

IF ONLY - Jeff Hood Funeral

I doubt that there is anyone in this sanctuary right now who would want to trade places with me and do what surely cries out to be done. Namely, to offer some words of comfort in the midst of so many unanswered questions and such a painful loss. For someone this family and these friends cared deeply about has been taken from us in a tragic and unexpected way.

Our emotions at a time like this pendulum from shock to grief, from hurt to anger, from guilt to accusation, from acceptance to judgment, and then all over again, from grief to confusion. Our question is “WHY?”

If I did have a cure that would ease such pain, I would definitely use it now. But being human, all I have is words, and these seem so weak and frail. However, I must nevertheless try.

It is natural at a time like this to say to ourselves, “IF ONLY ...”
... if only I had been there
... if only I could have said the right thing
... if only the events of that day had been different
... if only he had been able to kick those habits that hurt him
... if only he could have seen how many people really cared

The 'if only's' are endless.

The fact of the matter is that nothing I say today will matter to Jeff, because he is not here to hear it anyway. But everything we say and do today matters to us, because we are left to deal with our grief and our questions.

It is at times like this that we turn to the Christian faith for hope and help. There are religions in the world today in which some god or theology demands that people give their lives for a cause; but the Christian faith teaches that God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to give His life for us. A God like that is fundamentally GOOD. He did not cause the hurt we are feeling today; our grief is caused by the brokenness of a world that has by and large misunderstood, and even rejected, the Christian faith.

1 Corinthians 15:19 If in this life **only** we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

The largest part of the Christian faith deals with what we call the afterlife, because the longest and most important part of your life is not the part you are living now, it is the part that happens after we have your funeral.

If the Christian faith was only religious idea to offer some mental distraction when things got tough, if it was only going to church services and hanging out with good people, if it was only singing hymns and having something nice to do on Sunday, then Christians would be the most miserable people you ever met. Why? Because everything they lived for would be over at the moment of their death.

Tragically, that's the way it is with most people. Everything they live for, everything they trust in, everything they enjoy, everything they invest in, everything they're planning for will be over the moment they die. Don't let that be you!

Ecclesiastes 7:2-3 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

A real Christian is fundamentally different, because everything they trust in, everything they enjoy, everything they invest in, everything they're planning for gets exponentially better at the moment of their death.

Even so, not all the benefits of living a Christian life are confined to “life after death.” In fact, one writer wisely said “Christianity is not life AFTER death, it is life INSTEAD of death.” My eternal life starts the moment Jesus Christ becomes Lord of my life.

It's at a time like this, when our heart is hurting, our emotions are raw, our thoughts are confused, and our feelings are turbulent that the Christian faith provides a firm support to lean on.

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

When life is difficult, it's easy to give up; but giving up is the worst thing we can do. A professor of history said, "If Columbus had turned back, nobody would have blamed him — but nobody would have remembered him either."

CORETTA SCOTT KING FUNERAL – keep living in spite of the hurt!

Job's story is the oldest book in the Bible, because his experience is the oldest one known to mankind – suffering that we cannot explain. Job's friends came to him to try to help; they heard his words but did not feel the anguish of his heart, so they took the wrong approach in trying to help him handle his trials. They argued with his expressions instead of ministering to his feelings. They tried to give explanations when there weren't any to give. We are not here to do that today!

Your hurt, your sorrow, your confusion, even your anger are legitimate feelings that need to be expressed. But in the middle of all of his pain, in the middle of asking “WHY?” and in the middle of everything that he did not know, Job had one thing that he DID know ...

Job 19:25-27 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

The real issue of the Christian faith is this ...

- There is HOPE beyond this life, no matter how tough this life is
- There is GOOD in life no matter how much bad we encounter
- There is more MERCY in God than there is SIN in us

We are not loved by God because we have such incredible value; rather, we have such incredible value because God loved us first. That's why, no matter where you've been, what you've done, or who you are ... God loves you and wants you to be part of His family forever.

The one command that is given more often than any other in the Bible is “FEAR NOT.” There are many things to be afraid of in this life, as we discovered all too tragically this week. No one wants to have to attend the funeral of a friend, a son, a brother, a dad. But there is one thing we DON'T have to be afraid of, and that is GOD.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

The very reason God came to earth is so He could feel the feelings we experience in life. He is familiar with tears, with grief, and certainly with death – after all, He died for us in a death that was incredibly unfair.

But God did more than come to earth so He could sympathize with us; He came to earth so He could give us a hope that would be greater and longer than life itself.

1 Corinthians 15:19 If in this life **only** we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

What are you giving your life to that will last beyond your last breath? That is the question that we all have to answer ... and that is the question that can let you leave here holding onto a HOPE.