

Facing Death (part 2)

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[0:00] Several, or at least two of the people in the Bible spoke of death as going the way of all the earth. And Matthew Henry says that to go the way speaks of a journey. Death is a journey.

And we depart from this shore and we enter into eternity. We prepare for journeys. Surely we ought to prepare for the last one, the greatest one, the greatest change that will ever take place in terms of a change of place. We're here and then we're there. And that in an instant.

So how do we prepare for it? And we saw last week, first of all, we ought to make our calling and election sure. We ought to be sure we're in Christ because if we're in Christ, then death itself is ours.

It serves our good. And so that's the first thing, to be in Christ. Secondly, we saw that we're to live a life of repentance and faith every day. That all of life is just long enough to prepare for death.

And we prepare by a life daily lived unto the Lord. And so for those things that we regret in our lives, as we look back at the end of them, we run to Christ and repent and confess and look afresh at that fountain open for sin and uncleanness.

[1:20] We exercise faith in him. That's preparing for the final day. Number three, then, today we begin the continual theme of how to prepare for our death.

We understand and meditate upon what Christ has done to change death for us. Not all people die the same. Remember, wicked Balaam says, let me die the death of the righteous.

You notice that there was a certain death that the righteous died that he wanted to die like them.

Well, what is it that has made it different for the Christian to die than for the non-Christian?

Or what has Christ done to forever change the experience of death for every believer? You tell me, what has he done to change the experience of death?

Mickey? All right. All right. So his own resurrection to life. We we talked about the fear of death because we've never we've never died before.

[2:26] We but our Savior has died. He he has tasted death for us and and come out the other side and told us enough about it that we might have peace in approaching our own death.

So his resurrection. What else has he done for us to change death? Jim? His word would no way to take him. His word be true. And he tells us in his word what what the true place is.

Heaven and hell would be like. When did he suffer that hell for us? On the cross. All right. So so we're back to his death, aren't we? He's died for us, suffering the hell that we deserved.

He's risen for us. Has he done anything else for us that would change our death? All right. And that blessedness extends to the day of our death.

We're blessed in the day of death because of what he's done. Becky? All right. The day you die, Jesus will be praying for you. And he has lost none of all that are his.

[3:33] Raj? He gives us a distinct understanding of death, Roger says. And that's that's this whole point that we need to understand death and the change that Christ has made concerning our death.

Dave? Dave? Good. And that because we believe that Christ died and rose again and that when he comes, those who have died in Christ will rise first and so on.

It keeps getting back to the death and resurrection of Christ ultimately. Raj? Excellent. We'll talk about that more. It gives dying grace. And that changes death's experience for us, Charlie.

Good. Remember when Paul writes the Corinthians, he says, he speaks of the gospel as a first importance, how that Christ died according to the scriptures and was buried and was raised to life according to the scriptures.

That's a first importance. And we as Christians need to keep that as first importance front and center every day of our life. And we're going to need that gospel front and center on the day of our death as well.

[4:45] It's not a different reality that we need that day than the first than today. What do we need today? We need to feed on the gospel that Jesus died for me and he lived lives for me.

He rose again, triumphing over death for me. And when I come to my last day, believe me, those are going to be the things that I will need. That's that's what changes death for the Christian. It's what Christ has done for us. In space time history, look at First Corinthians chapter 15. This is the way that the apostle writes when he seeks to comfort believers in the face of death.

We just referred to that in First Thessalonians chapter four. But notice how he puts it in First Corinthians 15, 55 to 58.

When he speaks of the final resurrection. And death being swallowed up in victory. Verse 55.

[5:54] Where, oh, death, is your victory? Where, oh, death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brother, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. What is the sting of death?

What does he say? Explain that. What is it about sin that makes death such a fearful, painful experience? Okay?

To a fear of death. Okay? To a fear of death. And why fear of death? Because we've sinned. And death is the punishment for sin.

And if we haven't had a remedy for our sin, we're not going to approach death any differently than the next guy. The reason that king was so petrified to have anyone talk about death in his presence is because he wasn't prepared for it.

[7:00] He was a sinner and he didn't have an answer for sin. But not so for the believer. What has Christ done with our sins? Buried them.

How? With his blood. And that's all picture language, isn't it? A burial, a covering with blood. But what it's getting at is the fact that Jesus went to the cross in space-time history and hung there in the place of the sinner, me, and took the full wrath of God for my sin.

My sin was put on him. That's where my sin is. It was put on Christ on the cross. And he took all the wrath of God that I deserve for that sin. So that sin's been punished. It's been paid in full. That's how it's removed.

That's how it's covered. That's how it's forgiven. So the sting of death is gone for the Christian, is what Paul was telling us. For the believer, then, death is like a stingerless bee.

It may buzz and scare you a bit with its buzzing, but it has nothing to harm you with. It has no more stinger. So remember that as you hear it buzzing.

[8:17] Oh, death, you sound so, so scary, but where is your victory? Your stinger is gone because sin is the sting of death, and Christ has taken that sting for me.

Or to change the imagery, death is like a deadly snake, and it's defanged. And it may curl and hiss and do all the rest, but it has no poison with which to hurt me.

What's the worst that death can do to me now? The very worst. Well, it can take me to God. Death is but my entrance into glory, we sing.

I watched a show once, a program, talking about people who had this tremendous fear of uncleanness, and so they're always washing their hands. I mean, just to their paralyzation and lack of being able to function in society and a new form of treatment where they seek to face their fears and look them in the face and then to...

So for these people, it meant going to a camp, and it meant rubbing their hands on the floor of this old dirty cabin and licking their tongue. And then doing it in other places that I won't even mention, but backyard, back alley trash cans and putting their fingers in them and then licking them to face down their fears.

[9:40] Well, in a sense, believers, that's what we need to do with the fear of death. We need to just look it right in the face. Okay, death, you're making me tremble right now.

Talking with a brother this week, and he says that he was on his way to work early, whatever morning it was when the storm went through, and saw a telephone pole come down right in front of him.

And he said, when I got to breakfast uptown, my hand was just shaking. I said, why is that? I know I'm going to heaven. We get fearful, don't we? Well, we need to look the death in the face and say,

okay, what's the worst it can do?

Well, it can take me home to heaven. And because the stinger of death is gone, there's no wrath of God in our death. There's therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

There was wrath in Jesus' death, but all the wrath that should have been mine was there, so there's no wrath of God in my death. Rather, there's love in my death.

[10:42] Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. And he loves the fact that we're coming home to be with him. But outside of Christ, it would be a horrible thing to die because death is a sheriff that brings us to the bar of judgment to be cast into eternal hell.

So the death of Jesus takes the stinger away, and that forever changes death for the believer.

Let's think a bit about the resurrection of Christ. You see, it's one thing just to say, well, I know Jesus died for me, but trace it out. What does that do for my death and the day of my death? And it's another thing to say, well, Jesus rose from the dead, and that gives me hope.

How does it give you hope? What exactly are the stages of how Christ's resurrection changes death for the believer?

Well, we're in union with Christ, aren't we? We're joined to him. So when he died, we died. And when he rose, we rose. And so his resurrection is the certainty that we will rise.

[11:52] 1 Corinthians 15, verses 21 and 22, if you're still in this chapter. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. There's our hope in the day of death. I'm in Christ.

And in Christ, all will be made alive. The resurrection was the father's vindication of Christ's saving death.

It's the assurance that his death was effective and that God has accepted it. He went into the place of judgment with our sin on his back.

And he was so judged by God that he comes out and ascends into heaven. Now, the fact that he's in heaven shows that God has accepted what he did.

[12:51] If God had not accepted what he'd done, he'd never allowed his son into heaven. Not with our sins on him. No, our sins had to be taken from him. And they were on the cross.

They were punished fully. And so when God raised him from the dead and raised him to his own right hand, he's showing by the resurrection and ascension. I am pleased with what he's done.

And so if Christ, our representative, is in heaven now, one day we will be with him. He's the head. We're the body. We're not to be separated forever. If he's there, we must be there.

He's called our forerunner who has gone into heaven for us. And his presence there guarantees that one day we too will be there. With him. Cindy mentioned that passage in Hebrews 2.

Notice that with me. Hebrews 2 verses 14 and 15. We're talking about what has Christ done to change death for the believer.

[13:53] Hebrews 2 verses 14 and 15. Notice what Jesus has done enough to accomplish, to free those who all their lives were held in fear of death.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

This is a description of unconverted man held in slavery all their lives by this fear of death. He has good reason to fear.

His death will bring him to the bar of judgment. It will bring him to the second death. It will bring him to God's eternal hell. But when we lay hold of what Christ has done for us, it sets us free from this fear of death.

What Christ has done is enough to free us from that fear of death. Listen to what Calvin says on this passage. The guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God.

[15:01] God, we must above all remember this substitution, lest we tremble and remain anxious throughout life, and especially as we draw near to death.

And this freedom from the fear of death here is spoken of as a present reality right now, something that's been won for Christ for us. Right now, we're not afraid of death anymore.

It's something to be known here and now. It's something to register upon our emotions. Fear is an emotion, and we're set free from this enslaving emotion of the fear of death.

Luther says, He who fears death or is not willing to die is not sufficiently Christian. That searches me. He who fears death or is not willing to die is not sufficiently Christian.

We've got some more growing to do. Of really being what a Christian is. He says, As yet such people lack faith in the resurrection and love this life more than the life to come.

[16:11] Calvin says something similar. Although we must still meet death, Let us nevertheless be calm and serene in living and dying when we have Christ going before us.

If anyone cannot set his mind at rest by disregarding death, that man should know that he has not yet gone far enough in the faith of Christ.

In other words, God has done enough to take the fear of death clean away from us. And if we have any element of fear of death left in us, then to that extent we're not sufficiently yet Christian as we ought to be, Luther says.

And to Calvin says, We've not gone enough in the faith of Christ and really laid hold of what he's done for us in his death and resurrection. So God means for the gospel to have a profound effect on our attitude toward death.

You know that there's a way to glorify God in death. John 21, 19 says that he was referring to Peter and the way that he would glorify God in his death.

[17:19] There's a way to glorify God in our death. And it has to do with our attitude towards death. Our attitude toward death and the day of our death will either tend toward the glorification of God and commend the truths of the gospel, or it will tend to nullify the gospel and almost put a question mark as to whether or not it is true.

So let's pray to be able to go out of this life glorifying God by confidence in the certainties of the gospel. Our very last breath can be used to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that we believe that those things that he's done for us are sufficient to land us safely in heaven. Our death then is the final test of how well we know and live upon Christ and his gospel. So that's point number three. We need to understand and live upon what Christ has done in his life and death and resurrection.

I need to go quickly here. This is really another aspect of that. But number four, we need single trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ for justification.

Hebrews 9.27 says, Death is appointed to man once to die and then the judgment.

[18:47] Okay? So as I think about death, I realize that there's something right behind it. It's called judgment. As soon as I think about that, then I need to know that I'm ready for that judgment.

And how do I know I'm ready for that judgment? And what's God looking for in that day? He's looking for perfect righteousness. Okay. So he's looking for perfect righteousness. If I'm going to be at rest with my death, I've got to know that I have a perfect righteousness, ready to stand in judgment.

And I do in Christ. For he has obeyed the law for me in every point that he might work out a righteousness to give to every believing sinner.

So if I would prepare for death and be at peace with my death, I've got to rest on the righteousness of Christ. Don't ever get into the legal frame of wondering, well, have I done enough for God to gain acceptance into heaven?

You know, it's not beyond the devil to kick a man while he's down. Even on his deathbed, to stir up fears of the day of judgment. Well, what do you do with those fears? Well, you go back to the gospel and you go back and remind yourself, Jesus has not only died and risen for me, but he's lived for me.

[20:02] He's lived a perfect life for me. And he's given me all his obedience, his perfect report card, his perfect righteousness. And that's what Paul rested on. Philippians 3, 19.

So to be found in Christ means that all of his accomplishments and all his obedience were done on my behalf and they're now mine.

His righteousness has been credited to my account. So I have a perfect righteousness in heaven as Bunyan feasted upon.

Complete righteousness, perfect righteousness, unable to improve upon it. Finished. It's the very righteousness that God himself has. And so I can face death and the judgment beyond it, secure in the righteousness of Jesus put to my account through faith.

Jay Gresham Mason was a champion of the Reformed faith when liberalism was making inroads into the church and undermining the foundations of biblical Christianity.

[21:25] He wrote a book that's still being used called Christianity and Liberalism in which he shows that whatever these liberal Christians would say about their Christianity, it's not Christianity.

It's a different religion. He stood against liberalism at Princeton Seminary. And when Princeton finally caved into liberalism, he left and was instrumental in starting Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

At age 55, he cut short his Christmas break to go to North Dakota to preach and promote the new seminary. It was 20 below.

He contracted pneumonia and died a few weeks later on the 1st of January, 1937. His last words were memorialized in a telegraph that he sent to a friend and colleague in the work at Westminster, Professor John Murray.

And from his deathbed, he sent this message. I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it.

[22:32] Here's a man who gave his life to serving the Lord and defending the faith and teaching young men to proclaim the gospel. But in the day of his death, as he's laying on his bed thinking, I'm to face death and beyond it judgment.

He's not thinking, you know, I've done pretty well. No, he's not thinking about his own life at all. He's fixing on the obedience of Christ.

Christ obeyed. For just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of the one man, Jesus, the many will be made righteous.

So he dies with his eyes on Christ's righteousness as his living hope. Well, we've got to be at home with these.

Are you living on the righteousness of Christ today, you see? Training yourself to look away from yourself to Christ. You're preparing yourself for the day of your death because you'll need to do that in that day as well.

[23:36] Number five, how to prepare for your own death. Collect and memorize some precious promises for the day of death. On the resurrection of Christ, the death of Christ, the perfect obedience of Christ, these very things that we've spoken of.

When you go on a journey, you lay up provisions for the journey. Well, you've got a big journey ahead. What are you laying up for it? You're going to be there one day, possibly conscious that this is the last day of your life, the last moments, the last week, whatever.

Well, do you have any promises laid up for that day? A lot of people run to Psalm 23, the day of death. Sweet Psalm.

Do you know that Psalm by heart? Is it forward and backward? Are you able to fall back on death? Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me. All sorts of promises.

The key of promise is something we need to keep with us. You need to be memorizing hymns. You know, there's often a verse, often the last verse of our hymns have references to the day of death.

[24:48] And there's sweetness in those hymns as it puts the truth of the gospel before us. Trying to think. Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes.

Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee. In life and death, O Lord, abide with me. Alexander Archibald Alexander says, No class of people needs the supports of faith and hope more than the aged.

The ages, the aged. So we've got to be laying up these promises as supports of faith and hope. What does faith lean on in the day of testing?

It's got to have a sure word from heaven that won't move beneath us. And then, lastly, pray for dying grace. Pray for dying grace. Pray to be able to glorify God in death.

To some extent, Samson is a poor example, but he prayed that God would give him strength to yet glorify God one more time in his death. And he had a life full of regrets.

[25:55] But he had this final prayer, Lord, let me die with the Philistines. And he took out more Philistines in his death than he did in all of his life. Well, if that's in a sick way, perhaps his prayer at the end.

We surely ought to be praying. Lord, let me glorify you in my last act on earth. It's the last chance to glorify God in this life.

Lord, prepare me, help me to glorify you in dying. But we're not to expect dying grace before the dying hour arrives.

Hebrews 4.16 promises that we will find help in our time of need. Your time of need to die is in the day of your death.

We might wish that we had this grace ahead of time, but if it's not needed today, it won't be given today. God gives strength equal to the needs of the day. Remember the Israelites in the wilderness?

[27:01] They received only enough manna for one day, with the Sabbath exception. They might have wished that they had enough for the whole week, so they didn't have to trust God. But they were thrown upon him and made to trust God just for grace for today.

And then tomorrow had to trust him for grace for that day. And so with dying grace, it'll be there for us in the day of dying. You can expect it to be there in your time of need. But God usually gives grace through the use of means of grace, doesn't he?

God uses the means of grace to give grace. So don't neglect the means of grace and just expect this big wave of grace to die, to just show up.

If you're not feasting on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, don't expect in the day of death to be so brimming full of life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

Rather, use the means that God has given us that we might be laying the foundation well for the day of our death. I say a right attitude towards death is the way to glorify God in death.

[28:10] Is it not true that we sometimes think and talk of death as if it's the worst thing that could happen to us? Are we not, when we think and talk like that, think and talking like the world?

And is that not part of what worldliness is? To think and talk about death as if it's the worst thing in the world?

And is that what we're not to be conformed to? For us, it's not the worst thing in the world that could happen to us.

It's arguably the best thing that could happen to us. And a right attitude toward death is a way to glorify God in death. It becomes a punctuation that everything that I've said in my life about the gospel and believed about the gospel, it's really true.

And it gives me peace and joy even as I think about death. Philippians 1, 21 and 23. Here's the right attitude toward death. Philippians 1, 21 and 22.

[29:16] Philippians 2, 22.

Philippians 2, 22.

Is there some apostolic thing about that? That puts this out of the reach of the ordinary Christian? I mean, can we just say, well, but yeah, Paul's an apostle. So he's got special situations. So that death for him was gain and death for him was better by far.

I don't know of anything that enabled the apostle Paul to say that, that was true of him, that is not true of the weakest, most ordinary Christian.

[30:51] To die is gain. To be with Christ is better by far. Do we really believe it? Do we believe it to the point that it has affected our emotions and our attitude and our thoughts toward death?

Is being with Jesus such a painful thing? That's the way to glorify God in our death. To commend him as more valuable than life. David said it.

Your loving kindness is better than life. Psalm 63, 3. Well, you can say that in the day of your health, but say it in the day of your death and you will glorify God.

His loving kindness is better than life. Paul says to be with him is better than life. Better than life here, apart from his physical presence. Samuel Rutherford put it this way. It were a well-spent journey, those seven deaths lay between, to see the king in his beauty, to be with him forever. Better to die, to go to be with him, if I had to die seven deaths to get to him. Glorifying to God. And so we need to ask, what is my attitude toward death?

[32:00] We can so cling to this life that it looks like we don't believe the promises of a better life to come. Having known it Christ to live, let me know it gain to die. It's what James taught us in chapter 1 and verses 9 through 11.

Let the man in humble circumstances boast in his high position. And let the rich man boast in his low position because like a wildflower, he's going to pass away.

And what happens to him on the day when he passes away is far better than living on forever here on this earth. Are we boasting about the day that we'll depart and go and be with Christ?

The Lord Jesus has done that much to forever change the way we view our death. Hebrews 2, 14 and 15. Christ died to set every one of his people free from the fear of death.

So we need to have our attitude, our mind permeated with the scripture's view of death. Is going home such a terrible thing? When you were away at college, when you were away in the service, when you were away on business, is going home such a terrible thing?

[33:10] Oh, Paul says, well, we're confident. And I say, I would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. That's what death is. It's at home with the Lord.

Are family reunions such a dreaded thing? Well, maybe to some they are. Used to be they weren't. You know, death is referred to as being gathered to his people.

Spoken of, I believe, one of the patriarchs. He was gathered to his people. That's what death does. It gathers you to your people. Who are your people? Well, it's the family of God.

Are they such a bad crew that you don't want to be gathered to your people? Is reaching our goal not something good? Paul says, I'm straining. I'm straining toward that goal.

To be like Christ when I see him and am made like him. Is finishing the race such a terrible thing? Oh, it's relief. Well, that's what death is.

[34:13] It's to take the last step of the race. 2 Timothy 4.8. Is the end of a fight so bad? And that's what death is.

It's to finish the fight. It's the funeral of my sin. It's receiving a crown. Is receiving a crown such a dreadful thing?

We've got a crown of righteousness laid up in store for us. 2 Timothy 4.8. We've got a crown of life for those who love him. James 1.12. We've got a crown of glory. 1 Peter 5.

Is getting our best things so bad? Hebrews 10 speaks about that when their goods were confiscated, that they rejoice because they knew they had better and lasting possessions.

Is it such a sad thing that I'm going to my better and lasting possessions? Does it bring us to a better country that we're longing for? Hebrews 11.

[35:10] They were looking for a country of their own, longing for a better country, a heavenly one. How do you get to that country? Through the door of death.

It's the only way you'll get there unless Christ comes. They were longing for that heavenly country. That changed the way they looked at the doorway to get them there. Hebrews 11.

Is it so bad to go to rivers of pleasure forevermore at his right hand? Where blessings are unmixed with troubles, where there's no more sickness, death, pain, sorrow, curse.

All tears are wiped away, where nothing unclean will ever enter in, where everyone there will be holy and sinless and pure. Where riches are eternal, where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break through and steal.

Is the answer of Jesus' prayer such a thing to be dreaded? Father, I want those that you've given me to be with me where I am. That they might behold my glory. The glory you gave me before the world was founded.

[36:16] Five minutes, five seconds after death, we'll be wondering why in the world we dreaded it so much. That's a good thing to remember. Why didn't we look forward to it?

What was I thinking after all? Meckling sent me a little cute comical joke on a husband and wife enjoying heaven. And they go from feast to feast and they can eat anything that they want.

And finally, he looks a bit perturbed at his wife and says, Just think, I could have been here ten years earlier if you hadn't made me eat all that healthy stuff. Well, there's that truth, you see.

That we almost cling to this life as if we don't have anything better there. But just a few moments in heaven will remind us.

What were we thinking? That we were so fearful to pass over and to come to such a place as this. So it is thinking about what a place we're going through.

[37:27] What lies on the other side of the river? On the other side of the door, Bunyan has Mr. Standfast receive a message which said, You must prepare for a change of life. That his master was not willing that he should live so far from him any longer.

And so he stepped into the river. The river of death. And he says, The waters indeed are to the palate bitter and to the body cold. Yet the thought of what I am going to and of the convoy that awaits me on the other side lies like a glowing coal on my heart.

I see myself now at the end of my journey. My toilsome days are over. I am going to see the head that was crowned with thorns and the face that was spit upon for me. I've been living by hearsay and faith.

But now I'm going where I shall live by sight and I shall be with him in whose company I delight. Oh, I have loved to hear him spoken of and wherever I could see his footprints on the sands of time. There I delighted to walk. His name has been to me a precious treasure, sweeter than all perfumes. His voice I rejoice to hear and his face exceeds all beauty and earth and sky.

[38 : 34] His word I have used as food for my soul and for an antidote against my faltering. He has kept me back from my iniquities and he has held me fast. Yes, my strengths, my steps, he has strengthened in his way.

And I'm going to see him. May the thought of it be as a glowing coal in our hearts and help us as we prepare for the day of that glorious change.

Thank you.