

Psalms 116:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

Analysis

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. This remarkable verse interrupts thanksgiving testimony with profound theological statement about how God views His people's death. What humans often perceive as tragedy, defeat, or end, God sees as precious—valuable, costly, treasured.

"Precious" (יָקָר/yakar) means costly, valuable, highly prized, rare, weighty, honored. The same word describes valuable jewels (2 Samuel 12:30), costly stones (1 Kings 5:17), and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4). Something precious isn't common or cheap but rare and treasured. This word indicates God doesn't view believers' death casually, callously, or indifferently but with profound care and valuation.

"In the sight of the LORD" (בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה/be'einei Yahweh) means "in the eyes of the LORD." This anthropomorphic language emphasizes God's perspective. Humans see death as loss, ending, separation, defeat. God sees differently. His evaluation differs fundamentally from human perception. His "sight" includes eternal perspective, comprehensive understanding, recognition of death's role in redemption's plan.

"Is the death" (הַמָּוֶת/hammavetah) addresses mortality's ultimate reality. Mavet means death, dying, mortality—physical cessation of earthly life. This verse doesn't romanticize or spiritualize death but addresses literal mortality. Yet it reframes death's meaning: not ultimate disaster but transition, not meaningless end but purposeful passage, not divine neglect but divine attention.

"Of his saints" (יִיחֲסִידָיו/lachasidav) specifies whose death God values. Chasid means godly one, faithful one, saint, one who practices chesed (covenant loyalty). This word describes those in covenant relationship with God, faithful to Him, devoted in worship, characterized by steadfast love. These are God's own people, His covenant family, His beloved children. Their death matters supremely to Him.

The verse's context strengthens its meaning. Preceding verses describe deliverance from death (v.3-8); following verse declares: "thou hast loosed my bonds" (v.16). Thus verse 15 isn't celebrating death but recognizing God's sovereign care even in death. Whether God delivers from physical death (as in this psalm's case) or delivers through death into eternal life, either way believers' death is precious to Him—never careless, accidental, or overlooked.

Historical Context

Old Testament understanding of death developed gradually. Early texts present Sheol as shadowy underworld where dead exist without joy or active worship (Psalm 6:5; 88:10-12; Ecclesiastes 9:10). This limited revelation created special poignancy for Psalm 116:15—even without full understanding of resurrection and heaven, the psalmist trusted God values His people's death.

Later Old Testament revelation progressively clarified afterlife hope. Job declared: "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" (Job 19:25-26). Daniel prophesied: "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life" (Daniel 12:2). Isaiah envisioned God swallowing up death in victory (Isaiah 25:8).

New Testament revelation fully illuminates death's meaning for believers. Jesus taught: "whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26). Paul wrote: "to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21) and "to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Death becomes not ending but graduation, not loss but gain, not separation but union with Christ. Revelation 14:13 echoes Psalm 116:15: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

Church history records countless martyrs whose deaths demonstrated this truth. Stephen's martyrdom showed death as precious transition—heaven opening, Christ standing in honor, Stephen's spirit commended to God (Acts 7:54-60). Throughout centuries, believers facing execution, persecution, disease, and danger testified: our death is precious to God, therefore we need not fear. Their confidence wasn't denial but faith that God values His children supremely, caring for them in life and death.

This verse comforts believers facing mortality—whether approaching natural death, confronting terminal illness, or risking martyrdom. God doesn't carelessly allow His children to die. Each death matters infinitely to Him. He numbers our days (Psalm 139:16), knows when sparrows fall (Matthew 10:29), and welcomes His saints into eternal presence. Death may seem enemy, but God transforms it into precious transition.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's perspective on believers' death differ from human perspective, and why does this matter?
2. What does it mean that death is 'precious' to God—does this mean He desires our death or that He values us supremely?
3. How should understanding that 'the death of his saints' is precious to God affect how believers face mortality?
4. What is the relationship between this verse's Old Testament context (limited afterlife understanding) and New Testament resurrection hope?

Interlinear Text

יָקָר	בְּעֵינֵי י	יְהוָה	הָ מָוֶת	לְחַסְדֵּיוֹ:
Precious	in the sight	of the LORD	is the death	of his saints
H3368	H5869	H3068	H4194	H2623

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 72:14 (Parallel theme): He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight.

1 Samuel 25:29 (References Lord): Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling.

Revelation 1:18 (Parallel theme): I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Revelation 14:3 (Parallel theme): And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Luke 16:22 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;