

Funeral Service for Rachel S. Matzko
Dr. Michael Barrett
Faith Free Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina
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Today we think of our sister Rachel. The service today will not be a eulogy but rather a doxology unto Rachel's God and Rachel's Savior. Our sister died in the peace of the Gospel. She trusted her Savior in life, and she knew the presence of her Savior in death.

The verse of Scripture that you find in your program, Psalm 73: 26, was Rachel's testimony. This is a promise that the Lord had given her at the beginning of her ordeal, her battle with cancer, one that she trusted and one that she believed. The Lord was her strength and her portion forever. So today we want this service to be in worship of Rachel's God and Rachel's Savior.

We will begin our worship with the singing of Psalm 90B. We will stand together as we sing:

Lord, thou hast been a dwelling place,
A rest in tribulations,
To us, thine own redeemed race,
Thro' all our generations.
Thou, ere the mountains sprang to birth,
Or ever thou hadst formed the earth,
Art God from everlasting.

Lord, teach us so to count our days,
That we may prize them duly,
And set our heart on wisdom's ways,
That we may praise thee truly.
Return, thy servants' griefs behold,
And with thy mercy, as of old,
O, satisfy us early!

Restore us comfort for our fears,
Joy for our long affliction;
Our children give thro' changing years
Increasing benediction.
Thy glorious beauty, Lord, reveal;
And with thy prospering favor seal
Thy servants and their labors.

[*Scottish Psalter*, 1880]

Let us bow our heads as we seek the Lord, His presence, to be with us in a very special way in this worship hour.

Our gracious God and loving heavenly Father, we come humbly, but yet boldly, into Your presence in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We acknowledge, Lord, that Jesus is the only mediator between God and men, the only redeemer of God's elect. We rejoice, Lord, that you so loved the world that you gave your own dear Son to be our Savior. And Lord as we come today to this worship service, as we think of our sister Rachel, as we think, Lord, of the life that she lived in testimony of the power of the Gospel, that our hearts might be attracted today to her Savior. We reflect, Lord, upon her testimony of saving grace. May that be the attraction to us all – to enjoy more, to rest more, to experience more of that same saving grace in our own hearts and lives.

We would ask, Lord, for those who know nothing of Rachel's Savior that today as they hear something of her Christ that they might be attracted to Him. Lord, we commit the word today into Your hands. We do pray that the presence of the Lord would be with us.

We do give thanks for every remembrance that we have of our sister. We're thankful, Lord, for her diligence, for her untiring service that she rendered not only in her teaching but in her life of service to the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, she is an example to us. We pray, Lord, that while we are here today grieving and sorrowing over our loss, that we might know what it is to rejoice in her gain. For to Rachel to live was Christ, but her death was gain. Her testimony, Lord, was that as she rested upon the words of the psalmist that the Lord was her portion

forever. And, Lord, as that was a happy thought for her, it is for us even now as we stand before her coffin to know that her spirit is absent from this body and present with the Lord that she loved, the Lord that she served.

So as we sorrow, we do not do so as those who have no hope. It is our prayer today as we come to this worship hour that while we consider the sermon before us in Rachel's casket that our hearts might be lifted up to Rachel's God, to Rachel's Christ, to her Savior. So, Lord, we ask that you would meet with us. We pray that You would unite our hearts in these moments to seek Your face, to hear Your name, to give our worship to Your holy name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated.

Before we read together a portion of Scripture, I have a letter I want to read from Dr. Cairns, our recently retired minister – the minister who knew the Matzkos, and prayed for the Matzkos – who upon learning of Rachel's death has sent a letter to be read. I trust that this will be an encouragement and a blessing.

From Dr. Cairns:

"The Scripture tells us that the memory of the just is blessed. Certainly the memory of Rachel Matzko will be a blessing to all of us who knew her and witnessed her courageous struggle with her aggressive cancer. Her fortitude in the face of her hospitalizations and treatments was remarkable. Through all those years Rachel demonstrated the power of a vital faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, pursuing with unswerving faithfulness the calling the Lord had given her in Christian education. In the process she taught not only her students but all of us lessons that cannot be learned from any textbook.

Now she has gone home to glory. The Lord who redeemed her with the precious blood of His own dear Son has taken her to be with Himself. She has not passed into oblivion; she has not descended into darkness. Her assurance in life was the same as the psalmist David's: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

I shall awake tells us of her resurrection, for her body will not remain forever in the grave but will be raised incorruptible at the coming of her Saviour.

I shall awake with thy likeness reminds us of her glorification, for Christ her Lord will “change her vile body that it might be made like unto his glorious body.”

I will behold thy face in righteousness sounds out the glorious gospel note of Rachel’s final acceptance as a justified believer in Christ, one whose sins God has fully pardoned and to whom He has imputed the perfect righteousness of Christ.

“I shall be satisfied” reminds us of the eternal bliss, the absolute and unalloyed happiness of Christ’s blood-bought people that Rachel has already begun to enjoy.

For sorrowing loved ones, Rachel’s death will bring sadness and tears. That is understandable. The Christ who wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus knows all about such grief and will sustain you through it. But for Rachel there is no trace of sadness as she has entered into the presence of her Lord where, the Bible tells us, the saints enjoy fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore. So amid the shadows cast by Rachel’s death I trust that all her sorrowing family and friends will be encouraged and strengthened by the realization that that their loved one is with Christ, which is far better.

Brother John, Joan and I are sorry we are so far away at this time. We are remembering you and Austin and all your family in prayer. I am sure it was a blessing to Rachel to see a picture of her new grandson just before she lapsed into unconsciousness. I am also sure that her memory and testimony will be a constant witness to all her family of the reality and power of the gospel. Like Abel, “she being dead yet speaketh.” Hers is a message of hope, a word of gospel grace and an urgent cry to everyone who knew her to make sure that they are prepared to meet God as she was.

John and Austin and family, Joan and I send you our heartfelt sympathy and love. Though we are separated by a great ocean, our thoughts are with you today. May the God of all comfort draw near to you and sustain you. May he

bless you with His presence and give you His abiding peace until the day dawns and the shadows flee away and we all meet as redeemed sinners around the throne of our great God and Saviour.

Your friend in Christ and for many years your pastor,
Alan Cairns

We're reading from God's word, a text from I Peter 1, a text that I read on several occasions to our sister during these last couple of weeks, a text that I believed rejoiced her heart as she reflected on the great blessing of what it was to be in Christ.

I Peter 1, beginning at verse 2:

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

Amen.

The only difference now between what the apostle says and what our sister now experiences is that the one that she so loved, she now sees.

I was with Jack and Lois at the very moment that our sister passed from this life into the next. It never ceases to amaze me the wonder of what it is to expel your last breath here and take your next breath as it were in the very presence of the Lord. Unconscious she was at that last breath, but she had spiritual eyes that opened at the beauty of her Savior: the one that she loved, whom on earth she had not yet seen, she now sees face to face.

We are going to sing that song together, "Face to Face." We will stand please as we sing.

Face to face with Christ, my Savior
Face to face – what will it be,
When with rapture I behold Him,
Jesus Christ, who died for me?

Only faintly now I see Him,
With the darkling veil between;
But a blessed day is coming,
When His glory shall be seen.

What rejoicing in His presence,
When are banished grief and pain;
When the crooked ways are straightened,
And the dark things shall be plain.

Face to face! O blissful moment!
Face to face – to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer,
Jesus Christ, who loves me so.

Refrain:

Face to face I shall behold Him,
Far beyond the starry sky;

Face to face in all His glory,
I shall see Him by and by!

[Carrie E. Breck, 1855 - 1934]

Solo: "Jesus Lives and So Shall I"
Pam Dunbar, soprano.

Jesus lives, and so shall I,
Death! thy sting is gone forever.
He who deigned for me to die,
Lives, the bands of death to sever.
He shall raise me with the just:
Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives and reigns supreme;
And, His kingdom still remaining,
I shall also be with Him,
Ever living, ever reigning.
God has promised: be it must;
Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives, I know full well,
Naught from Him my heart can sever,
Life nor death nor pow'rs of hell,
Joy nor grief, henceforth forever.
None of all His saints is lost;
Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives, and death is now
But my entrance into glory.
Courage, then, my soul, for thou
Hast a crown of life before thee;
Thou shalt find thy hopes were just;
Jesus is the Christian's trust.

[Christian F. Gellert, 1715 - 1769;
trans. Philip Schaff, 1819 - 1893]

It's an honor for me to minister today at the funeral service of Rachel Matzko. I've known Rachel for many, many years. Before we were married, Sandra and Rachel were roommates. I recall a few times that Rachel did her best to chaperon Sandra and me during those days. And over the years she's been a friend. Over the years, it has been a joy to see her testimony, her diligence, and all the labors that she offered unto the Lord. We will miss her and sorrow at her loss. It is our hope as believers that our sorrow is not that of others, for we have hope.

That's the thought that I really want to meditate upon in these closing moments of this worship service. The words of the Apostle from I Thessalonians 4:

“13. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

I want to reflect particularly upon the opening verse where Paul admonishes us not to be ignorant, not to sorrow as those that have no hope. I'm reminded every time I stand over a coffin that there is no sermon more personally relevant to every living soul than the sobering sight of a casket and the grave. We see death and are reminded of the brevity of life, the frailty of our existence. The Preacher tells us that it is better to go into the house of mourning than into the house of banqueting, feasting [Ecclesiastes 7:2]. For that is the end of all men, and there are lessons that we are to learn when we enter into that house of mourning. We are to take it to heart.

If we have been born, it is certain that we must die; and the time of both is fixed and marked on God's unchanging calendar of events. The day of death for all of us here cannot be altered, cannot be avoided. You look around in this congregation today, and of those of us who are gathered this morning before Rachel's coffin, one of us in this room will be the next to die – maybe me, maybe you.

And the question is how it will be when we transition from this life to the next. As final as death is, it is not the end of things. There is an eternity that follows time, and death is the door in time that opens up either to eternal life and the presence of Christ for those that are his, or it is the door in time that opens up to that eternity of punishment for those who are the damned.

This brings us then to think briefly on the text before us, a text that declares something of the riddle of death, for death is not all that it appears to be. As sobering a reality as death is – the curse of sin itself – there is something that is quite pleasant about the death of a Christian. There is an aspect about Christian death that the Apostle Paul does not want us to be ignorant of.

Rachel was a teacher, and like all teachers she battled ignorance. It is fitting therefore as we stand now before her coffin that from this coffin she teaches one more lesson. It has been said that ignorance is the mother of misery; and on this occasion as we listen to Rachel's message from this box before us, let's set ignorance aside, let's set misery aside and learn something about the Christian's death.

There are two very simple thoughts that I would leave with you. We have something here of a description of what the death of a Christian is, and it is a happy condition. Everyone dies. But not everyone will die the same. The Bible tells us that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked [Ezekiel 33: 11], but yet precious in His sight is the death of a saint [Psalm 116: 15]. There's something about the way the wicked man dies that brings God no pleasure and something about the way a believer dies that is a precious thing in the sight of God.

For the believer to die is gain. For the wicked, whatever suffering he may have endured in life, all of that suffering is going to pale into insignificance in comparison to the eternal misery that he will experience in eternal punishment. But for the believer, for Rachel, for her to die was gain. For the believer, we have death described for us here as being a sleep – those that are asleep, those that are asleep in Jesus, something about death for the believer that is a sleep.

Life had taken a hard hold on Rachel's body. Particularly in these last months as she took her last stand against that cancer, it took a great toll. Rachel was a battler. She had been fighting this cancer for many years, as you know. As I told Austin just last night, I thought if anybody was going to beat that thing, Rachel was going to beat it. But she didn't. And I say, in these last months particularly, that cancer took a very heavy toll on her body. The Lord has now let her sleep. In the mercy of God – and what a joy it was – that before the Lord put her into that pre-sleep, that coma, He kept her awake long enough to see that picture of the new grandson, studying that picture, I'm sure bringing great joy and comfort to her soul. After that mercy, the Lord gave her the other mercy of ultimately putting her to sleep.

You understand we're not talking about the sleep of her soul, for even now her soul is most active in the presence of her Savior. Even now her soul, her spirit, is participating in that true and that spiritual worship before the throne of God. Now she is there in that company of saints that have slept before her, joining in the chorus of praise and thanksgiving and worship of her God and Savior. Absent from this body but present with the Lord. She now is anything but asleep in terms of her spirit.

But her body is asleep. It is our joy to know that in death there was no dissolution, in death there was no absolving of the union that she had with Christ. The day came in Rachel's life when she was but twelve years old when she accepted Christ as her personal Savior; and the Holy Spirit of God united her in that vital, in that spiritual, in that real, that mystical union with her Savior. For the rest of her life she knew what it was to fellowship in union with the Lord Jesus.

The Bible tells us that as believers we have some fellowship in His death. But in her death, there was a real sense in which her Savior fellowshiped with her, for she did not die alone. The psalmist says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me." [Psalm 23: 4] Rachel, as she walked in that valley of deep darkness, whether she was conscious of the presence of her loved ones, of her minister, I don't know. But I do know that even in those moments of the darkness, that shadow of death, that her Savior was present with her. It is impossible, it is impossible, for a believer to die alone. The Savior is there present.

There in those closing moments—I said, it never ceases to be a wonder to me—the last breath on earth no sooner expelled than the spirit in the immediate presence of the Savior. She was here, we knew she was sick, we knew she was dying; but still, I say, there is something very sobering about that moment: here she is, and now she's not. As soon as that last breath was taken, there she was seeing her Savior face to face. She fell asleep in Jesus.

This imagery of sleep is a common picture that both the Old and the New Testament use to describe the death of a saint. And how pleasant that is. How pleasant is the thought of sleep. Sleep is a peaceful and a careless state. In life it is the cares and concerns and the anxieties and the businesses of life that rob us of sleep. How sweet it is when even in all of the throes of life's issues we can fall asleep. During that repose we are not conscious of all the problems that we have to face, have to endure in life. We have that rest. It is a mercy of God that even in physical weakness, in the extremities of infirmity, He can give that physical sleep.

There were times when I visited Rachel that she was asleep. I left her asleep. What a joy it was, what comfort that had to be even from whatever pain was there and whatever thoughts—to be in physical sleep, just to have that repose from all of the cares, all of the anxieties, of life. Now she sleeps. And now she sleeps absolutely careless, without care, without thought of all of the stuff of life. We're here today mourning her loss. She's today enjoying the presence of Jesus. We're today reflecting upon her life, but now she, in the presence of God, is just filled with song and hallelujahs to the God upon the throne. No cares, no concerns.

Just after Rachel passed Jack's words were, "No more suffering." No more suffering. All the cares and all of the trouble that had come to her body in these days: gone, careless, she's asleep. That body that was wracked, that body that had become weakened – now her spirit, her consciousness, knows nothing of it. What a pleasant thing it is to go to sleep in Jesus. Sleep is refreshing; it prepares you for the labor that is ahead. In life we go to sleep and we wake up to tire again and start all over. Rachel's sleep now refreshing, preparing her for a tireless eternity where her occupation is no longer to deal with earthly ignorance. Her heavenly occupation is simply to join in all the songs, all the worship, all the service rendered to her Savior. How refreshing.

But sleep is temporary. Nobody sleeps forever. As pleasant as it is, it comes to an end – as pleasant as it is. Even to us in our physical, day-to-day existence is not sleep a pleasant thing for us? It's often my first thought in the morning when I wake up: I can't wait to get back here tonight. [Laughter] How pleasant sleep is! We look forward to it. It's refreshing. But nobody sleeps forever. We always wake up and start over again.

And so it is with this sleep that Rachel's body is now in. This body before us is going to rise; it's going to rise in the fullness of life. This is the theme of Paul's argument before us here. This text takes us to the certainty of the resurrection. The day will come when the trump of God blows, and it will blow in such a way that it wakes the dead, and those dead are going to rise with glorified bodies. They're going to have a head start on the rest of us that may be alive. They're going to arise.

In a few moments we're going to put this box in the ground. And this body that died wracked in weakness, this body that will in the next little while decay away – one day, one day, that body in this box before us is going to arise. It will hear that trump of God. The box is going to open, and a body is now going to come forth glorified, a body like unto His glorious body, raised like Christ. Ah, there is a resurrection. There is a resurrection unto life that is going to happen as certainly as we are standing here before Rachel's casket. As certain as it is that Rachel has died, so certain it is that she is going to rise again. When the Lord returns and the trumpet blows, up from her grave she will rise.

And so will it be for every believer. So will it be for every believer that has fallen asleep in Jesus, notwithstanding how long the body may be in the grave – maybe so long even that the bones themselves have turned to dust, scattered, bleached, who knows. What a miracle. What a supernatural sound will come from heaven. And Rachel, and every saint of God, will rise again. Don't be ignorant. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, as others which have no hope." What a hope. What a hope we have. What a happy condition is death for the saint.

But yet the text gives us another lesson as well. It gives an exhortation to those of us that have not yet died, an exhortation to comfort, to consolation: "Don't sorrow like others sorrow that have no hope."

It is a natural thing – and understand, it is a godly thing – for us today to sorrow. It is not a belief in the sovereignty of God, in the providence of God, that allows us to come before the casket and have a grin on our face. This is not the time for grinning. This is a day of weeping. This is a day of sorrow. Again, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes sets for us all of those times that God has ordained: a time be born, a time to die, a time to weep, and a time to laugh. [Ecclesiastes 3: 2-3] And it is a belief in the providence of God, it is a belief in the wisdom of God, to use those times as He has defined them. For us to laugh in weeping times is not a holy act. For us to weep in laughing times would not be a holy act.

It is today for us to sorrow, to enter into the house of mourning, to learn the lessons, to take these lessons to heart, to remember that we too are dust, to remember too that we are destined to die, to learn the lesson from the casket before us. It's OK to weep; it's OK to sorrow. We are not prohibited from so doing. We mourn our loss. Today we mourn a body that no longer functions. We sorrow over eyes that no longer see, lips that can no longer utter speech, feet that can no longer move. Today we mourn the loss of a wife, a mother, a sister, a grandmother, a friend. Today we mourn a loss.

But remember the loss is ours, not hers. Today she is as happy as happy can be. Today she is as joyous as joyous can be. The loss is not hers. The loss is ours. We weep over a body cold, lifeless, a body that will decay; but we do so with

that hope of faith, knowing that death is not the end of things, that this death has transported her into the presence of her Savior in spirit, and she simply waits now in the grave for that trump to sound to be body and soul forever in God's presence.

But there is a lesson here as well for those that don't have hope, those that are not in Jesus. To die in Jesus, to be able to sleep in Jesus, you first of all have to live in Jesus. You're not going to fall asleep in Christ until in this life you come into union with Him. There was a day when Rachel found Jesus as the source of her life. She found in Jesus the sustainer of life. She found in Jesus the end of her life. There was a day in which Rachel was born again into this life that led to this enviable death.

As that pagan prophet expressed his lamentation, "O, to die the death of the righteous." [Numbers 23: 10] It's the death to die. Not a one of us here can escape death. Who here in this room will be the next to die? I don't know. Maybe me, maybe you. Not one of us can escape death. "O, to die the death of the righteous." O, to die this death that is a sleep to be enjoyed in Jesus.

Rachel, as she teaches today her last lesson, let her casket make that declaration: "Don't be ignorant." "Don't be ignorant today," this casket says, Rachel from this casket says, "When it comes time to sleep, make sure that you sleep in Jesus."

May Rachel's God be praised. May Rachel's Savior today be adored. And we in the life that we have physically join just a little in the worship that she now experiences spiritually in the presence of her Savior.

Jack, Austin, you have our sympathy. You have our love. I trust that you will have the support of the people of God in these days. Sorrow, but not as those that have no hope. We have hope. May God bless.

Let's pray together.

Our gracious Heavenly Father, again we give our thanks for the power of the Gospel. Lord, it was a constant prayer in behalf of Rachel during these last days

of her earthly life that You would keep her in the peace of the Gospel, that You would keep her out of pain. Lord, we believe that those prayers were wonderfully answered, for every time the opportunity was given to express her confidence in the Gospel of Christ, her affirmation was true. Her confession was that Jesus was her Savior, trusting Him. Lord, she died in that peace. What a way to die; what a way to die. The circumstances, Lord, of death for us all will be different. We can't begin to imagine what they may or may not be. But Lord, may it be true for all of us as Your people that we would know what it is to die in the peace of the Gospel, that we would know what it is to one day, like our sister, fall asleep in Jesus. So Lord, accept our thanks for a life that crossed our paths, for a testimony that was sure, constant, consistent. We pray, Lord, that your hand of comfort and blessing would be upon the family, her brothers and sisters, her grandchildren, her son, her husband. Lord, may they know in these days peace, the consolation, the comfort that only God's people can know. Be to them the father of mercies, the God of all comfort. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Postlude: "My Hope is in the Lord," "Praise Ye Jehovah" [BJU Anniversary Hymn], "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."]