and you may end up landing in Hanoi.

Let's look at Psalm 110:

'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.'

And in a moment, we're going to turn to a passage in the New Testament, but before we do, may we pray?

Almighty God, I'm a dumb dog, and I don't know how to bark but would you grant that as I bark, attempting to tell people about Mary Jane, that you will enable me to bark for Jesus? For Jesus' sake. Amen.

If you'd turn with me to Hebrews 12, we're going to go on a journey today. We're going to fly over Vietnam, and we're going hopefully not to land in Hanoi.

Hebrews 12:1-2:

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

I want you to understand something today: this building is filled with millions of people, but you can't see them. We're told here that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses -- cloud of witnesses!

Look with me at verse 22:

"You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men" (and of course, that word "men" means people) "of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."

Think about it with me for a moment, if you will: Mary Jane's very best friend in the world was Barbara Benson and Barbara went to be with Jesus some years back and so I want you to know something, today: Barbara is over there.

And then more recently, we lost McGinty, and McGinty's over there.

And then we lost Don Orr, over there.

You say, "Well, you're being a little imaginative with the text."

That's okay. It's an application of the text. What I want you to understand is that when the church on earth worships, the church in heaven worships. We're told that we have gone, no, we're not told that we have gone, we're told that we have come. What that means in verse 22 is that we are here and now present in the hosts of heaven.

I want you to know that Mary Jane is praying for us today. She's praying for us today because she's with Jesus, and she loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and she loves you and she misses you and she understands the difficulties of life. And I want you to understand that Mary Jane did fight the good fight and that Mary Jane flew her airplane of life and that she safely landed that airplane and that she's safe and secure from all alarms. But I want you to know that the big war is not over yet.

Her battle, her immediate battle, is over. She's landed and she's safe and she's secure, but she's aware of the struggles that you and I face. She's aware of the pain of loss, of what it's like to lose somebody. All you had to do was listen to her obituary, about how many people she lost.

So we're told here that we have come which literally means we are now present in the middle of millions and millions of celebrators. That's what he says. We've come, we are present in "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect."

I want you to understand something about people. I learned this many years ago: people are not perfect. Everybody is a sinner, and if anybody ever tells you that he is no longer a sinner, he needs to go where I once went, to "the funny farm." People that believe they don't sin anymore are nuts.

But I want to tell you something about Mary Jane: she no longer sins. She's with the Lord Jesus Christ, and she is in a wonderful place that's described here like a great mountain.

After Barbara went to be with Jesus, my wife, Sandy, became very close with Mary Jane because my wife believes (and who am I to question my wife?) that when she was run over by that log truck on October 10, 1988, she went to heaven. And so she had a special bond with Mary Jane, especially in Mary Jane's last 4+ years, because Sandy never got to the top of the mountain.

She was only out there in the outskirts, but she knew it, and it changed her life, and why it changed her life was this: before that, my wife was a lovely, sweet, Southern girl, but after that experience, my wife became a fearless person.

You see, when she saw the outskirts of heaven, it took away from her the complete and entire fear of death. She's no longer afraid of death, and when you're no longer afraid of death, you're no longer afraid of anything because what's the worst they can do to you? It's kill you. And so they became special friends.

Mary Jane is perfect. She no longer struggles with sin.

You struggle with sin, don't you? Be honest. Don't lie to me. You struggle with sin. Everybody struggles with sin -- everybody. And the deadliest of all sins? Do you know what it is? You're going to name some bizarre, twisted thing that I studied about in the 60s in abnormal psychology, but the greatest of all those things is the sin of pride and that'll kill you, because pride does to you what the Philistines did to Samson: it blinds your eyes so you can't see yourself.

So Mary Jane no longer has pride. God began to strip her of her dignity in the last days of her life, utterly, totally and completely. So around 5:15, Wednesday, the Lord Jesus sent his angels to come and take her home to be with him, and she's perfect now.

Wouldn't you like to be prayed for by somebody who's completely perfect?

Have you ever begun to pray for somebody and as you began to pray for that person, you began to feel in your heart negative things like, you know, somebody done another...what's that saying? Another somebody done somebody wrong song.

That's it. I knew Dirk would know it. And you start thinking about how that person's done you wrong, and you can't even pray without sinning. But listen, she can pray without sinning now, and she's praying for us here, and she's praying for me because she knows I'm weak and I'm frail. So there we have it here.

And then as we think about Mary Jane being with us and the saints being with us, we don't pray to her, she prays for us.

I want us to look at another passage of Scripture and that's over in the book of 1 Corinthians 15, and please look at that map because you're going to land in Hanoi if you don't, or you might land in the China Sea. 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

Do you ever think about that, for a moment?

We don't need to feel pity for Mary Jane because Mary Jane in her last days had one foot in this world and another foot in the other, and from time to time she'd slip back into this world and talk to her family, and from time to time she'd be in the other world, and do you know what?

She faced the same struggle Sandy faced. Sandy had to come back to a house with five children, from a senior at ASH to a pre-schooler, to my mother who suffered from senile dementia, and when she realized what she was coming back to, she was very mad at God.

And I want to tell you something, if you could just read Mary Jane's mind right now, you would know there is no way in the world she would come back here because she's seeing the King, the Lord of glory.

There was a wonderful person who gave a speech back on April 3, 1968 at the world headquarters of the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, and this is what he said:

"Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

"And so I'm happy, tonight.

"I'm not worried about anything.

"I'm not fearing any man!

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!"

I want you to know something: This past Wednesday, Mary Jane could see the glory of the coming of the Lord, and that's why she was a mighty warrior. That's why she would never come back here. That's why she was the greatest fighter pilot that Cal Hoge ever knew, and he knew a lot of them.

Now, let's look at verse 20:

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead."

Why is there death? You think God decided to be mean to people and make things happen in a bad way for people? No, these were things that were, while not outside of God's control, they were the consequences of human behavior and God wanted to turn that terrible thing, the entrance of sin and death into our world into something wonderful and glorious. So God took something that was ordained -- he permitted it but not by a bare permission, and he turned it into something wonderful.

So death came into the world, something that was not part of God's original creation, and this is what happens.

Look at verse 22:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."

Now look at verse 24:

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

I want you to think about that with me for a moment. We try to disguise death. We try to make death smell good and look good. We try to talk about the dead as if they're asleep but they're really not asleep.

The body sleeps, but the spirit has gone to be with Jesus. And there's nothing more obvious than a dead person whose spirit has left that person's body.

Death was not part of God's plan for us. Death is an alien to our planet, and death is called here an enemy -- an enemy.

Mary Jane was a fighter, and she fought to the very end. She "gave the last full measure." And in her fighting to the very end, she finally took off for her last flight in this life and she landed safely on the airfield of heaven.

But there's more to come, and the more to come is right here in verse 26 because while she won her battles, the last battle is yet to come and that's the battle when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth for his saints, with his saints.

It seems to me as I read my Bible, it's all one thing. You don't need a chart to understand Bible prophecy. It's very simple, and so the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

And when is it going to be destroyed? Well, it isn't destroyed today, and it isn't going to be destroyed next week or next month.

In a little bit, we're going to take Mary Jane's mortal remains to the cemetery across the river, and we're going to put her body into the earth and the earth is going to hold her body, and her body is going to be like her body would be sleeping in the grave, but her soul's not asleep.

Her soul is with the Lord Jesus Christ, and her soul is going to be with the Lord Jesus Christ until the trumpet sounds and the archangel shouts, and when that happens, that's when verse 26 is going to be fulfilled.

Do you understand? Do you understand how Mary Jane is a great fighter pilot? And do you understand that she made her flight through life safely? "Man's flight through life is" not "sustained by the power of his knowledge"; man's flight through life is sustained by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, Mary Jane landed safely, but she's going to take off again, and she's going to take off with a mighty squadron, and she's going to take off led by the greatest fighter pilot that has ever been known in the history of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord, and she along with millions and millions and untold millions of others, is going to fly once last mission, and the last enemy that will be destroyed is death, and she'll rise from the dead.

May we pray?

Lord, we celebrate your victory through Mary Jane. We celebrate the fact that she no longer suffers in this life. We celebrate the fact that her spirit, her soul, is with the Lord Jesus Christ and an innumerable company of angels in the general assembly and church of the firstborn.

We thank you, Lord, that she's not yet completely at rest because, while the battle is won, the war has not yet been won. And Lord, we await that glorious and wonderful day when the graves will be opened, and Mary Jane's body will clothe itself with immortality, and she will be in her body transformed forever with the Lord. May we find comfort in these words for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray?

Amen.