

A Matter of Life and Death

Welcome back to another great time together as we make our way through “Walking with Christ”. Today we’re going to touch on a subject we don’t often talk about: death. At first glance, this doesn’t look like the happiest of subjects. But seventh-century John Climacus urged Christians to use the reality of death to their benefit. He said, “You cannot pass a day devoutly unless you think of it as your last.” He called the thought of death the “most essential of all works” and a gift from God. He wrote, “The man who lives daily with the thought of death is to be admired, and the man who gives himself to it by the hour is surely a saint. A man who has heard himself sentenced to death will not worry about the way theatres are run.”



Fellowship

1. Think about the quote from Climacus, “A man who has heard himself sentenced to death will not worry about the way theatres are run.” If you knew that today was your last, how would you spend it?
2. What would you like to see inscribed on your tombstone?



Discipleship

When he died, his empire was four times the size of Alexander’s and more than twice the size of Rome’s. Yet it survived less than 200 years. Who was this world-class conqueror? None other than Genghis Khan. On his deathbed, Khan was wrapped in blankets, shivering before a small fire. Delirious with pain, he complained: “My descendants will wear gold, they will eat the choicest meats, they will ride the finest horses, they will hold in their arms the most beautiful women and they will forget to whom they owe it all.”

Genghis Khan felt the futility of living a life for what will not last...but it was too late. First Timothy 6:7 says, “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” The only things we will take out of this life are spiritual: our souls and what we’ve done for Christ (including souls we’ve had a part in bringing to the Savior). Our only *investments* that go with us are those we’ve made in our *heavenly* account. THAT is our legacy! The glory that goes to Him through what we’ve accomplished on earth will not fade.

I knew the family of a pastor who moved a lot! Between living in different cities for school, internship and then the pastorate, the inconvenience of uprooting and making new friends would happen frequently. One time, when their children were still young, such a move necessitated a 2 week stay in the church building. Finances were tight and no other option was available. But finally, a small house became available and they began to unpack a few boxes. They all got hungry, so after deciding a trip to McDonald's was in order, they pulled out of the driveway as the 3 year old daughter looked back at the house. She then asked with curiosity, "Are we all done living at *that* house now?"

I love stability and setting down roots, but I need to remind myself daily that this earth is not my true home! Turn with me to our passage for today in Hebrews 11:13-16 and let's read it together (read aloud).

The patriarchs of the Bible lived their earthly lives in tents! They followed where God led them and constantly kept their eyes on their *future* reward. By admitting that we are aliens and strangers on earth, we hold more loosely to what binds us to the temporal and can grasp and enjoy what pertains to the eternal.

This reminds me of the story of an aging missionary couple coming to their homeland after many years of service in a foreign land. A dignitary was aboard the same ship, so the welcoming crowd was large and decorated! Banners, flags and loud cheers were all on-site to announce his arrival. Sadly, no one was there to meet the couple who had known such hardship and given up so much to take the Word to lost souls. After scanning the crowd and seeing no familiar faces, the woman turned to her husband and said, "My heart feels sad. We are finally home and no one could make time to come and greet us after all the hardship we've faced and the long road we've traveled." Wisely, the husband turned to her pain-filled eyes and comforted her with the words, "But darling, we're not home yet!"

Imagine this scene: You are standing on a shore watching a ship sail into the horizon. Her outline against the sunset is so beautiful you can't take your eyes off of her. But finally, just where the sea rises and the sky comes down to meet it, someone at your side observes, "There. She's gone." But is she gone? Only from *your* sight. She is just as large in mast and hull as she was when she left the harbor. Her diminished size is a matter of perspective, and just at the moment when someone at your side says she is gone, on that distant shore there are other eyes watching for her coming and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!"

Death has been swallowed up in victory! Because Jesus has conquered death, Hebrews 2:14-15 says He has FREED us, who all our lives were held in slavery by our fear of death. Do you know people who are afraid to die? Are you one of them? I must admit, I find myself afraid – not of going to be with my Savior and to enjoy heaven for all of eternity – but the pain that I may experience in getting there! Yet, oh, the joy which awaits us! Evangelist D.L. Moody used to say, "Someday you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody...is dead. Don't believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive

than I am now!” God has promised to exchange these perishable bodies for the imperishable that will never decay!

Our neighbor’s cat was run over by a car, and the mother quickly disposed of the remains before her four-year-old son Pablo found out about it. After a few days, though, Pablo finally asked about the cat.

“Pablo, the cat died,” his mother explained. “But it’s all right. He’s up in heaven with God.”

The boy asked, “What in the world would God want with a dead cat?”

I smile whenever I tell that story, and I’m not here to debate about whether your family pet will be in heaven. But what is *not debatable* is that a seed never exceeds in splendor what grows from it! Maybe you are happy with your physical body and would love to have it for the rest of eternity...but I’m not! How encouraging that our physical bodies will truly be changed! You may be in a wheelchair, bed-ridden, nearsighted, struggle with your weight, have arthritis, or be losing your hair! Whatever causes you distress about your earthly body...take heart, brothers and sisters! This world is not your home and these bodies are just a tent!

One of the earliest verses I memorized as a child is James 4:14, comparing our lives to a mist. Mists don’t stick around long! It still surprises me that even as a youngster I was drawn to a verse reminding me of my mortality! But deep inside of me has always been the yearning for something “more”; for something greater than this life, with all its pain and disappointments.

General Stonewall Jackson received a painful wound in battle. One of his fellow officers asked him, “General, how is it you can keep so cool and appear so utterly insensible to danger, in such a storm of bullets and when your hand was hit?”

Gravely and reverently Jackson answered, “Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to always be ready, no matter when it may overtake me.”

There is no fear in death, as long as you have received God’s gift of Jesus and His hope of eternity with Him. You see, God has created us all to be eternal beings. We will all continue on *somewhere*...but you must accept His death that brought you life to be able to look forward to the next one. This earth is not our real home. A new body, home, and rewards for faithfulness await us. Death is really victory, dying is really living, to live is Christ...and to die is gain!

Do you have what it takes to not dread death? Have you accepted Jesus’ free gift...His death in exchange for your spiritual rebirth? If not, you are surrounded by people who would love to share how to do that and pray with you.

If you are a Christian, imagine how it feels for those still in darkness to live in fear of death. Next week we will be talking about heaven, so bring a friend who is still without the hope of heaven. After all...heaven is something we don't want to miss!

3. Read 2 Peter 3:11-14. Are you looking forward to experiencing the new heaven and new earth? How comfortable do you feel on this earth?
4. How does this anticipation challenge your life and Christian walk?
5. Read Romans 8:18-25. What sufferings are you facing now? What is the hope of verse 18?
6. What do you look forward to about your heavenly body (verse 23)? How do you feel in bondage to this earthly one (verse 21)?
7. Read James 4:13-14. How do you feel when reminded of the brevity of life? How does that affect how you live it?
8. Read Philippians 1:20-23. Answering honestly, can you echo Paul's words?
9. From verse 20, we can all imagine how our life might glorify God, but how might our death glorify God?



Ministry

10. All of us have lost loved ones and experienced the pain of this separation, even if we know it's only temporary. Feel free to share your feelings and pray for each other...then celebrate the hope we have.



Evangelism

11. Who can you pray for and invite next week?

