

Christ Be Exalted!



God decided. It was God's choice and God's timing. And that is the way it should be.

What was this decision, this choice at this time? God determined when Willy's life on this earth was over. The placard that led the funeral procession now marks the fresh grave and reminds visitors of the days and years that the LORD had ordained for Willy:

Born: 14 June 1964.

Died: 30 January 2021.

57 years of God's undeserved but abundant grace bookended between 1964 and 2021. This span of time gave Willy opportunity to accomplish a lot of things: grow

crops, play football, get an education, marry, raise a family, even become a full-time worker in the church. In all he pursued in life, Willy strived to do what the Apostle Paul wrote passionately about in Philippians 1:20, namely, to exalt Christ.

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will...have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or whether by death.”

Whether by life

Willy's full name was Willy Matengula Gama. Since 1999 Willy had been serving as an Evangelist in the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. Evangelist Matengula and his family had been living in the southern region of Malawi in an area called Mpemba. For the past 19 years he has been serving a four-congregation parish union. Like the Apostle Paul, Willy joyfully preached “Christ crucified” and loved to sing praises to God.

Willy had a special appreciation for life. After all, he nearly lost his in 1996. It was then that he was involved in a serious road accident. A minibus and a bicycle collided, and the one on the two-wheeler was Willy. Remarkably the collision had not taken his life, but it did take his sight.

From that point on he lived life in total darkness. He could have cursed the minibus driver (and for that matter, God Himself) but he didn't. He could have become bitter and withdrew from everyone and everything – but he chose not to do so.

He saw clearly that he could use his lack of vision as an opportunity to exalt Christ with his life. He used his sightlessness to God's glory. He devoted his time to learn and to teaching. He learned Braille and taught confirmation class to the youth in the congregation.



Evangelist Willy and Margaret in 2013

Willy and his wife Margaret accepted the suffering that God allowed. Margaret stuck by him during those dark days. For better or for worse. For three years he groped around in darkness. But then God gave him a spectacular gift: vision. No, not a vision, but...vision! God restored his sight! Talk about amazing grace! Was blind...but now I see!

It was then that God called him into the full-time ministry as an Evangelist in the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. With his life devoted to full time preaching and teaching, Willy exalted the One who not only restored his physical sight but his spiritual sight as well.

Seeing one's wife and children and congregation is a tremendous blessing, but oh, to see the Savior with the eyes of faith! Twenty-two years later, God called him again. This time, not to another congregation in Malawi, but to the Church Triumphant in heaven.

On 30 January 2021 God called Willy to his eternal home. The home purchased for him by Jesus Christ.

Or whether by death

On 30 January 2021 Willy exalted Christ with this death. But how could that be? Wasn't Willy's body in the coffin? Wasn't the coffin lowered into the grave? Wasn't the hole filled in and the ground heaped up?



Of course. Willy's eyes were closed. His mouth silent. He obviously could no longer preach and teach and sing...but others could and did! Just because Willy's earthly existence was gone does not mean the wonderful message of the Savior was!

Willy's death gave the opportunity for hundreds of people to hear the death-defeating gospel of Jesus Christ on the day of his burial. Pastor Patrick Magombo

preached the funeral sermon on 2 Timothy 4:5-8. Even though the Apostle Paul wrote the words and Pastor Magombo preached them, it was as if Willy was speaking them to those who had gathered:

“The time has come for my departure” (indeed, it had). “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, “I have kept the faith” (indeed, he had). And on that day of the funeral, it was as if Willy, like Paul, had passed a baton.



Pastors on the way to the graveside service

The songs and hymns Willy used to sing? The ladies and the choirs sang them. The Scripture lessons that Willy used to teach? The pastors were speaking them. The sermons that Willy used to preach? The pastors were preaching them. The prayers that Willy used to say? Many were praying them. The funeral was Willy's, but it was all about Christ.

Christ had given Willy 57 years of grace, desire to serve and joy to share. Christ went to the cross and to hell itself so that Willy wouldn't have to. Nor would we. The One who brought Willy into the world in '64 now, in His wisdom took him out in '21.

God brought him into a place like none we have ever experienced before. A home in which he could exalt the name of Christ forever! A home with no more tears, suffering, crying or pain or...death.

Don't you long for such a place? Are you ever a bit eager to get there? Ever wonder when God will call you home? Ever hope it would be today? Ever wish it would have happened already? If you had the choice to go to heaven today or stay for a while longer on earth, which would it be?

That is the same quandary in which the Apostle Paul found himself. Torn between the two. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Yet what shall I choose? Paul knew the choice was not his. Nor is it yours or mine. God decides. God's choice and God's timing. And that is the way it should be.

At that moment in Paul's life, God chose not to call Paul to his heavenly home. He had more work for Paul to do. More lives to touch with the gospel. More opportunities to exalt Christ with his life. Death would come soon enough. It did for Willy. It will for me. And for you.

*Hast my soul from grace to glory,
Armed by faith and winged by prayer.
All but heav'n is transitory,
God's own hand shall guide you there.
Soon shall end this earthly story.
Swift shall pass the pilgrim days,
Hope soon change to heav'nly glory,
Faith to sight and prayer to praise. (CW#465 v.4).*

Willy's faith has now become Willy's sight. Face to face with the Savior! To live is Christ. To die is gain. Whether by our life or whether by our death, may Christ be exalted!

Missionary John Holtz lives in Malawi

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields

*in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts
at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>*