

Death

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[0:00] Until Christ comes, every single one will have a day of death. A hundred percent, one hundred percent of people die.

! That's a high percentage.! Death is the universal experience of all mankind. And the Bible testifies to that. It is appointed to man once to die.

It's an appointment all men keep. Hebrews 9, 27. Death is the destiny of every man. Ecclesiastes 7, 2. And that's what you notice as you visit a grave, a cemetery.

That death is no respecter of persons. Young, old, male, female, educated, uneducated. We all die. As in Adam, all die.

What man can live and not see death? Or save himself from the power of the grave. Psalm 89, 48.

And yet, though death is the universal experience of all men, and we have its reminders, grim reminders, all around us, it's not a topic that men enjoy discussing, is it?

[1:10] It's rather something that is kept under the rug. It's not the subject that men like to pick for conversations, for sermons, for Sunday school lessons.

And yet, J.I. Packer picked it for the last chapter on his book, on God's words. And so we're going to give ourselves to the study of the word death this morning.

God speaks much about it, and therefore we ought to know much about it. At least as much as what he's revealed to us. Why is it? Let's open this with a discussion.

Why is it that men do not feel comfortable talking about death? We fear anything that we know not what we need to hold.

Okay, this is a great unknown to us. The end of life here is the beginning of what? What's beyond this door of death? And the unknown future is a matter of fear.

[2:15] So he's mentioned the word fear. Fear causes us not to like to speak of it. What else? Why are men slow to speak of death? The end of all their pleasures. Okay.

Outside of Christ, it could very well be the end of all their pleasures, all their good things. As Jesus told the rich, ungodly man.

Any other reasons? Being painful for those living still. Family and adversity. Okay. We think of the grief that it causes to those who remain.

It's a loss. It's a loss. Good. Raj? For those outside of Christ, which is the vast majority of the mind, they know, deep into themselves, that there is a God.

And they fear to. Okay. So there is this witness in the heart and the conscience that there is a God to be met with. And hence the fear of death.

[3:18] Eileen? A lack of understanding. Okay. Very often it can be in the Christian's life that the reason we might be fearing death is that we have a wrong understanding of what death is.

And I trust that study this morning will help us then in dealing with death if that is the case. Well, there are many reasons then. There isn't just one, but it's a universal phenomenon.

Stan? I have a phrase that, and it's where I heard it. All men think all men are moral but themselves. We have this idea that that's not the thing.

It's everybody else dies but not me. And so it's just something we just somehow we think everybody else is moral but us.

Couldn't there be something of the deception of the evil one in that? Just to keep men under this deception that I'm not going to die. When everything around speaks to the contrary.

[4:19] All right? Well, let's think in the first place then. What is death? What is death? And I'm not looking for a medical description. This has been debated as to when a person dies.

Is it when the heart stops beating, the brain waves cease functioning. The biblical definition of death is separation of body and spirit.

James 2 and verse 26 says, As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. So here's a definition, by the way, that James uses.

His point is not to talk about death. It's to talk about a dead faith. But he, by the way, explains to us what is death? Death is the body without the spirit.

It's the dissolving of this union between body and spirit. Man was created a body, spirit, creature.

You read in Genesis 2, verse 7, that the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground.

[5 : 23] So he took the dust and he formed it into a man. It is still not man. It's just half created man. And then he breathed into his nostrils the breath.

The same word for spirit. The breath of life. And he became a living being. So man is body and soul. Death reverses that process of creation.

God made the body and breathed into him his spirit. Death is the removal of the spirit from the body. It partly unmakes man.

It separates what God originally joined together. Ecclesiastes 12, 7 says, The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

So it is pointing back. His description of what happens at death points back to the creative act. The spirit returns to God who gave it. Remember how he gave it as he breathed into man the breath of life.

[6 : 33] Death is the undoing of the creative act of God. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul refers to death as the destroying of the earthly tent we live in.

Again, you see that there is the outer tent, and there is the we who live in it. We are body, soul, creatures. But he says in verse 1, Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a dwelling with God.

Packer says that's why corpses look vacant, as if the person is no longer home, because that is the reality. That's the way the Bible speaks of it.

The spirit of the person who used to live there is gone, and only the outward tent, that outward part of him, remains. Now when a man dies, and it was not from an accident, we often read in the papers that they died of natural causes.

Have you seen that or heard that? He died of natural causes. But when you think about it from a biblical perspective, nothing could be further from the truth in that there is no death that is natural.

[7 : 47] All death is unnatural. Death is an intruder into the natural order that God created at the beginning. What is natural is that God made man to be a body, spirit, creature.

What is unnatural is the tearing apart of body and soul. So death is unnatural. That brings us to the next question.

We've seen what is death? Why is death? Why is there death? Why do people die? What's the short answer to that question? Okay.

I think there's a sign on a barn around here. What does it say, Jim? Something about... Death is sure. Death is sure.

Sin and false. All right. There you have it. Now you all run down there and check that out after church.

[8 : 49] But it's a good summary of this topic, isn't it? What was it again? What's the first line? Life is short. Death is sure. We've looked at that. A hundred percent. Sin and false.

Now we're asking the question, why? Sin the cause. That's the short answer. Sin is the cause of death. Had there not been sin, there would not have been death.

The Bible makes that point. Sin or death is God's judgment for sin. It's the punishment that man deserves for rebelling against God.

But it's good for us when we're studying God's words to look at the first mention of the word in God's word. When's the first time death is spoken of? Well, Genesis 2 and verses 16 and 17, when God, right from the beginning, told the man that you're free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

There's the first mention of death in God's word. It's the punishment for eating what God said, don't eat. And it's only when man disobeyed God that the curse of death was announced in Genesis 3 and verse 19.

[10 : 09] Dust you are, and to dust you will return. So death is God's punishment for sin. It's the wages, Paul says, that sin pays its employees.

The wages of sin is death, Romans 6.23. Turn with me to Romans 5. This is the New Testament commentary on this event of the fall and God's punishment for sin being death.

In Romans 5, Paul is showing us in this great book why we need Jesus Christ.

And one of the reasons we need him is because outside of him we die and we have no life. Now notice how he explains the origin of death in verse 12, Romans 5.12.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned.

[11:17] Sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin.

Sin opened the door and death came in with sin. It's the punishment for sin. That's how Paul describes the origin of death.

That Adam's sin sunk us all in this situation where we all must face death. That's why all die, he says here. In this way death comes to all men.

And that's why 100% of people die, because all have sinned. We've all sinned in Adam, our representative. And so we all die.

As in Adam, all die, 1 Corinthians 15.22. And that's why death is so universal and none escape it. It's also why death is so fearful.

[12:36] Because it brings us to judgment. Remember, we just said if death is God's judgment for sin, then we can understand why people are squeamish about death.

Because death brings us to the judge. It brings us not only to the judgment, but if we're outside of Christ, it brings us to what the Bible calls the second death.

There is a death far worse than this first death. It's the second death. It's existence forever in the lake of fire. Revelation chapter 20.

So when we think about why men don't like to talk about death, well, the very nature of death is that it's God's punishment for our sin. Death is a reminder.

We're sinners. And there's a holy God who punishes sin. You don't get away with your sin. We've got an appointment with this God. Indeed, as someone said, that there is that sense of conscience that we know that we will stand before this judge.

[13:42] Romans 1.32. Even people who have never read a Bible, there's this sense of judgment that we must face. Hebrews 9.23 ties these two things together.

It's appointed unto man once to die, and after that, the judgment. Death, judgment. Judgment is followed, or follows death.

So when the separation of the body and spirit takes place, it's not the annihilation of the person. Their body, the Bible says, returns to the ground.

But their spirit returns to God who gave it, and it returns to God who gave it for him to judge it. And the witness of the Scripture is that the spirit returns to God who gave it, and he judges some to eternal heaven and others to eternal hell.

There is this judgment immediately upon death. Job refers to death. And so we shouldn't be surprised that men find death to be fearsome.

[14:46] Job refers to death as the king of terrors. The king of terrors. He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors.

Turn to Hebrews 2.15. Hebrews 2.15. We're going to return to this text, so you might put a marker here.

But just notice that it speaks, verse 16 speaks of those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

All their lives held in slavery by their fear of death. There is this enslaving, these chains, fear of death.

And it's as worldwide as is death itself. Wherever you find death, you find the fear of death. It spans all cultures, all places on the earth, the fear of death.

[15:56] And again, the Bible speaks of it, that men are held captive to the fear of death. And that's why people don't like to talk about death, because they fear it.

King Henry XV issued a command that anyone who spoke of death in his presence would experience it right away.

So we're not going to talk about death in my court, was the attitude of King Henry XV. It is something man tries its best to forget.

It's sort of a denial of the problem, isn't it, for which he has no answer. He has no power over it, no answer to it. Indeed, death reigns over him.

We didn't take time to look beyond Romans chapter 5, but Paul goes on to say that death reigns. Because of Adam's sin, death now reigns. And that's why in Genesis 5, you read, so-and-so lived 523 years, and he died.

[17:02] And he died, and he died, and he died. Death reigns. Death reigns on the planet Earth. Sinners are getting punished for their sin, and they don't have an answer to it.

And so they don't like to think about it. Oprah Winfrey was recently interviewing her New Age spiritual guru, Eckhart Tolle, talking about his book, and raving over his ideas of God and spirituality, and just being a part of the consciousness that is God.

And at one point in the interview, Oprah just says, so what happens to us at death when the body dies? And Eckhart said, I don't give it any thought.

Just, that's it. That's the answer. I don't give it any thought. He just brushed it aside in a nonchalant way. But you know, death won't be brushed aside. Death is stubborn, and it will be there for Eckhart.

It will be there for Oprah. It will be there for you. It will be there for me. You can't just say, I don't give it any thought. You know what Packer says about such? He says, A philosophy that will not teach us how to master death is not worth two pence to us.

[18:16] If your philosophy on life, if your religion, if your idea of what life is about does not answer the problem of death and how to master death, it's not worth a nickel, as we would say here in the States.

So we come then to God's answer to the problem of death. Man is bankrupt before death. Man is powerless, so he's just in dread fear of it or else tries to carve out some pleasure by forgetting about it.

But his pleasure only lasts as long as he can forget about it. There's something wrong with pleasure when you've got to forget reality, isn't there? Something fundamentally wrong. So God does have an answer to the problem of death, and it's here that the gospel of Jesus Christ shines so brightly because it has the answer.

The gospel is good news for us who have to die because it tells us how Christ conquered death.

Give me again the short answer. How has Christ conquered death?

He has done it 100%, okay? Again, if we go back to the barn, life is short. Death is sure.

[19:35] Sin the cause. Now we come to the cure. Christ the cure. Christ conquered death. How did he do it? By making an atonement for his people's sins. Okay, by making an atonement for people's sins.

By rising from the dead. All right, you all have hit the short answer right there. That's it. And we must have both, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Very often, Christians think of Christ conquering death and they run to the empty grave. See? Christ conquered death. But that's not where the Bible takes us.

The Bible first takes us outside Jerusalem to the middle cross and says that's where the victory was won over death. And when we see that, we have another example of that word of Isaiah that God's thoughts are not man's thoughts.

How would you have Christ conquer death? If you could devise a way that this great problem of death could be solved, how would you have it solved?

[20:49] Would you have it solved by Jesus dying? Oh, it looks like defeat rather than victory, doesn't it? It's not the way we think.

We don't think in those terms. But God's ways are higher, far higher than our ways. And so he undoes death.

He conquers death by himself dying. Turn back to Hebrews 2 if you've turned away or if you're still there. That's where we're going. So it is by death that he conquers death.

It's by his death that he conquers death. Notice how the writer to the Hebrews puts it in Hebrews 2, 14 and 15. Since the children, that's the children of God, as you look up a verse, since the children have flesh and blood, he too, that is Christ, 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.

There's not a word here about the resurrection. And I'm not saying that to say that that that's not part of the answer. All I'm saying is that death, the death of Christ, is the first place we must go when we talk about how did Christ conquer death.

[22:21] Now notice this is the reason for the incarnation. Why is it that God, the eternal son, became a man? Why did he take on flesh and blood with us? It was that he might die.

The eternal spirit cannot die, so he must become man that he might die as man and die for man. It was death for man that he died. It was the innocent dying for the guilty one. And that means, therefore, it was death under the wrath of God.

God was punishing our sin in him. He bore the sin and guilt of men, and he took it to the place of punishment and of judgment on the cross, and he received the full payment from God.

So there was wrath in his death that there might not be in ours. So you see how Christ's death sets us free from this enslaving fear of death.

[23:25] He takes the stinger out of death, is how Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 15, 56. The sting of death is what? It's sin.

The sting, the thing that really smarts, the thing that really is hurtful and harmful in death is sin. So if we could somehow get rid of sin, we could get rid of the thing that really hurts about death.

And sin is the chain that holds us in bondage, then, to the fear of death. It's sin that makes us guilty, isn't it? It's sin that makes us liable to God's judgment.

And it's death that takes us to that judgment. So if we could find an answer to sin, we can find an answer to death. And in the cross, the great substitution that took place there, our sin and guilt is transferred to Jesus Christ, and he bears the consequences of it and is judged in our place, suffers God's wrath, so that we don't have to die under God's wrath.

So the worst part of death is defiant. There's no second death for us in our first death. That's because he bore our second death. So without sin, to be judged for, the sting is gone, the chains are broken, the enslaving fear of death is gone.

[25:01] So Paul taunts death. Where, O death, is your victory? Where is it now? Where, O grave, is your victory? Because the sting, or the sting of death is sin, but Christ has delivered us from sin.

And therefore, death has no sting to us as believers. That's why John Owen would write over this passage and would speak of the death of Christ in these ways.

He speaks of the death of death in the death of Jesus Christ. Wrote a book about that. The death of death. How?

How is death going to be killed and died? By the death of Jesus Christ. And yes, it was a death followed by resurrection.

That's the other side of the victory over death. For his death would not conquer death if he remains himself a captive to it. But death could not keep its prey.

[26:05] He rose again, never to die again. Romans 6 says, death no longer has dominion over him. It wasn't like Lazarus, who was raised from the dead and then died again. Not so our Savior. He rose again to never die again.

He says in Revelation 1.18, I died. And behold, I am alive forevermore. Never again to die. I have the keys of death and Hades.

So death has been swallowed up in victory. Christ's victory over death at the cross and at the empty tomb. But we must not jump too quickly to the empty tomb, to the resurrection, lest we fail to see why is it that his resurrection sounds the note of victory over death.

It's because he rose from a death to sin. And by that death that he died, he took away sin so that we don't have that judgment for sin to face after we die.

The resurrection has meaning because of the death that he died. And the death of Christ has meaning because he rose from that death in the resurrection. And so we know that neither life nor death nor anything else in all God's creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[27:33] So in Christ, the very worst that death can do is what? Bring me to the one that I love and the one who loves me.

That's the very worst it can do is to bring you to heaven. That's because Christ died that painful and shameful death of the cross for our sins.

The victory of Christ over death enables Paul to say for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

That's ignorance to the world today to hear a man talk about death being gain isn't it?

Because it isn't gain for them. It's loss. It's eternal loss for them. But in Christ it's eternal gain such that Paul's in a quandary I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far.

Better by far than what? Than living? That's that's nonsense to the world today. But in Christ it's reality. For the Christian the day of death is indeed better than the day of birth.

[28 : 41] when John Wesley saw the Moravians in a storm at sea as he was coming over to do missionary work in Georgia the colony of Georgia back in the 1700s and they were caught in a tremendous storm at sea he saw the Moravian women and their lack of fear and he was trembling in his boots and you know what he concluded?

I'm not a real Christian. I might be a missionary I might be a preacher but I don't even have the root of the matter in my heart. He was converted months later.

But what he saw in them was the reality of this verse that Christ has indeed set them free from that dread slavery to the fear of death and it convicted his heart that he had not yet been set free.

He had not yet found Christ to be his Savior. It was later said I believe of the Methodists that your people die well.

That's the compliment of the world to the Christians to the church. Your people die well. Why is that? It's because of Christ. And so this is the freedom from the fear of death.

[30 : 13] It's a liberty that Christ is one for all of his people. That's what the writer of the Hebrews is saying. This is for you. This emancipation proclamation it's for you. You need to enjoy it.

You need to live in the light of it right now. So Martin Luther says he who fears death or is not willing to die is not sufficiently Christian. And I sit up in my chair when I read that and the next quote is from Calvin and he says 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.

The reality is death is conquered. And there is everything in the death and resurrection of Christ to remove my fear of it.

And I say Lord I believe but help my unbelief. What we need is greater faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So Calvin's Geneva hymn Thou art the life by which alone we live and all our substance and our strength receive.

[31 : 25] Oh comfort us in death's approaching hour. Strong hearted then to face it by thy power. So life is short death is sure sin the cause Christ the cure.

And so Packer calls us to be prepared for death. What he says is that we should be packed up and ready to go. Packed up and ready to go. If death should knock at our door today we're already set. We've already got the ticket we've already got our luggage packed we're ready for it. There's no surprises here. We're packed up anticipating it in Christ.

And yet that's not what we find as certain as death is is it not strange that there are few who are preparing for it. Many are preparing for retirement that have made no preparations for death.

And that's what Stan was saying that most men seem to live as if they would never die. You know it was once a part of Christianity to think about death.

[32 : 39] It was a part of healthy Christianity to think about death and the church taught this as something that we need to do. We need to think about dying.

Now in our day if you think about dying when you're in health you're thought to be a little bit morbid. It's an unhealthy practice. But in reality nothing is more wise than to prepare for this ultimate event that is sure to come to every one of us.

In fact we're not really prepared to live until we have prepared to die. Isn't that the reality of it all?

And so the Bible is over and over directing us to think about death.

Whatever culture says about this practice the Bible is for it. God is for it. Ecclesiastes 7 2. Death is the destiny of every man. The living should take this to heart.

The dead are already off the stage of life. You're still on the stage. This is for you to think about.

This is for you to take to heart to mull over like Mary who pondered these things in her heart.

[33 : 52] Take to heart the fact that death is your destiny. Psalm 90 and verse 12 so teach us to number our days right. He's just talked about the shortness of life the uncertainty of life and he cries out to God oh teach teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom as if to say I can't live wisely in this world until I have reckoned with the number of days that I have left.

Now we don't know that but the point is to reckon with the brevity of life how few are my days that I might gain wisdom on how to live today. Indeed Ken said live each day as if it were your last.

So in conclusion we need to regularly be reminded of two things the shortness of time left before we die that's what these verses have been setting before us teach us to number our days the father of Alexander the great Philip of Macedon was wise then when he charged one of his servants with this chore to every morning say to him Philip remember that you must die now you don't have any servants to charge with that that duty but we would do well to have that reminder more than we do to remember that we must die maybe maybe it's a cemetery and every time you pass it that's Philip's servant saying to you remember John you must die maybe it's a funeral procession maybe it's driving by a funeral home maybe it's reading the obituaries we need to say to ourself remember to John that you must die

Robert Murray McShane painted a setting sun on the dial of his watch and that was his way of remembering how short life is the sun is setting night is coming when no man can work so every time he he he checked the time he's got the the reminder that the night is coming when no man can work so we need to to remember death that we might remember just how short life is and then secondly we need to remember the eternal significance then of the present moment the eternal significance of this moment here and now look at 2nd corinthians 5 and verse 10 it's a it's a verse that's familiar to you in the context of the judgment that is to come after death what judgment and we know 2nd corinthians 5 10 we know we must all appear or be made manifest before the judgment seat of christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body whether good or bad the judgment is going to proceed on the basis of the things done while in the body that's the dash the period of time between your birth and your death things done in the body that's today we are in the body we're not disembodied spirits we're in the body eternity is going to bear the marks of what we do today and so death teaches us the eternal significance significance of the present moment life is just long enough to prepare for eternity this is the sowing time that will determine our eternal harvest

Galatians 6 7 for we reap what we sow eternity is reaping time is sowing and so think of that each day that you rise think of it right now I'm sowing right now I'm planting seeds that will bear a harvest for all eternity well let's live lives packed up and ready to go as Packer said let me just read his concluding remarks how may Christians live their lives packed up and ready to go there's no mystery about it common sense should tell us be wholly committed to Christ's service each day don't touch sin with a barge pole keep short accounts with God think of each hour as God's gift to you to make the most and best of it plan your life budgeting for 70 years

[38 : 58] Psalm 90 and verse 10 and understanding that if your time proves shorter that will not be unfair deprivation but rapid promotion never let the good or the not so good crowd out the best and cheerfully forego what is not the best for the sake of what is live in the present gratefully enjoy its pleasures and work through its pain and work through its pains with God knowing that both the pleasures and the pains are steps on the journey home open all your life to the Lord Jesus and spend time consciously in his company basking in and responding to his love say to yourself often that every day is one day nearer remember that as George Whitfield said man is immortal till his work is done though God alone defines what that work is and get on with what you know to be

God's task for you here and now may God help us then as we think about death to rejoice in the cross and empty tomb of our Savior and so to embrace this moment today Sunday morning and to bear fruit for all of eternity from we we are dismissed