

The Last Enemy

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[0 : 00] Last week we talked about perseverance and preservation.! What we were saying was it's not over until it's over.! You aren't out of the woods until you are out of the woods.

An end. Every war has a final battle.

And the Christian throughout her whole life or his whole life has one last battle to face. One last enemy to look eyeball to eyeball with and to deal with and to face.

And what is the last enemy to be destroyed? Death. Death. We don't normally think of dying as a part of an aspect of the Christian life, but it is because death comes to every man.

Death comes to every man. Have you had a chance to meet Jeremy Sarber, his wife Danae, their daughter Nora? If you haven't, they've been coming for a couple months now.

[1 : 22] Jeremy works as a chaplain of sorts at a funeral home. And it was something that he did down in North Carolina. It's something that he took up again when he moved back up here.

And so this funeral home calls in Jeremy when a family wants a Christian religious service for a funeral and they don't have anyone that can do that.

And I was talking with him a few weeks ago and he said that now 70% of the funerals that this funeral home does involves cremation.

And really they don't want a body. They don't want to talk about death. They don't want to see it or think about it. They want to talk about life.

And it's almost like they want to pretend as if that person just went somewhere else, is out of town or just went away.

[2 : 28] That is becoming more and more the move, the motion of our world away from dealing with the reality of death, trying to make it clean, to make it not there, not so bad.

We ignore it. But no matter how much the world or we put our heads in the sand and pretend like my life is just going to go on its merry old way forever, death comes.

Charles Spurgeon said, if I do not think of death, yet death will think of me. I can ignore it all I want, but death is coming.

There's a whole book in the Bible that makes us reckon with death. It's the book of Ecclesiastes. And it's dealing with the challenges that death and the frustration and the curse of this world proposes to living.

And this is what the book of Ecclesiastes says. A good name is better than fine perfume. He's talking about when you're dead and they come to anoint your body to make it so it doesn't smell.

[3 : 48] He says it's better to have a fine name than even good perfume. A good reputation is better than fine perfume on that day. And then he says, and the day of death, better than the day of birth.

It's better to go to a house of mourning than do a house of feasting. For death is the destiny of every man. The living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter because a sad face is good for the heart.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. But the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. And someone says, what morbid advice.

What morbid advice. What depressing advice. And so he goes on and he says, because I think he really sees that that is how some people are going to react to this advice.

He says, it's better to heed a wise man's rebuke. That's what he just gave us. A wise man's rebuke. Then to listen to the song of fools like the crackling of thorns under the pot.

[5 : 01] So is the laughter of fools. This too is Havel. Meaningless. This too is fleeting and flying away. It won't last.

What he's saying is is the laughter of fools. Those who laugh and act like death is never going to come. It's quickly gone. That laughter is soon popped and seen for what it is.

You can laugh and pretend like death is never going to come. But the laughter of fools lasts for a second. And then it happens. And death comes for the fools too.

Death is the destiny of every man. Your destiny. My destiny. And the living should take it to heart. Psalm 90.

Moses echoes the very same sentiment. And he says teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom. The Puritan Edmund Barker said every Christian has two great works to do in the world.

[6 : 07] To live well and to die well. Your whole life. Two great things to do. To live well and to die well.

Here's Charles Spurgeon. He says we are flying as on some mighty eagle's wings swiftly on towards eternity. Let us then talk about preparing to die.

It is the greatest thing we have to do. And we have soon to do it. So let us talk and think something about it. That was his introduction one day to a sermon he was preaching.

And so let's do what Charles Spurgeon said. Let's think about it and talk about it. First, let's talk about what death is. What death is.

The difference between a dying man and a dead man is really infinite, definite, radical, distinct.

[7 : 10] It's not a continuum. It really is not a continuum. There are whole different categories.

There is truly something awesome and I don't mean that in the good like oh that's awesome.

like awful, full of awe, something other, something beyond description when you see that person is no longer there.

So, we know people through their bodies. That's the way that we engage everyone in this creation, in this life. that's how we express ourselves.

That's how we express our personalities. So, I can see your mood by your posture, your face. You act through your body.

That's how you make your heart known. You know, the mouth speaks. It's the overflow of the heart.

But there is a tongue and there is a mouth and that's how we express what's in our heart.

[8 : 17] That's how we interact with this creation. But, there is that moment when the person is gone. The body is there, but the life is gone.

The soul is gone. And, you see really that there is something about us that transcends the physical. And, maybe that's why so many people are cremating.

Because, they don't want to think about a body. Maybe that's why that dead person is about the most peripheral thing sometimes at their own funerals. Where that is the one thing that we really don't talk about.

Where that person is now, what's happened to that person. We are all desperate to think and pretend that something terrible hasn't happened. happened. And, the person that was there isn't there.

And, if they're not where they were, then where are they? What's happened? Why has this happened? Those are uncomfortable questions. And, they lead to uncomfortable answers.

[9 : 30] And, so, I would rather, and I'm afraid of what I might find. And, I'm afraid for myself because that might possibly happen to me. And, so, I'd rather just ignore the whole thing.

So, that, but that is death. Death is essentially the unnatural separation from life. And, I mean each of those words.

Unnatural separation from life. The first death, the death we have with our bodies, is the death, is this unnatural separation from physical life.

It, it is unnatural. It, it's not the way God meant for us to be. And, so, the parting of body and soul, it is something very unnatural.

And, that's maybe another reason we're afraid of it. It's not something that should be. The second death is the ultimate unnatural separation from life.

[10 : 32] It's the total separation of a whole person. from him who is life. From him who, from God who is life. So, there's this great gulf between heaven and hell.

There's this great gulf between the sinner and hell and the life of God. A person who here and now is spiritually dead, are spiritually, unnaturally separated from God.

Humans were never meant to live without the fear of God, without respect to God, without God as listening to God. Adam and Eve were meant to live with God in the garden, walking and talking, communing and fellowshiping, obeying and believing.

Everything the Lord says, that is what is natural to humans. that's the way it's supposed to be. But when you're spiritually dead, you're unnaturally separated from God.

So, their soul, the spiritually dead person's soul, is dead to God, separated from God. Listen to Ephesians 4, 18. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

[11 : 59] Having lost all sensitivity, is that a dead person? Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.

They're dead to God. They're insensitive to Him. And because they don't have life, they don't enjoy life, they have to try to fill up what is lacking in their own souls.

And so they fill it up with every kind of impurity. It's a continual lust for more. The spiritually dead person doesn't cease to desire and doesn't cease to want something to make them feel alive, make them be alive, but they seek it and pursue it in evil things.

all of that evil, it's just a continual lust for more because it doesn't give them the life that they're seeking. And so that's death.

death. It's this unnatural separation from life. And we were never meant to live without God. We were never meant to live, we were never meant for hell, really.

[13 : 19] I mean, we were never meant to live this life without God. We were never meant to live without our bodies. bodies. It is all very unnatural.

And so that, I think, exposes the common lie that our culture is bought into, that there is a natural circle of life.

So the Lion King's circle of life. The Lion King is wrong. And all the movies and TV shows and books that try to comfort people by saying that dying is as natural as living are just wrong.

People know they're wrong. People experience that it's wrong. And we know it because you just can't look at a dead loved one, a dead spouse or friend, and say, that's natural.

This is the way it's supposed to be. Everything in us says no. that is not the way it's supposed to be.

And repeating it again and again to ourselves won't make it so.

[14 : 35] So what is death? Well, it's not natural. Death is the consequence of sin. The wages of sin is death. And so death is a part of the curse of sin.

people say death is a blessing, a release, a peaceful end. And we can say praise the Lord in Christ, in Christ, underline that, put it in box that in Christ, we can experience all of those.

We can experience all of that in and through death. Death is our entrance into glory. Death is a release from this world and all the pain. It is the end of the war and it is the beginning of peace.

And that's what we can experience through death because of Christ. But that's not what death is in itself. That is so important for you to realize.

That is not what death is in and of itself. Death is an ugly, destructive thing. Paul calls it the last enemy and it is meant to be and it will be destroyed.

[15 : 50] So death outside of Christ is not a blessing. It is a curse. It is not a release. It's really more the jailer handing you over to the torturer.

It's not a peaceful end. It really is a calamitous and terrible and horrific beginning. That's what death is outside of Christ.

Christ. So Jesus looked forward to death. You get these little pictures, these little vignettes in the gospel where he unveils and uncovers his heart where he says, I know this is coming.

And you never get a sense when he is talking about his upcoming death that this is a natural good thing that he's looking forward to. And yeah, we can say his death was a special unique death and that it was an atoning death and that it was especially horrific because all of our sins were going to be on him laid, but yet he died a natural human.

And as a human, he looked forward to death and he did not, he dreaded it. And at the cross, he fought against the curse of death because death isn't just our enemy.

[17 : 15] Death is God's enemy. Death is God's enemy finally. And what I mean by that, we saw last Sunday evening that Jesus wished for the fire of judgment to be kindled on the earth because it was only through this fire of judgment that would consume all of God's enemies, that salvation

would come.

And Revelation says that in the end, on the last day, death itself is thrown into the lake of fire. So the devil, Hades, death, they're all thrown into the lake of fire.

And God judges, condemns death. He destroys it. death of And in this way, God's people are saved. God's people are saved.

Saved from their enemy and saved from his enemy. So Jesus' people are rescued forever from death. But you have to see that death is our enemy.

enemy. And in the final picture, death is Christ's enemy. And he seeks to destroy it because it's one of the works of the devil. It's one of the things that he's done. And so we sing that song, death of death and hell's destruction.

[18 : 36] You know that song, land me safe on Canaan's side. Death of death and hell's destructions are names for Jesus. He's the death of death.

He's the hell's destroyer. Those are names for him. And then we sing, death of death, hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side.

And so now, because we are in Christ, we don't think of death just as it is. We think about it in Christ.

And in Christ, death is a defeated enemy. And that's why for the Christian, death is not without hope. death has been changed into what Paul calls falling asleep.

So take your Bibles and turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. And really, when you fall asleep, you wake up.

[19 : 40] There's resurrection. And that's Paul's point that death for the Christian has been changed, or at least in death, we experience not this ultimate curse, but it is a falling asleep.

So, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 13, and I'm just going to read this little section here. Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep, for the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

And after that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore, encourage each other with these words. Death is falling asleep and resurrection is coming.

[21 : 17] And that's why we can say now, what I want to do is to die well. I wonder, is that one of your aspirations?

I want to die well. if the Lord, if I am one of those who dies before the Lord comes, I want to die well. The first Methodist, it was said, they knew how to die well. So a doctor was talking to Charles Wesley, and he said this, most people die for fear of dying.

I'm not sure exactly what that means, but most people die for fear of dying. They have great fear in their death. But I never met with such people as yours. There are none of them afraid of death, but are calm and patient and resigned to the last.

They knew how to die well. And brothers and sisters, that should be us. That should be something that we long for, that what we want to do.

[22 : 29] It's the last thing we get to do on this earth. We want to do it well. Living to the glory of God, there is a living to the glory of God, and there is a dying to the glory of God.

And so whether you eat or drink, and I'll add whether you live or whether you die, do it all for the glory of God. So how do you die well?

How do you die to the glory of God? And again, this is a part of the Christian life because this is something that you do while you're alive. It is the last thing that you do, but it is something that you do while you're alive on this earth.

So how do you die well? Well, you die with hope. With hope. Hope in Christ.

That's what 1 Thessalonians 4 was really all about. He took on our flesh, Hebrews says, that he might taste death, that he might share in our death, that he might suffer in our place.

[23 : 43] He did die, that is part of the gospel, but he was raised. We preach both, and we need to believe both, and if both are true, then that gives us great hope when we come to our turn to die.

So he was raised, and now we have a living Savior to go through death with. None of us will die alone, even if we're all alone in a hospital.

We'll die with him. And so do you want to die well? You want to die to the glory of God? Well, look to Jesus as the author and perfecter of your faith.

Look at him as the pioneer, the one who goes before. And he is the pioneer. He is the victor. And I will not die alone.

I will die with him, with him at my side. I will die in him. So Christ has conquered death. Christ has conquered him who holds the power of death.

[25 : 01] So how did he do that? Well, he snatched away the devil's weapon, the law that stood against us. So what makes death so horrific is I'm going to face the judge.

And now what if the judge has this prosecuting attorney and I'm a lawbreaker? And the law tells me I'm condemned.

But what Colossians says is now that the law is snatched away, so the devil has no weapon against us. There's nothing that he can do to condemn us.

There's nothing that he can do to even bring our righteousness into question because I am clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And there's nothing that the devil, even with God's law, can say against me.

And so we sing, now the terrors of law and of God have nothing with me to do. My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

[26 : 09] And so we also sing that other song, so with confidence I now draw nigh. With confidence I now draw nigh.

And Father, Abba, Father, cry. What I'm saying is if you want to die well, die believing and hoping in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, holding on to the things that are yours in Christ.

Death is defanged, the devil is disarmed, and now to die is to go to your father. It's to go to your brother.

It's to be gathered with your people. It's to be gathered with your people. And believing that, holding on to that, is how you die well.

You die to the glory of God when you're telling people, this is why I'm not afraid of death. When you carry yourself through that process in a serene and peaceful, calm way, you die to the glory of God as you believe those things.

[27 : 20] So, how do you die well? Well, you see it like Paul saw it. To live is Christ and to die is gain. It's gain.

We depart, he says. It's a sailing term. You have your ship and it's tied to the dock and you loose the rope and you set sail.

That's what dying is. You loose the rope to this earth and then you go sail on Christ's deep, deep love forever to go and be with him is better by far.

So, how do we view death? We're kind of like summarizing here right now. How do we view death? How do we prepare for it? Well, how do we view it?

Well, we see that it's not at all natural. That's important that we hold that true because just hold on a second.

[28 : 21] It's not at all natural. It's an enemy. And yet, because we are in Christ, we can have great hope that not even death can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

We have to continue to believe that this is an enemy. And that is important because it is an enemy. And because when you are going to meet an enemy, it is not the same thing as going to meet a friend for lunch.

Right? death is death is an enemy.

And so you have to seriously prepare yourself for it. But because we are in Christ, we face it with him.

And so how do we view death? How do we go toward it? I think we go toward it seriously. This is not an afternoon lunch with a best friend.

[29 : 45] You go for it seriously, but you go toward it with hope. With hope. it is a defeated enemy, but you have to go through it.

Now, how do we prepare to go through those waters? How do you prepare? I think first you have to realize that you don't know when it's going to happen.

I don't know who said it, but someone said that the young may die. and the old will die. So, you don't know.

You just know it's coming. And I think it also helps to realize you don't know exactly what it's going to be like to die. You've never done that before.

And each death is unique. So, it might be suddenly without preparation, and it might be after a long, drawn-out sickness. And if it is one where it's drawn out, you do need to realize that you don't know how it's going to be exactly for you.

[31 : 03] to be going to do. And what I mean by that is just Pilgrim's Progress has a lot of death scenes of crossing the river, and they're each unique.

And John Bunyan is teaching us something there. Christian didn't know what the waters was going to be like for him when he got there. And Mr.

Honest and Mr. Sedfast and Christiana, they didn't know what the river was going to be like that day. But each one was different. And some people, they went through those waters and it hardly passed their feet.

It was still there, but it hardly went over their toes. They go right over and it's as easy as falling asleep after a long day's work in the yard. As easy as that, as comfortable as that.

Christian went through the same river and it nearly drowned him. It was so frightening. It was so overwhelming. The waters were so high it nearly drowned him.

[32 : 11] He was in great distress. Hopeful had to hold him up. Long last he got on the other side. For one, it was easier.

For another, it was harder. Ferguson says this, and I think this is helpful. At least it's a good illustration. He says, if dying is falling asleep, then we might realize that some of us fall asleep easier than others.

Some fall asleep as soon as their head hits the pillow. Isn't that true? Some of you toss and turn and it's a lot harder. We're different that way.

And what Ferguson says, it might be that way in death. For some people, the end is the worst. It's the last thing and it's really hard.

And for some others, it's easier. And I guess I want to say, and I want to say this to myself, you don't know how it's going to be for you. And so you need to be prepared as best you can.

[33 : 19] But more than that, I think in this area, we need to trust God. Because for some people, the waters are really deep, but that's under God's control. And some people, the waters are really shallow, and that's under his control.

It's enough that he has his reasons. He has his reasons. He has his purposes. Whatever the case is, however it is, we can say with the Lord Jesus and with the psalmist, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

We can hold on to whether it's easy or hard, that we can entrust our souls to God. And we should. So how else do we die? Or how else do we prepare to die well? Jim Elliott said this, when the time comes to die, make sure that all you have to do is die.

let me repeat that. When the time comes to die, make sure that all you have to do is die. In other words, dying is not the time to start living for Christ.

[34 : 31] Dying time is not the time to start living for Christ. Dying is not the time to be saved. There was one thief that was saved in his last hours, in his misery, in his pain, in his agony, but there was only one.

That is not, those are not good odds. Almost everybody dies as they lived.

That's the truth. Almost everybody dies as they lived. Some people have waited until the end. And the problem is that waiting to the end means you're waiting until you're absolutely the hardest spiritually.

A lot of times you're so out of your mind because of pain medication. You cannot focus. It's not easy to be spiritual when you're in pain and you have tubes coming out of you.

And it's not easy to really focus on God when you are in a morphine haze. It's not easy to come to the Lord when you're 97 and in a nursing home and only semi-lucid some of the time.

[35 : 59] Today is the day to be saved. Today is. Today is the day to start living for Jesus Christ now when you can. And I guess I just wonder if you're waiting until the very end and I don't know

that any of you are and I trust that none of you are but if any of you are waiting to the very end I just want you to think of how much of an insult that is to the Lord.

You're going to give him the dregs of your life. I guess I wouldn't be surprised if he just didn't accept it. Because if that's all he's worth to you the very end.

All right. If you believe in those last hours you will be saved but it is not something to count on and it is an insult to wait to the end. So you live for Christ now and the point is so when it comes time to die all you have to do is die.

You don't have to be saved. You don't have to get your conscience clear, clean. All you have to do is die. It's nice at the end of the day when all you have to do is fall asleep.

That's the point. So how do you prepare to die? Well you keep a clear conscience with God and with others. A clear conscience someone said is a wonderful help for dying well.

[37 : 24] when it's all right between you and God and it's all right between you and your fellow man then that's that's the way to die well.

Then you're saying goodbye to people on good terms. Aren't you? You're saying goodbye to them on good terms. Yes you'll see them again but for now you're saying goodbye and you're on good terms with them and you're saying hello to God and you're on good terms with him too.

You need to live like the world is temporal. We have to live like this world is passing away because it is. One of us is going to go first the world or us but either way we're going to be severed from it and so Paul says this world in its present form is passing away.

Therefore those who use the things of the world should live as if not engrossed in them. In other words if this world is passing away and the other side of that is if you're passing away from this world then you need to live like you're not engrossed in the things of this world.

If you're learning to hold on to the things that God has given you with open hands and if you're learning to hold fast to Jesus Christ then the end will be easier. It will be easier.

[38 : 49] Because the things that must be taken away will be taken away and they're not going to be taken away out of your clenched fist and the one who you have to hold on to you'll be practiced in holding on to him.

Jesus talked about where our treasure is and he said giving giving to the poor giving to the Lord is a way that we store up treasures in heaven.

We send our money up there to heaven and he says this that where your treasure is your heart will be also. Where you where you're focusing where your treasure is your heart will follow that and if your treasure is on this earth then your heart will be on this earth and if your treasure is in heaven then your heart will be in heaven.

Your reward your joy is in heaven and then your heart will be there also and so when it comes time to go go to it well then you're going to your treasure that's how you die well go to your treasure and leave this earth behind.

So live like this world is temporal so hold on to this earth and the things of this earth. Yes they are blessings from God yes they are to be used for the glory of God and yes they are even to be enjoyed to the glory of God with thanksgiving but we hold on to them with open hands because they are going to be taken away.

[40 : 18] Now last of all think much of Christ and much of heaven and let that hope cheer you on your way. Glory.

Glory dwells in Emmanuel's land. The king there in his beauty without a veil is seen it were a well spent journey those seven deaths lay between.

Samuel Rutherford says it's the summer morning I've sighed for. The fair sweet morn awakes. The streams on earth I've tasted more deep I'll drink above.

Whom have I in heaven but you and earth has nothing I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Think about that. Think much of Christ. Think of him in his glory. Think of heaven if you want to die well.

[41 : 34] I'm going to end with just two quotes from Charles Spurgeon and I want you to just think about them. Spurgeon said these two things. He said this, the only people for whom I have felt any envy here have been dying members of this church.

The only people he's ever envied are those who are dying. And he said this, the best moment of a Christian's life is his last one because it's the one that is nearest to heaven.

We have so much to look forward to and so it would be wrong to not look forward to it with great joy. So think about heaven, think about Christ, and then live in light of it.

We're dismissed. judgment