

The Death of a Believer & Unbeliever

by Rolfe Barnard

The sermon highlights the contrast between the death of a believer and an unbeliever, emphasizing the believer's hope in eternal life and the unbeliever's fear of death.

Duration: 54:39

Scripture: John 5:25, Revelation 22:1, Revelation 22:3-4

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Mortal Death"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of death for believers as being like sleep for the body. He shares a personal experience of preaching at his father's funeral and how it was a blessed time for him. The preacher emphasizes the importance of facing the reality of death and asks the congregation if they would be willing to die in their current state. He then presents five blessed truths that come from the scripture, highlighting the difference between the fate of unbelievers and believers in death.

Transcript

Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary, and her sister Martha. It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother, Lazarus, was sick. Therefore his sisters 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 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, saying, 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 life of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he, and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death, but they thought that he had spoken of taking a rest and sleep. Then said 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, who has been paralyzed, and who keeps asking each day when her preacher boy is coming. It is going to be my privilege perhaps to stay with us, to sit at the bedside of my mother, and let her preach to me.

I had some experiences like that. My wife received a letter this week that her father, way out in Calvary, is perhaps sick unto death. Somehow or another I have been thinking about this business of death, about the contrast in the word of God between the death of a believer and the life and the death of an unbeliever.

Our text is the eleventh verse of that chapter. Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go to awake him out of his sleep. Our Lord is talking about physical death here.

We are familiar with the fact that Hebrews chapter nine tells us, and as it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the 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 a sense the world understands death. My Lord will not admit that his people will die. He will admit they'll 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 or if you need it, or rebuke if you need it, or encouragement if you need it, if you're without hope in this world and the world to 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 sins.

For the believer is 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 and be a little pious when I said that I'm looking forward to my mother preaching to me and giving me a word of encouragement, but I am. You need to 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 so constructed us that we love life and we dread the cessation of it as we know it here on this earth. But I 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, past four score, I found that they've got a word for us younger people.

I 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, he 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 pick the sting out.

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 help you. It has no power to save you.

So let 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 teacher. We stored our furniture and sold our little home and left Tulsa, drove down to 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 was 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 of her girlhood. She came to know them and to know the Lord and 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's the type of fellow that usually did the prayer for the congregation.

But you know what I'm talking about when I say he had what the old-timers said, umption in prayer. God had given him a gift that doesn't give many. Like we ask somebody to lead us in prayer, we try to pray with him.

He was able to lift us up and bring us into the attitude of prayer at umption. I married into the family. He followed us all over America, the appeal of evangelism.

Then he retired with a terribly bad heart condition. Bought him a little two-and-a-half acre tract out from Okmulgee 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, he said, Rob, let's take a little walk.

I regarded him almost as a father because my father's been gone. He regarded me as a son that 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 this. 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 way off into North Carolina. He said, this old ticker of mine is going to tick for its 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 called 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. You just can't do it. Now, other people, we've passed cemeteries and we know that this is a dying world, but not for our sake.

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. 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 pious. I honestly believe to get that old, a lot of this foolishness is gone.

He said, Rob, I'm anxious. I'm anxious to see my Lord. There ain't nothing about death that can hurt a 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 whose air is filled with the gnashing of teeth and the wailing of men. Oh, if my Lord acted to re-insent heaven's glory and properly's glory for a while to come down here on a mission for men, they've got to die because they've got to come to the judgment.

A man would do well if he could to quiet 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? 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.

Blessings of the blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They shall rest from their labors and their works do follow them. Blessed 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, contradiction of sinners. I 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 in New York City. I was utterly amazed at the crowds.

They just had to seat certain people at night. Bastards said, now you folks, you will not come back tomorrow night. Other people come.

Give them a seat. I was amazed at the young people, there above them 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 services? One quiet-spoken, fine-looking young man said, Brother Barney, in New York City is just two places to go.

To God's house or to hell. I don't see much of it, much difference. Went to Salem in 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 in the factories. 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 organization, 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. Said, when the communists come and spit at you and curse you, he said, what they want you to answer them back.

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 sin.

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 the town and the police escort to keep the enraged church people from taking his life.

Many a time Brother Mews said, T.T. Martin make the train for the grace of God. And the skin of his teeth said, whatever was blessing or cursing, oh T.T. Martin, get on that train, stand on the steps. While the people sang the hymn, he'd wave his handkerchief to enemies or friends, sing on Jordan's stormy bankside, and cast a wistful 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, Rob, 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. He said his thin, piercing voice, I had the honor of hearing the old man. He said his thin, piercing voice carried through the corridors of that old hospital.

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

I am bound for the book of the unbeliever. Death is the entrance into that place of eternal torment. Torment, I've examined the word, restless, torment, no rest for the wicked, but 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 or Christ alive. 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 and face the 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, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50, 51, 52, 54, 56, 56, 57, 57, 58, 59, 60, 60, shall awaken when his Lord shall awaken. In our young life, is that where you are sitting? The body into the little big tabernacle style.

Another minister stood up. I preached what's called a funeral song. They wheeled the casket out, put it in the hearse, and we followed it to a cemetery.

Put the casket, put the flowers on. I stayed in one ear, clots falling on the body. At the funeral in the morning that afternoon, wife and I slipped away, went out to the cemetery.

Already the flowers beginning to wilt. Our tears. The woman, think about the feminine sex.

For him's truth, girl bride, bereft mother, she's, she's sleep. Waiting. And the one who said, our friend lies asleep, shall speak.

But for the unbeliever, he dies to be raised unto eternal punishment. To receive in his body and his soul, the just 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 probe truths. It'll do you good to solemnly face the question, how shall I die? Die, you must! Die, you must! In the Bible, death, the sleep for the believer, fits the body for the duties of the next day. I love some time just for my own heart's blessing, to turn over to the twenty-second chapter of the Revelation and read, not try to learn anything, just read it.

At verse one, and he showed me a pure river of 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. There were twelve men of fruits, and yielded their 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 four, 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, father believer.

This picks you up, the serving, and beholding. To see his face. I preached my own father's funeral service, sang a solo at the service at his request, sang that pearly white city.

I had a blessed time preaching my father's funeral, singing a 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 Worth, 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. My mother said, son, you want to come with me? And she led me, and opened the door and said, go in. I went in, she shut the door and left.

And over in the corner was a casket, and I went over. 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 about the Shekinah, the glory. 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, an only man, they beheld his glory.

And that glory, that glory was on the face. I can see it now. My wife didn't get to go.

I wished a million times we could have borrowed some money, enough for her to go. We were struggling. My man couldn't preach enough sermons, and prove enough facts.

If he had ten million years to do it, to undo what I saw of my dad. After a while, when I could get mother alone, I said, mother, what took his way 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. The embalming. The glory of God settled on his countenance.

Well, she said, son, I knew you were going to ask me. She said, what happened after this? Why? I said, about an hour before dad went home, he began to call the children in, one by one. And he gave them a special blessing, greeting, like old Jacob did his boy.

He said, because you was his preacher boy, he saved you for the last, and you weren't there, but Lois, my older brother, he went in. My dad couldn't see with these eyes, but his face was all swelled up. He never knew the difference.

My brother took my place. Mother said, dad, said, Rob, my preacher boy, I never got to hear you preach. Then he made his request about, then he dismissed me.

Mother said, after he told all the children goodbye, everybody said that, that's the, that we made love. I said, after, dad, still in this world, made a little trip into the next one, and said that look, that shine came on his face. Dad began to say, mother, oh, he said, it's so beautiful.

What's that? But all he'd say, oh, it's so beautiful. That spreading glory of God. You know what was different? That song will not have crossed Jordan alone, wasn't just a song.

That promise, I'll never leave you, no, never, no, never leave you, not to see his face, just to see his face. It's for the glory of him who shall lighten the new Jerusalem, so the need no light that's settled on my desk will be just willed. If they had the casket open, time or two I'd fall a little bit, my little mess.

Oh, heart shells and free willers and the rest of you, let the believer will see his face, will see his face. We'll know the song. You heard me tell it, I'll tell it again.

Faithful finally makes it to the gates and gains entrance. He's had quite a long journey, met lots of disappointments. Said as soon as he got inside, he heard such, oh, he says, wonderful.

He said he looked and there was the Choir of Glory. He said he began to walk toward that grave, heading the choir. The closer he got to it, the more beautiful the singing was.

He said he spied an empty seat in the Choir of Glory. He said he kept walking, pretty soon he could see some letters written on the seat. And he wondered what the letters were.

He kept walking, pretty soon he could see it was the letters of somebody's name. 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 practicing on it. And in the heaven of Jerusalem, the saints of God sang in the song of Moses that killed him for the law, and the Lord Jesus that healed him.

For the unbeliever, he'll not serve Him, he'll not see His face, for they held it down here. All he'll do is sit on, sit on, sit on, sit on, sit on, sit on, sit on. That's the process of serving the little church at Alvord, Texas, going to South Bend or something.

I had an old man there, it was the old man of the town of Lake. 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. In the summertime, he'd come to see me often, sit down and listen to me preach. He believed everything I preached.

He used to come and say, boy, preach on. 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 can tell people, there comes a time even in this life when the pleasures of sin turn into the torments of hell. And if you're good 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 flesh of youth and 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 and 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 sins. Die in your sins or to die in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's sing it together.

Amen. 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 heard many times ago, something like this, I'm going home. I'm going home. I'm going home.

To sin no more. To sin no more. To sin no more.

I'm going home. To sin no more. Fire our heads about tonight.

And if you will, your eyes closed. How many of you give me this testimony tonight? Like you are right now. 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 who's paralyzed, you'll be well with your soul? Let me see your hand. Let's 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.

You'd be afraid to die. If you had any idea of your face and death, you'd stand right in the face. You'd be scared.

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

Your sins are not under you. How many of you with heads bowed and eyes closed? Honest enough to tell me. The invitation has 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 can help you after the service. Instead of going to 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 into the darkness of the eternity. We could pray with you, instruct you, help you. We'd be delighted to.

We can't save you. But we are interested. Remember our special need in the offering tonight.

If 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 leads you. Our Father, here's a man not ready to die. God, speak to him.

Deal with him. Christ is in reach of his faith. If he could, oh God, that he'd 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, that 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, great.

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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