

# What Happens When We Die?

*What Does the Bible Teach?*

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sermonaudio.com

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## **Truth Community Fellowship**

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As we start this morning, I want to encourage you to remember the lyrics that we were just singing about the deep, deep love of Jesus, remembering the fact that that is speaking to the motivation which brought to us the saving gospel of Christ. It was because God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, it wasn't simply to accomplish a theological abstraction. It was because God had mercy on souls; it was because Christ wanted to save a people for himself; it was because God wanted to open up the free proclamation of the gospel to every man on the face of the earth. We are the beneficiaries if we are Christians this morning. We are the beneficiaries; we are on the receiving end of that love. Those of us who are indeed redeemed are secure forever in a salvation which we did not plan and which we did not earn. Those of you who are not yet Christians, the deep, deep love of Jesus is appealing to you this morning in what we're going to discuss.

The elders gather together and pray before every service on Sunday morning and one of the things that we were talking about this morning is the fact that there are truly eternal consequences to everything that we do together as a church; there are eternal consequences to the preaching of Scripture. And today, in particular, you're going to see that there are eternal consequences to what we have to say and what we're going to consider and it's just so vital for you to realize that God has brought you here today in an act of mercy and blessing to you. He's extending grace to you by having gathered you here today to come under the sound of the preaching of his word and it's going to be a somewhat uncomfortable topic, at least at the start, but you need to approach everything that is said here, every one of you from those of you that are just 5-6 years old and just barely able to understand some of the words that are used, to those of you that are the most seasoned saints deep into life, those of you who are Christians. Those of you who are not Christians, you need to pay a particular attention this morning because God is reaching out to you and appealing to you through the deep, deep love of Christ, through the deep, deep love of Jesus which is absolutely incontestable. It is incontestable that Christ is favorably disposed toward mankind. Look at the nails in his hand, look at the nails in his feet, remember him hanging on the cross, crying out, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing," and understand that as we proclaim Christ today, that we are proclaiming a loving, merciful, gracious Savior who intends blessing on you if you will only receive it.

We've come today to a critical question as we continue, soon to end our study of the doctrinal grounds that underlie our church. We've done maybe close to 10-12 messages, I didn't bother to count, but we've come to one that is immensely personal and relevant to each one of you today because we're going to answer the question, "What happens when we die?" What happens when we die? Now, this is not the topic that you would choose if you were interested in a seeker-sensitive kind of ministry because there is probably no topic, no subject that men dislike to discuss more than death. We go out of our way to avoid contemplation of our own mortality. It makes us uncomfortable. It threatens us. It saddens us. But, beloved, we can't avoid it. Even though, and let me say this to you in terms of your own accountability to the Scriptures here this morning, it is incumbent upon you, it is imperative for you to engage your heart and to engage the subject matter this morning because there is nothing else in the world, in the entertainment world or the news or anything that's really going to cause you, ask you, call upon you, compel you, to contemplate your own mortality because everyone understands that that makes people uncomfortable and it makes them want to turn away.

But, beloved, that would be utterly foolish for you to do. That would be an insane act of spiritual suicide because you can't avoid the topic of death. Scripture makes that plain. Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The person who sins will die." Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Hebrews 9:27 puts it so pointedly, "It is appointed for men once to die." There is an appointment on your calendar known to God but unknown to you where your earthly life will cease and you will step into eternity. That is inevitable. That is certain to occur unless somehow the Lord comes prior to your death but the outcome will be the same either way: you will suddenly find yourself face-to-face with eternity and the proclamation of the gospel, the proclamation of the Bible is your one and only hope of finding that time to go well for you. And so, beloved, out of the deep, deep love of Jesus, I appeal to you and ask you to listen to what is said today and if you're 7, 8, 9 years old, you're not too young to hear this. The Lord brings this to you and everyone else as well. I want to say this here at this point, beloved: we're here today not to offend your sensibilities, not to make you uncomfortable but we're here to help you. We're here because the gospel matters. We're here because what happens to your eternal soul at the moment of your death is of great inestimable consequence and we care about what happens to you at that moment.

Several of you have buried loved ones in the past year. The topic of death was thrust upon you whether you wanted it or not. Some of you are still spiritually dead in your sin and you need eternal life. Some of you perhaps are like me in the sense that you need some biblical balance to contemplate your own mortality with a greater sense of peace. I've been thinking through these issues in my own life even in preparation for this message and so out of the Spirit and the gracious love, the deep, deep love of Christ, we appeal to you to listen today. Out of the deep, deep love of Christ and the biblical urgency of the gospel, we appeal to you to take heed today, to take note, to listen because you are going to die. Some of you won't be here this time next year. You are going to die. You can't ignore that. You can't deny that. The fact that you don't want that to be true is utterly irrelevant. It's completely irrelevant as the fact that it is irrelevant that you don't like to pay taxes. You still have to pay them anyway. You pay taxes whether you want to

or not. You're going to die whether you want to or not. If you do tax planning, how much more should you do the eternal planning that's necessary for the well-being of your soul?

What is death? Death is the end of life which separates the soul from the body. It is inevitable and because it is inevitable, because the consequences are so unspeakably vast, we have to address this question here this morning, "What happens when we die?"

What's going to happen to you when you die? The answer to that question depends entirely on one thing. There is a two part message here today but it's all pivoting on the same issue: the answer depends on whether you are a born-again Christian or not. That is the determining factor and so we need to look at the negative and the positive aspect of this question in order to see what happens when we die. There are two groups of people in the world: there are Christians and there are non-Christians. Both of them are heading to the same inevitable point of death. They'll come together as two separate streams, they'll meet, as it were, at death and then they'll separate into two different streams yet again. The commonality is death. What distinguishes on this end, on the front end before death is whether you're a Christian or not; what happens afterwards is what we want to know.

Beloved, there is no place else that you can find a reliable source for this kind of information which so desperately impacts your well-being; there is no other place that you can go for an accurate, reliable word than the Bible. Everything else is irrelevant. Everything else would be designed to deceive you and take you away. I understand that there is a great fascination with stories about near-death experiences and foolish books that even Christian publishers put out about people who supposedly have died and gone to heaven and then come back. Those things are all a waste of time; there is nothing reliable in them. Don't look there for what your soul depends upon. Don't look to foolish books supposedly written by a vision given to a four year old boy about what happens when you die. You wouldn't put the keys of your car in the hands of a four year old, why would you put the future understanding of what happens to you when you die to a four year old who is under the influence of his father when the book was written? Why would you do that? It's foolish. No, no, what you need to do, beloved, is you need to take a mature look at the Bible. You need to realize that this book and this book alone is where God has spoken and see what God himself has to say about it and that's what we're going to do today.

What happens when we die? Let me ask you a question, two questions that we'll answer here this morning: are you a non-Christian? Are you still in your sin? Do you maybe come and hang out in a building with other Christians but you've never been renewed within? You've never truly repented and given your life to Christ? You've never truly trusted him to save you? You've never repented and utterly surrendered your life to him? Maybe you come from a Christian family; maybe you speak Christian words; maybe you listen to Christian music on the radio, but in your heart you know you've never been born-again. Maybe you're just a hardened sinner and you don't really care; you don't even know why you're here. "What am I doing here listening to a message about death?" Variations are endless, aren't they?

Well, let me just say that if you're not a Christian, let me tell you what lies just ahead for you. You will die. What happens when you die is the question. You can't escape death. There is a reason why there is no one over 110 years old living on the face of the earth, it's because everybody dies. So are you a non-Christian? I say this out of the deep, deep love of Jesus, I say this with a spirit of earnestness and care for your soul, if you are a non-Christian and you die like that, here's what's going to happen to you: you are going to immediately enter into conscious punishment for your sins. There will be no waiting period. There won't be any soul sleep. It's not that your soul will be annihilated and you will cease to exist. No, no, you see, Scripture makes it clear: you will die and you will enter into conscious punishment for your sins.

Luke 16, turn there with me, if you would. You will go into immediate conscious punishment for your sins and I'm going to read an extended passage which comes from the lips of Christ as he's telling a story about a rich man and about a poor man. So much that we can learn from this passage; we'll focus on just one or two aspects of it. In verse 19 of Luke 16, Jesus said, "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried."

Stop there for just a second. There it is: two streams of life, so to speak, coming together at a common point of death. That's what we were just saying. The rich man had it good in this life, Lazarus did not. They all met, as it were, they met at the intersection of death. What happened? Verse 22, "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried." Now, verse 23, speaking about that rich man, "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he," that is, the rich man, "cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'"

Beloved, let's just make a couple of observations about this rich man who is representative of sinners who die without Christ. What happens? Well, if you're not a Christian, let me just say that you are getting a preview of your future as it stands right now. This is a preview of coming attractions, although it's not very attractive, is it? Jesus has given us a picture of what happens to the unsaved dead. They go to a place of misery, of agony and conscious infliction of punishment for their sins. It's a picture of physical suffering. It's a picture of conscious recognition of torment that is inescapable. There are accusing memories and there is a conscious separation from God, from the blessings of righteousness and there is a declaration that there is no second chance. Look at what

Jesus said at the end of verse 26, “none may cross over from there to us.” The conscious experience of pain is so great that this rich man was begging for a drop of water on his tongue to momentarily alleviate his suffering and Abraham says, “No dice. It's not going to happen. There is a chasm fixed. You are where you're at and you cannot leave there. You are in prison. You are being tormented. You are suffering and I can't help you and neither can Lazarus.” There is no relief that will come to the unsaved dead from outside to alleviate it and they can't get out of it themselves.

So there he is in Hades which is the realm of the unsaved dead, there he is in Hades and he says, “I can't help myself.” He says, “Father Abraham, send somebody from outside to help me.” Abraham says, “No dice.” Do you see how utterly hopeless and frightening this is? This is what the word of God says lies just ahead, just beyond the realm of this life, just beyond that final breath of life and you wake up and ahhhh! The terror of that moment. The conscious recognition that this is too awful for words and, “I can't help myself and no one will help me. No one can help me.” That's what lies just ahead if you're a non-Christian. Death for you will seal your punishment.

Eventually, in the outworking of God's purposes for the last days, you'll experience a bodily resurrection. Not that you would get a second chance to respond to the gospel but you will experience a bodily resurrection that sets you up for the infliction of eternal punishment. Look at Revelation 20, if you would. You know, these things are so awful and all you can do as preacher at this point, all you can do as a pastor, is just trust the Holy Spirit to work in someone's heart because there is a fixed chasm. Let's put it this way: there's a different kind of fixed chasm as well in that your heart is where it's at and I can't cross the chasm into your heart to undo sin, to undo your love for sin and your hatred of Christ; I can't step in there and do anything about that. Just like Lazarus couldn't step into Hades and relieve the punishment, I can't step into your heart and change a thing about it. We are all utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God if anyone is to be rescued from this miserable condition because Scripture says you're dead in your trespasses and sins and if you know that you're not a Christian, there should be an every growing sensibility about you at this very moment, at 9:47 am EDT on March 30, 2014. There should be an ever increasing urgency in your heart that says, “Lord God, help me. I don't know what's going on here in my heart but I don't think I know Christ and this scares me.” That's what should be happening in your heart.

But I can't make you do that. I can't make you respond that way. All I can do is lay the truth out. You have to soften your heart. You have to cry out to Christ. You're a non-Christian. What was there for the rich man is your destiny as it stands right now. I had nothing to gain by telling you this. Evaluate my motives. Why would I say this to you, my unbelieving friend, why would I say this to you? Is this what's going to make you like me? Would that motivate me to say this? No, no, I understand that when you say these things to people they resent it and they turn away. Why would I say it? It's because it's true. It's because I don't want that destiny to fall upon your head but all I can do is tell you. You're the one who has to repent and cry out to Christ.

Now, Revelation 20:11 says, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it," this is at the end of time just prior to the introduction of the eternal state where there will be a final bodily judgment. Right now the realm of the dead, the realm of the unsaved dead is a holding place of punishment until this great moment that is coming. Verse 11 of Revelation 20, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." They wanted to run but they couldn't. "And I saw the dead, the great and the small," the rich and the poor, the Democrats and the Republicans, I saw them all, "standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." Yes, your life will be reviewed at the Judgment Throne and God will hold you to final account for all your sins. That's what this is describing. Verse 13, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades," there's that realm of the unsaved dead, "gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

My unsaved friend, this is the outcome for sinners. This is what happens. God will judge you in the body for the sins that you have done in the body. Your life will be compared to the perfect standard of the law of God and your violations of that law in thought, motive, word and deed will be brought to account and God will punish you for every single one of them. God is a holy God. He is a just God and he will vindicate his righteousness against your violations of it. He will vindicate his righteousness against your rejection of the gospel. He will vindicate his righteousness of your cold, stubborn, indifferent response when people shared Christ with you. God will vindicate his Son. He will vindicate Jesus Christ and Scripture says that the most severe punishment will be reserved for those who rejected the gospel, who trampled on the blood of Christ and said, "I don't want that," and treated it like it was some unclean thing.

Look, I don't bear any fear of that happening to me because I know that I'm a Christian but telling you what lies ahead for you is enough to crush me. It's like there is a huge weight like an anvil just pressing down right now because of the incalculable consequences of which we're speaking and just knowing what Scripture says about the heart of men, I know that some of you are saying, "Just get over it, please." You don't want this to get over. You don't want this to get over until it so works on your heart and convicts you of the fear of God that it would begin to lead you to wisdom which is found in Christ Jesus alone. If you are not a Christian and you are impatient under the hearing of this, you are in desperate spiritual shape because this is reality. You will die. This is what will happen and there is no one other than Christ who can deliver you from it. Why would you be impatient with that? Why?

Matthew 25:46, you can just jot this down, I'm not going to turn there. "These will go away into eternal punishment," a punishment that you could almost say is too horrible to contemplate. Almost, it is horrible and we hate to think about this in one sense but the reason that it's not too horrible to contemplate and you say it's only almost too horrible to

contemplate is because God has revealed this in his word and this is what most people are plunging ahead toward. What would be too horrible to contemplate would be to stay silent on the matter and let people just go into the consequences oblivious to it. My unsaved friend, God does not trifle with your sin. If this seems unfair to you, that's irrelevant. It doesn't matter what you think about it. It really doesn't matter. God's not going to submit his judgment to your approval. It doesn't matter what you or I think about it, the only thing that matters is: is this what God says? And yes it is. Your sin requires this kind of punishment because God is so perfectly holy and your rejection of Christ, your violation of his law, your refusal to hear the gospel – listen to me now – is so horribly blameworthy that the only proper thing for a holy God to do if you remain in that condition would be to send you away and give you the punishment that that deserves. That's the only right thing for God to do for those who trample on his law and trample on his Son.

One author said this, “Those who remain unrepentant when confronted by God's claim on them and who continue in the blasphemy and rebellion which sin implies will face God's just wrath.” The doctrines of purgatory and annihilationism are unbiblical, false lies designed to take the edge off of this teaching as if, well, if you suffer for a few million years, at least it comes out well in the end. No, that's a false promise from a false church. There is no end to this punishment and, my unsaved friend, this is why we preach the gospel to you. We love you too much to let you go. We love you too much to just stand by and watch you go deeper and deeper into your sin, deeper and deeper into your rejection of God's word and to act like that's okay, that it doesn't matter. It does matter. It matters for you. Here's the thing, we sung earlier from Amazing Grace, “it was grace that taught my heart to fear.” You can understand in this context why John Newton penned those words. It is a gracious act of God to bring the fear of eternal judgment on sinners to your consciousness so that you would be awakened to Christ and turn to him for salvation from your otherwise certain fate.

Through his word, Christ is speaking to you now and saying, “This is what's just ahead.” One more time, his Spirit bids you to come to Christ. Will you refuse him in light of everything that we have seen from God's word today? Why? What do you gain? What do you gain, my unsaved friend? What do you gain from rejecting Christ in light of what Scripture says is just ahead for your soul? What do you gain from that? Do you see how much you love yourself, how much you love your sin, how much you must hate Christ at the very bottom of your heart if you can hear the consequences of sin and harden your heart once more and say, “I will not have this man reign over me”? This, if that's still you, this exposes the utter guilt and blackness of your heart if what is immediately ahead of you could be spelled out in such clear terms from Scripture for you and you would still say no. You would still, as it were, put your fingers in your ears and say, “Blah, blah, blah. I can't hear you.” You can hear me. You can hear me. Soften your heart and turn to Christ because even if you don't care about whether you go to hell or not, Christ has brought the gospel to you. I care.

You know, I think, have you ever wondered what a pastor thinks about? This is what I think about sometimes, I think about something like this: I think about the fact that we've

got this little brief window of time that we share together and we come together in a nice room and comfortable surroundings and I think about the fact that a lot of us are going to go to heaven together and yet as it stands now, there are a few of you that will be peeled off and they won't be with us. I think about that, that you would come together and share in the common blessings of grace, hear the same word and yet you would end up in this miserable position of punishment. If I didn't believe in a sovereign God and have confidence in his Spirit and have confidence in his justice, I don't know that I could stand up and preach and tell you these things because the thought of some of you going away into eternal punishment is too great to bear. There is such a contrast to that. Here we are and we're together. One day we won't be and you, my unsaved friend, won't be anywhere to be found unless you repent. I can't stand the thought of that but I'm bound as a steward of the word of God to tell you the truth.

So, what happens when you die? Are you a non-Christian? You've just been told. It takes the element of surprise out of it anyway, huh? At least you won't be so shocked. I don't know if there'll be this kind of conscious recognition. It would be just of God that when you wake up in that horrible condition, one second into it, will be the accusing recognition on your conscience, "I was told and I rejected." Not only will you be suffering, you will realize you are there of your own volition. Wow. Take heed of the gospel, please? Take heed of Christ, please?

Now, if ever a message had a dark and light contrast, if ever there was a switch that went from darkness to light, this is it. Now I get the joy of talking to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Now I get to tell you what Scripture says about us. That brings us to our second point this morning: what happens when you die? Well, the second question is: are you a Christian? I am. I am. What I'm about to describe – you know, I said that talking about hell is like having an anvil on your head that just presses you down, not it's like there are springs in my shoes and I just want to jump and shout because I know what we're going to see here in just a moment. Are you a Christian? I've got good news for you. What we just talked about that happens to the unsaved dead is what Christ has saved you from. It's what Christ came on the cross to deliver you from. Scripture says he came to deliver us from the wrath of God and he has done that to perfection for you if you are a Christian. He has set his eternal deep, deep love on you and Scripture says at the end of Romans 8, he will never let you go.

What happens to a Christian who dies? Brothers and sisters in Christ, you will go instantly and immediately into the presence of Jesus Christ. Your soul will be temporarily separated from your body but Christ has made provision for that. He will bring you into his presence. The Bible doesn't give us many details about this but it tells us enough that we will know that it is a place of blessedness that is – mark this, mark this down and underline it in your notes – it is a place of blessedness that will be far, far better than life on this earth ever was or ever could be. Turn to Philippians 1. Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus shed abroad in our hearts now. While we were yet enemies, Christ loved us and died for us and having brought us in and adopted us into the family of God, he will never let us go. He died for us. He rose for us. He ascended for us. He's coming for us because he wants us to be with him to share in his glory despite our sin. He's poured out blessing



and he's just started. There is so much more blessing to come. Philippians 1:21, here it is in the words of the Apostle Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die," here's our topic for this morning, right? "To die is gain." It's going to be an accrual of something better for me. To die is to gain. It's going to get better. There is more to be had through death than what I can have in this life.

Now, Paul explains that he feels a little bit of conflict in this. As an apostle, as one entrusted with the gospel, he's mindful of the fact that God has given him fruitful ministry while he's there on earth and he wants to see the fruit of that ministry come to pass. Look at verse 22, he says, "But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions," look at what he says in verse 23. Christian, here is what should be the fundamental principle that shapes the way you view death. Paul says, "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." That's not exactly what he said. He said, "That is much better." Ha, no. He said, "That is very much better." It's not going to be a little incremental improvement like if you move from one middle class house into an upper middle class house. This is going to be a translation into a different realm that is so very much better than anything we've ever known. Paul says to be with Christ is very much better. Verse 24, "yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." I'll stay for just a little while longer in the providence and the plan of God but I know that what lies ahead for me is to die and to be with Christ and that will be very much better than what I have known now.

Beloved fellow Christians, death will usher you into the conscious presence of Christ where Scripture says every tear will be wiped away. We will somehow be in the immediate presence of Christ with the one who loved us and gave himself up for us and we will be with him forever and that will be very much better than what we know now. Look at 2 Corinthians 5. Ask me about Roy if I forget to go to Roy after I read this verse. Honestly, just shout out, "What about Roy?" But not until after I read the verse. Maybe I won't forget. 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul says, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." Do you see it as a Christian? To be absent from the body, to die is to be absent from the body, the soul is separated from the body. What Paul says is when that moment occurs, that absence from the body will be to enter into the realm where we are at home with the Lord. You know, don't forget about Roy, you know, when we die and we enter into the presence of Christ, let me assure you of something: at that moment, at that very moment, from the very initial beginning of that whatever that is like, you are going to instantly, immediately, completely realize that you are at home, you are where you belong in a way that you've never felt as a Christian here on earth. We're pilgrims passing through. We're not comfortable with the environment that we're in. We're weighed down by our own sorrows and sins and those around us and life changes and we want it to stay the same but it changes and there's a bit of a heaviness to it if you really stop and think about it. You can never just quite be fully at home here even in the best of times. When you wake up in the presence of Christ, there won't be any sensation of that at all. You're going to wake up in the presence of Christ and there's going to be such a complete, total, pervasive sense of peace, such a complete, total, pervasive sense of joy, a complete, total, pervasive sense of

belonging that says, "This is where I'm supposed to be. I belong here. This is home and this is good." And heaven won't be able to contain the joy of your shouts. It won't be able to contain the overflow of joy inexpressible and full of glory that will be your conscious experience one second after death.

You see, Scripture emphasizes that we will be in the immediate presence of Christ. What did Jesus tell the thief on the cross in Luke 23 that believed in him? "Verily I say to you," what? "Today you will be with me in paradise." Paul says, "To live is Christ and to die is gain. Absent from the body, home with the Lord." The thief on the cross believing in those last hours of extremity in his life, Jesus says, "Today you," by name, "you will be with me in paradise." Hallelujah. Hallelujah. I'm saying it softly because I realize the shouting can sometimes seem just for dramatic effect. Hallelujah. Praise be to the God of our salvation that this is what lies ahead.

Now Christian, look back in your memory, as it were, look back at the prior half hour of this message, look back and you see what's behind me, a black curtain. That's what is behind me anyway, I guess all of you are looking forward to it. There's a black curtain behind you too if you just turned around and looked at it. Sometimes metaphors don't go where you think they're going to go. But in our lives, there's a black curtain behind us. The black curtain of death. The black curtain of judgment. The black curtain of uncertainty and fear. The thing of it is, that black curtain is behind you, what's ahead are the lights of glory. The immediate presence of Christ, welcomed, loved, never to be sent away.

Someone said, "What about Roy?" Let me tell you about Roy and to help you see what this does for your heart. Roy Anderson, one of my favorite old time saints from my former life back in California. Roy was, I don't know, he was 90 something and his family called me because he was dying. It was finally time but his mind was clear and sharp as anything. I walked into his bedroom and they had a really modest home and I walked into their home. They had been married 60 years, 65 years and I walk in and Roy is clear as a bell and I knelt down beside his bed and he knew he was dying, he'd been sick for a little while. I said, "Roy, tell me what you're thinking. What's on your mind right now?" Here's a beautiful thing about it, they've got this queen sized bed and they're laying next to each other holding hands. They're just with each other and Roy is there, clear of mind and just holding the hand of his earthly beloved for 65 years. One of the sweetest pastoral moments I've ever seen. I said, "Roy, what are you thinking?" And he said, "Don, I want to go and be with the Lord." There it is. The end of his Christian life, having spent all of his physical energy, holding the hand of his wife tenderly, looking at a pastor and saying, "The one thing I want is I want to be with the Lord."

Christian, here's the thing: that's what this truth does to you. In the hour of your extremity, you're not afraid. When death is pressing upon you and knocking, as it were, on the door, no fear. No concern. Only a sweet anticipation that looks in the eyes of a pastor or looks in the eyes of your beloved and says with clarity, with a firmness of voice without any doubt or hesitation, saying, "I want to go and be with the Lord." A few days after that, Roy died and then at that same instant, Roy started to live in a way he had

never known before. That, beloved, what happens when you die? If you're a Christian, that's what happens. You enter immediately into the presence of Christ.

Next week, we'll look and we'll talk about the resurrection and what happens as God gives us a glorified body down the road. We'll look at that for next time. For now, all I want you to see is that there is a certain expectation. Certain. Certain. More certain, this expectation is more certain than what you will have for lunch today. It is more certain than what's going to happen in your life. It's more certain than anything. The one great infallible certainty of your life today as a Christian is not what you're going to do tomorrow, not what you're going to do later today, the one infallible, unshakeable certainty is that death will bring you into the presence of Christ and you will then be with him forever and that, beloved, should banish your fear of death. We can contemplate death as Christians from a completely different perspective, not from fear. Oh, you make provisions for your family and you take care and you put your things in order but not out of fear, not as though you were walking into a deep, heavy fog and you didn't know what was going to happen. No, no, when you know this, when you understand this, you realize that you're walking with clarity into a realm that you were created to enter into. You're walking into the realm that God created you to inherit, that was appointed for you before the foundation of the world. That's the realm. The realm of blessing. The realm of Christ. The realm of home.

Christian, that's what belongs to you. That's what's going to happen to you when you die. That's what's going to happen and you've got to settle this in your mind, you've got to establish this as a bedrock thing about which there is no doubt whether you're 21 or whether you're 5 or whether you're 76. You've got to get this anchored into your mind that salvation was about more than this life, it was about rescuing you from damnation and preparing you for your eternal home, making you fit for the holy presence of God. And here's the thing, here's the kicker: when this is settled in your mind then death has lost its sting. Heard a preacher one time comparing it to a bee that had lost its sting. The bee can bounce off your arm but it can't sting you, it can't hurt you like it would with the stinger still attached.

And you never know, beloved, you never know when you're going to need to draw upon this. I have another friend who is in heaven. I can't remember if I've mentioned him here. I don't think I've mentioned this story here but this is an illustration of what this does for you. This is an illustration of where your heart should be and the utter certainty of the confidence that you should have. I guy I went to seminary with 20 years ago, he graduated and went off into ministry back east. Went out for doughnuts kind of late at night with his associate pastor and his, I think, three year old son strapped into the back seat. It's a three minute drive to the shop where he's going to get the doughnuts. You can only imagine what they were talking about. They were in a new ministry; they were doing it together. You know that they loved each other, they were spending time together and he pulls out and bam! He's hit by a drunk driver, thrown across the car. Suddenly, in that instant, his friends head is resting on his shoulder and dying and his son is in the back seat and my friend, whose name was Buddy, Buddy knew that he was dying and in one manner or another, he survived the impact for a few minutes. Firefighters arrived on

the scene, ambulance, the emergency personnel and they're reaching in to take his son out of the vehicle and in a glorious moment of triumph of faith, a glorious moment of victory for the truth of the gospel, my friend Buddy looked into the back seat and said, "Son, you go with the fireman. I'm going to go and see Jesus."

Beloved, when these things are settled in your mind, that's how Christians will die. After 90 years, you can say, "I want to be with the Lord." In a sudden shock of unexpected implosion of death on the scene, you can say, "I'm going to go and see Jesus." Do you see that being a Christian has utterly and completely prepared you for the worst eventuality in life? And there is no fear anymore. Death has lost its sting. The reality of what happens to a Christian who dies banishes the fear of death. Whether we were expecting it or not, Christ will receive us and indeed he who has given us so much already is prepared to give us so much more and according to the words of Scripture, it will go exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think. If we're thinking rightly about death as Christians, yeah, Paul expressed some conflicting emotions, "I'll wait a little bit longer for the sake of the work that's yet to be done. Okay, cool." But in our heart there is a desire that says, "To be with Christ will be very much better," and you start to lift up on your tiptoes and look ahead, "One day that's going to be mine." And that hope transcends any fear of death.

Christian, if you've lived your life from a perspective of fearing death, fearing what might happen to you or to your loved ones, come right here. Come and park it right here, right on this thought, "Absent from the body, home with the Lord. To live is Christ, oh, but to die is gain. Very much better." The Puritan Pastor William Gurnall said this and I quote, "Christian, let the hope of heaven conquer your fear of death. Why should you be afraid to die when you will live by dying?" Praise be to God for his unspeakable gift.

Let's bow in prayer.

Oh my Christian friends, let us not fear death. Let us trust Christ to keep his promises to us. He will keep them more than we can imagine. For my non-Christian friend, won't you repent of sin and receive Christ? Don't you want to share in this blessing, in this glory that Christ has reserved for those who love him? You're at the crossroads of the destiny of your eternal soul. God has given you the truth. He calls you to repent. He commands you to repent. He invites you to come to Christ. He stands with the riches, as it were, the riches of all of heaven, all the riches of Christ and says, "These can belong to you. Won't you come to Christ?" My non-Christian friend, why would you perish knowing the awful fate of the lost? Why would you perish knowing the riches that belong to those of us who know Christ? Why would you perish when Jesus says, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved"? Saved. Delivered from that damnation.

*Father, the issues are clear. The blessing and the curse is obvious from your word. Those of us who know Christ thank you profoundly from the depths of our heart and give you all the glory because we know that we could not have saved ourselves. Father, one last time for now, we'll be back at your throne asking again soon but one last time in this hour, we ask you to send your Spirit to do a regenerating work on the hearts of the lost, Father,*

*that he might open their heart even as Lydia's heart was opened in Acts 16 and they might believe the things that are being spoken, that they might receive the Lord Jesus Christ to save them now. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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