

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Right Thinking About Death and Resurrection

KEY PASSAGE: Philippians 3:20-21 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 27:51 | Luke 16:19-31; 23:43
John 3:3; 14:1-3, 6 | Romans 8:29, 38 | 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 | Philippians 1:22-23 | 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17
2 Timothy 4:6-8 | Hebrews 9:27 | Revelation 20:11-15

SUMMARY

Do you know what's going to happen when you die?

Death is probably the last thing we want to think about, yet it's something everyone must face. The Bible tells us, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment," (Heb. 9:27) so we must have a clear understanding of what happens to us after we die. There is a wide variety of ideas floating around today, but not all of them are accurate. God's Word is the only sure source of information about what awaits us after we die.

SERMON POINTS

For Christians, death is not a cause for fear or uncertainty.

In his writings, the apostle Paul spoke with confidence and clarity on this subject. When he was nearing the end of his life, he looked forward to what awaited him. He told Timothy, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness ... which the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day" (2 Tim. 4:8). He knew that when his soul left his physical body, he would instantly be at home in heaven with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Why do Christians die?

As God's beloved children, we may wonder why we have to experience death. After all, if Jesus saved us and all our sins are forgiven, shouldn't we then be able to avoid death—a consequence of sin? What we must understand is that death is not a punishment

for believers because Jesus bore the full penalty for our sins when He died on the cross. However, God allows us to die because:

- **We live in a fallen world.** When sin entered this world, so did disease, evil, and death. Even though Christians are redeemed from sin, we are not exempt from its consequences. As long as we live on this earth, we'll face the same sorrows, heartaches, and losses other people experience.
- **God uses these experiences to complete our sanctification.** The Lord has predestined us to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29), and the suffering and hardships of this world are how He accomplishes it. Through difficult experiences, we grow in spiritual maturity and learn to comfort others. However, when Jesus calls us home, our sanctification will be complete, and we'll finally be fully conformed to Christ's image.
- **The Lord wants us to live in obedience to Him.** His goal is not to remove us from the hardships of life after salvation. During our stay on earth, God deepens our relationships with Him, enlarges our understanding, and strengthens us through testing. When we respond in obedience, He works in and through us to accomplish His purposes. That's why Paul was so committed to sharing the gospel, and persecution and suffering never stopped him from obeying the Lord.

We should be preparing for death.

Since it is inevitable, we ought to consider whether or not we're prepared to die. Making funeral arrangements is important, but God is primarily concerned with our relationships with Him because they determine where we'll spend eternity. Those

who have not accepted Christ as Savior have good reason to fear death, but believers can have confidence knowing that it's the means by which we are ushered into heaven. Whenever loved ones die, we grieve, but if they were believers, we also celebrate because they are with Jesus. One day, we'll see them again in heaven.

What becomes of us after we die?

Death is a serious issue because there is no second chance to change our eternal destinies. This world is full of faulty information about what happens after we die, so we must always compare these ideas with the absolute truth of God's Word. For instance, Scripture doesn't say:

- **We stay asleep until Jesus comes.** People who hold this view think that, after death, we are unconscious and have no awareness of anything until we're resurrected. But Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Likewise, Paul said that absence from the body means we're home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). If we only sleep until Christ's return, Paul wouldn't have said departing to be with Christ was better than continuing to serve Him here on earth (Phil. 1:22-23).
- **We are annihilated.** Some individuals believe we will simply cease to exist after death. But God's Word says there is no escaping accountability for how we've lived: "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).
- **We go to purgatory.** This view teaches that believers who die must go to purgatory to suffer for the sins they haven't dealt with in life. After they've been adequately punished, they can go to heaven. However, if this is the case, Christ's payment for our sins on the cross was not enough. But the Bible says God placed the sins of the entire world on His Son and that He bore the full penalty for them. When we accept His sacrifice on our behalf, we are completely forgiven. There is no penalty left to pay.

What happens at the resurrection?

There will be a day when Jesus comes in the air to resurrect His people, catching us up to meet Him in the clouds (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Then we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be rewarded for our good works and enjoy those honors for all eternity. But the unrighteous, who haven't accepted Jesus, will be resurrected later and judged before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Rather than gain rewards for a lifetime of obedience and service, they will suffer eternally for refusing Christ's offer of salvation.

RESPONSE

- Since our eternal destinies are determined while we live on earth, everyone needs to prepare now for the day of their death. Going to church, reading the Bible, and praying are all important, but these alone are not enough. Even our good works amount to nothing if we have not accepted Christ's payment for our sins. Each person must ask Jesus for forgiveness and accept His offer of salvation. This simple act of faith guarantees that, when we die, we'll instantly enter into the Lord's presence where we will rejoice for all eternity. Don't put off this crucial decision any longer; nothing is more important than a person's eternal destiny.

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