

Death

by Rolfe Barnard

The Bible teaches that death is a sleep for the believer, but a fearful thing for the unbeliever, and that the ultimate destination of the believer after death is to serve and behold God in heaven.

Duration: 53:45

Scripture: Psalm 119:11, Matthew 25:30, John 8:24, 1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Revelation 20:14, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Death"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by expressing his desire to rejoice with the congregation and offer them challenges, rebukes, or encouragement as needed. He then focuses on the concept of death and contrasts the fate of unbelievers with that of believers. He emphasizes that for unbelievers, death leads to eternal torment, while for believers, it is like sleep, a restful state before awakening to see the face of God. The preacher shares a personal experience of singing at his father's funeral and expresses the joy he felt in preaching and singing during that service.

Transcript

We're going to read a number of verses, beginning at verse 1 of the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John. Now, a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary, and her sister Martha. It was at Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother, Lazarus, was sick.

Therefore his sister sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

When he had heard, therefore, that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that, saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judea again. His disciples said unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought the stone, thee, and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things saith he, and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then saith his disciples, Lord, if he sleepeth, he shall do well, albeit Jesus spake of his death, but they thought that he had spoken of taking a rest in sleep.

Then saith Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there to the intent ye may believe. Nevertheless, let us go unto him. We are making a very hurried trip, and a hard trip this week, to see my mother, who is in her eighties, and who has been paralyzed, and who keeps asking each day when her preacher boy is coming.

It's going to be my privilege, perhaps, the Lord to stay with us until we sit at the bedside of my mother in the flesh, and let her preach to me. My mother has been thinking about this business of death, about the contrast in the word of God between the death of a believer and the death of an unbeliever. Our text is the eleventh verse of that chapter, and our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I go to awaken out of his sleep.

Our Lord is talking about physical death here. We are familiar with the fact that Hebrews 9 tells us, and as it is appointed unto man, wants to die. And after that judgment, so Christ came once in the end of the age to do some things about men and for men who have a red letter, day of appointment to meet, and then one after that.

The very breath of every human being, says the prophet Daniel, is in the hands of God. But our Lord, in this play on words, in the gospel of John, at least gives us room to say this, that in the sense the world understands death, my Lord will not admit that his people will die. He will admit they will fall on sleep, but bless God, the Bible from cover to cover, by precept and sign and plain statement, tells us that they die or sleep, waiting the hour when the Lord shall wake them again.

Sometimes I like to storm, warn, sometimes plead, sometimes to instruct. Tonight I just want to rejoice a little bit with you who are God's people, and trust by God's grace that some of the rejoicing might be a challenge, if you need it, or a rebuke if you need it, or encouragement if you need it, if you without hope in this world and the world come. The Bible says that awaiting the unbeliever is the second death.

The Bible says that awaiting the believer is sleep. The Bible says that awaiting the unbeliever is a death in your sin. For the believer, it's to fall on sleep.

Tonight, if the Lord will enable me, I wanted to give you five blessed truths that grow out of this scripture, our friend Lazarus' sleepeth, and I go to awaken. You may think that I just try to be a little pious when I said that I was looking forward to my mother preaching to me and giving me a word of encouragement, but I am. You needn't kid me, death is a friend and an enemy, and we are more acquainted with its enmity than its friendship.

God knows what he's doing, he's so constructed us that we love life, and we dread the cessation of it as we know it here on this earth. But I've found that as I've talked with people who've known the Lord a long time, and as they come up in the big numbers of years, fast-forward score, I've found that they've got a word for us younger people. I've found that the God who gives grace to live, I don't know this by experience, I know it by experience of others, gives grace to die.

In the Bible, what we call death, and the Lord calls sleep, is harmless for one of his own. There is nothing in death to cause fear for a child of God. It is wonderful that the scriptures teach us that the Lord has removed the sting of death.

It can't sting you if you're one of his own. Now as a boy we used to try to trap yellow jackets, things like that, and take the sting around. I was told then if you did they would die, they had no other reason for existence.

I don't know whether that's so or not, but our Lord did do this for death, in the case of death, for every believing child of God, he took everything out of what we call physical death that can hurt, that can sting, that can cause us to fear. It has no power to hurt the child of God, thank God. Some years ago we accepted a call to come to Winston-Salem, Tulsa, Oklahoma, to work with Piedmont School as evangelist part-time teachers.

We stored our furniture and sold our little home, and left Tulsa, drove down to Okmulgee, Oklahoma, 40 miles away, and spent the night with Mr. and Mrs. R.A. Bazell. That name means nothing to you, but my wife's a half-orphan when she's about two-and-a-half to three. Her mother died and she went to live with her uncle, her mother's brother, and lived with them all her girlhood.

She came to know them as mother and father, even though her father, far away, was still alive and still is. Brother Bazell was a deacon in the first congregation I ever served as under-shepherd. He was a godly man.

He was the type of fellow that usually did the praying for the congregation. But you know what I'm talking about when I say he had what the old-timers said, started giving him a gift that doesn't give many, like we ask somebody to lead us in prayer, we try to pray with you. He was able to lift us up and bring us into the attitude of prayer at unction.

I married into the family. He followed us all over America in the field of evangelism. Then he retired with a terribly bad heart condition.

Bought a little two-and-a-half-acre tract out from Oakmulga and we went by to see him and stay all night. The next morning before we got in the car to head out for Tulsa, about nine or ten years ago now, something like that, he said, Rob, let's take a little walk. I regarded him almost as a father because my father's been gone.

And he regarded me as a son. They never had blood children of their own. We went out to the little barn where he kept a cow and a calf.

You boys quit cutting now and listen to the preacher. And he said, Rob, I want to have a little talk with you. He said, I'll never see you again.

He said, you're going away off into North Carolina. He said, this old ticker of mine is going to tick first last time just any day. He said, you'll be busy and I'll be gone from this earth before you get back.

And he said, I just want to talk to you a little bit, tell you how I loved you. How I tried to pray for you. How I followed you.

How much you've come to mean to me. We had a good time. And I said, Uncle, oh, he's calling him Uncle.

I said, tell me, how is it with you, with your old bad heart? It's a little more sensible to you than it is to most of us. We just can't figure out we're ever going to die. Now, other people die, but not us.

You just can't sit down and think about your own death to save your life. It just can't do it. Now, other people, we pass cemeteries and we know that this is a dying world, but not for ourselves.

I said, how is it with you? Is there any fear? Is there any dread? Is there any loss, a sense of loss? If I live a few million years, I'll never forget what that humble child of God said, son. He said, I look forward to it. I look forward to it.

He said, the Lord's been good to me. I don't think he had just been five hours. Simply to get that old lot of this foolishness gone.

He said, Rob, I'm anxious. I'm anxious to see my Lord. There ain't nothing to fear the child of God.

But for the unbeliever, death is a fearful thing. If the Bible speaks truly and it does, death introduces the unbeliever to that fearful place and there is fear in the wailing of men. Oh, if my Lord acted to ransack heaven's glory and pulverize glory for a while, the cause, they've got to come to the judgment.

A man would do well if he could quieten himself and face the question, how shall I die? How shall I die? You'll not do an unsaved man in harm, do that. You'll not be lost time, I tell you. How shall I die? And the Bible pictures what the world calls death and the Lord calls sleep as a welcome relief after the day of labor has come to a close.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They shall rest from their labors and their works do follow them. Blessed are the dead.

They shall rest from their labors. Death is a portal, it's the elevator from this scene of sin to a paradise of bliss. The Apostle Paul says, to die is gain, to die is gain.

Persecution, the lot of God's people, divided households, father against son, son against father, the lot of God's people. Very few of you, if any, can escape that. Very few of you, if any, do not have blood kin, close blood kin, enemies of God, haters of the grace of God, contradiction of sinners.

I've preached a lot in the North, I think it's getting about that bad in the South. Years ago, went to hold my first meeting, New York City. I was utterly amazed at the crowd.

They just had to seat certain people a night, fasted, say, now you folks, you'll not come back tomorrow night. Other people come. Give them a seat.

I was amazed at the young people, there by the multiplied hundreds. Some of us went down to the drugstore at service one night, and I said to some of the young people, how is it so many of you flock out to the service? One quiet, spoken, fine-looking young man said, Brother Barnard, in New York City is just two places to go, to God's house or to hell. I don't see much other, much difference, Winston-Salem and New York City.

I remember the first time I held a meeting in Detroit, Michigan, the automobile city. I began to get acquainted with the humble men who worked. They began to tell me something of what was up against.

It was in the days when communism was threatening to take over the labor organizations, doing its best. In the days of the Black Legion. In the days when they'd break your arm, do anything to make you join up.

Those godly men told me that the only way a Christian man could pursue his trade in a factory was to take a Bible along with him. Said, you'll need it in the factory. He said, when the communists come and spit at you and curse you, he said, well, they want you to answer them back.

He said, we found the only thing that keeps us going is when they start that. We reach over and get our testament, bury our face in it. The contradiction of sinners.

This old ungodly world. Sleep for the believer is a welcome relief. A.D. Mews used to tell of T.T. Martin.

He never had but two kinds of eating. He'd always go to a town way back yonder. And the first service he'd outline his program of the gospel, declare war.

This is it, he would say. He either left town with multitudes blessed, carry him down like a king to the train, wave their handkerchiefs at him, saying, hold the fort for I'm coming. Or he'd leave a town under police escort to keep the enraged church people from taking his life.

Many a time, Brother Mews said, T.T. Martin, make the train by the grace of God and the skin of his teeth. Said, whatever it was, blessing or cursing, old T.T. Martin, get on that train, stand on the steps. While the people sang to him, he'd wave his handkerchief to enemies or friends and sing on Jordan's stormy banks.

I stand and cast a wishful eye to Canaan's fair and happy land where my possessions lie. T.T. Martin came to his death on the second floor of the Baptist Hospital in Jackson, Mississippi. Mews told me, Ralph, he said nothing ever happened in Mississippi like that.

He said it took the old man about a half a day to die. He said every floor woman, every scrub woman, every doctor, every intern, every nurse, every patient that could walk or crawl or be carried crowded up on that old second floor to listen to T.T. Martin die. And they said, he said his thin, piercing voice, I had the honor of hearing the old man, his thin, piercing voice carried through the corridors of that old hospital.

As old T.T. Martin died singing, I am bound for the promised land. And I am bound for the promised land. Oh, I'm going, I am bound.

He said he died singing. But for the unbeliever, death is the entrance into that place of eternal calm. Examine the word day over night as eternity rolls into eternity.

Wouldn't do you any harm, my dear friend, in this religious world that knows not holiness of life, in this world when men's thoughts are upon everything else except God and the things of eternity. Wouldn't do you any harm, try to sit down for a minute, face question, how will I die? How will I die? The Bible says that for the believer, death is a sleep, and he lies down to rise up again. John 5, 25, 26.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. They that hear shall live. My Lord said, I'm coming, my reward with the believer lies down to await the resurrection morning, when his Lord shall awaken, when his Lord shall awaken.

In our young life, Mrs. Barnard and I sat where you are sitting, as they brought the casket with the body of our firstborn into the little, it was a big tabernacle style church house where I ministered. Another minister stood up, and I preached what's called a funeral sermon. We were young, we'd had our youngster three and a half years, and now we didn't have her.

They wheeled the casket out, put it in the hearse, and we followed it to a stand. They lowered the casket, put the flowers on, wouldn't let us stay. They didn't want to hear clots falling on the caskets of the body of our baby.

We had the funeral in the morning. That afternoon, wife and I slipped away and went out to the cemetery. Already the flowers were beginning to wilt under the sun.

As that little mound covered with flowers, we knelt on either side and drew our tears. The woman, or something about the feminine sex, apprehends truth like this that we old My girl bride, the ref mother, said, it's all right, bro. Patty Sue isn't here.

She's with the Lord. Waiting. He said to our friend, the unbeliever, he dies to be under eternal punishment.

To receive in his body and his soul the death, vengeance of a holy God forever and ever. It'll do you good, my own safe friend. In this day of many doctrines and many beliefs and many everything, except many hearts that face facts and stare out into the future and prove truth.

It'll do you good to solemnly face the question, how shall I die? Die in the works. Die in the works. In the Bible, death or sleep for the believer fits the body.

For the duties of the next day. I'll have some time just for my own heart's blessing to turn over to the 22nd chapter of the revelation and read and not try to learn anything, just read it. At verse 1, and he showed me a pure river, water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river was there the tree of life. It bore twelve manner fruits and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and there shall be no more curse. But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him.

In the Greek word of that, his servants, his willing, loving bond slaves, who found their meat to serve him down here. I got a little taste of it. Bless the Lord, they'll spend eternity doing two things.

First, serving him, and second, beholding him. Verse 4, and they shall see his face. Why sleep for the believer? Death for the believer is like sleep for the body.

You work hard all day, and then you sleep at night, and you're all ready to go the next day. And that's what death is for the believer. It just picks you up to serve him, and behold him, and to see his face.

Preached my own father's funeral service, sang a solo at the service of his request, sang the pearly white city. I had a blessed time. Preaching my father's hymn, singing solo.

I tell you how I had such a good time. My father died while I was on a train trying to get from Fort West, Texas, while I was in school, to Alabama. And I got to Mother's home about midnight, and greeted the loved ones who were there.

Pretty soon, my mother said, son, you want to come with me? And she let me, and opened the door and said, go in. I went in, she shut the door and left me there. And over in the corner was a casket, and the first thing I saw was the lock of cold black hair that always curled here.

And then I stood there in amazement. I read much in the Old Testament of the glory of the Lord. I read about some people when my Lord was here on earth, who were given sight that enabled him to see God.

When they saw somebody just like a man, you know, they held it close. And that glory, that glory was on the face of my old dad. I can see it now.

I didn't get to go. I wished a million times we could have borrowed some more money, enough for early. Why a man couldn't preach, and if he had 10 million years to do it, to undo what I saw on my dad's face.

After a while, when I could get Mother along, I said, Mother, what? She said, what do you mean, son? I said, you know, dad's face. The undertaker couldn't take it out. The draining of the blood couldn't take it out.

Been bombing. The glory of God settled on this countenance. Well, she said, son, I knew you was going to ask me.

She said, what happened after this, why? Said, about an hour before dad went on, he began to call the children in one by one. And he gave them a special blessing, greeting, like old Jacob did his boy. Said, because you was his preacher boy, he saved you for the last, and you weren't there.

But Lovis, my older brother, he went in. My dad couldn't see with his eyes good. His face was all swelled up.

He never knew the difference. My brother took my place. Mother said, dad, said, Roth, my preacher boy, I never got to hear you preach.

Then he made his request about the singer to dispute. And then he said, Roth, Roth, be true to the cross. Said, after a while, dad, still in this world, made a little trip into the next one.

Spreading glory to see his face. They had the casket open, the free willers and the rest of the believer. Well, you've heard me tell it.

Faithful, fine, game veteran. Oh, he said, wonderful. He said, he looked, and there was the choir of Lovis.

He said, he began to walk towards that great heavenly choir. He said, he spied an empty scene. And said, he kept walking.

Pretty soon he could see some letters. And he wondered what the letters were. He kept walking.

Pretty soon he could see it was the letters of some. And he kept walking, and he saw that it was his name. And he said, I went up and took my seat and began to sing.

And I didn't miss a note. I knew the tune had been practiced. I hung you on my pillow.

And the heavenly ledger room. Joy in singing the song of Moses that killed him for the law. And the Lord Jesus that healed him through his blood.

And remember, for the unbeliever, he'll not serve him. Except him. Had an old man there.

It was the old man of the town rake. He showed the result of his life of sin in his face and his countenance everywhere. He never missed a service.

He heard me preach. By the time I preached, we'd have special meetings. He'd be right there.

He'd come to see me about every weekend. We'd drive out from school to minister. And in the summertime, he'd come to see me often.

Sit down and listen to me preach. He believed everything I preached. Used to come and say, boy, preach on.

The preacher I didn't ever did before. He said, I know what I'm talking about. He said, I, no hope for me.

Never could get him to change his tune. He died in that shape. He said, I'll tell you one thing you tell people.

There comes a time even in this life when the pleasures of sin turn into the torments of hell. That's right. And if it'll do it in this life, think what hell will be if that which no longer tastes good is the only occupation of people throughout eternity.

There's some excuse, I guess, for sinning in the flush of youth, the prime of manhood or womanhood. Some pleasure, the Bible says there is. But there's none even for you when you get old in this life.

And the only prospect the unbeliever has is eternity. Doing that which he himself hates, from which he'll never be delivered. It'd pay you, my friend, to consider how you shall die.

There's just two ways to die. Die in your sin. Die in your sin.

Or to die in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's stand together. My mother used to sing a chorus.

I guess it was her favorite. She'd be going about the chores of the house. You'd hear her singing.

I think most of the time she perhaps wasn't conscious she was singing. She'd sing that old, old song you've heard many times. Goes something like this.

I'm going home, I'm going home, I'm going home to sin no, to sin no more, to sin no more. I'm going to sin no more. Your present relationship to the Lord.

Are you willing to die in the shape you're in now? Would you be afraid? How would you feel? How many of you believe that if you die before my old mother that's paralyzed, you'll be well with your soul? Let me see your hand. Let's just let that devil see it. Way up high.

How many of you with eyes closed and heads bowed? Not ready, not willing. You wouldn't want to die in the shape you're in tonight. You're honest.

You'd be afraid to die. If you had any idea you're facing death, to stand right in the face, you'd be scared. You're not ready.

You don't know the Lord. Your sins are not under the Lord. Your sins are not under the Lord.

How many of you with heads bowed and eyes closed? Honest enough to tell me that tonight. Just lift your hand. I don't want to see it.

If the Lord, the invitations come to him, it means look to him. Look away from yourself. Put all your dependence on him.

Make absolute surrender to him. I can't tell you what those things mean. The spirit will have to.

But I know that people who want to know him can know him. We could help you after the service. Better go in the back door if you walk up and say, Preacher, I'm not ready to leave here tonight.

Went out that door into the darkness of the night. Might go out to the darkness of the eternal. We could pray with you, structure, help you.

We'd be delighted to. We can't save you. But we are interested.

You visit with us. Please do not hurry out. Let our people get acquainted with you.

Tell you they're glad you came to visit us. Invite you to come as the Lord. Our father, here's a man not ready to die.

God speak to it. Deal with him. Christ is in reach of his faith.

If he could, oh God, that he lay hold on the Lord Jesus Christ. Him only is our prayer. And brothers here who are on their road to a Christless, graven and eternal hell.

But they are absolutely unaware of what to face. Remember the time we were in that shape. We pray thy continued mercy upon them.

Keep them out of hell, Lord. Dig around them by thy wonderful mercy. For we ask it in the name of him who took this sting out of death.

For everyone who's able to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is our prayer in his blessed name. Amen.

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And remember that John Calvin, in defending the Reformation's regulative principle of worship, or what is sometimes called the scriptural law of worship, commenting on the words of God, which I commanded them not, neither came into my heart, from his commentary on Jeremiah 731, writes, God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, I have not commanded them whatever the Jews devised. There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions than that they are not commanded by God. For when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to his commands, they pervert true religion.

And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship in which they absurdly exercise themselves would fall to the ground. It is indeed a horrible thing for the Papists to seek

to discharge their duties towards God by performing their own superstitions. There is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears.

Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying his word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error. The prophet's words then are very important. When he says that God had commanded no such thing, and that it never came to his mind, as though he had said that men assume too much wisdom when they devise what he never required, nay, what he never knew.

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