

Are You Prepared to Die?

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Those of you who were present at our prayer meeting on Wednesday will know that yesterday morning found me discharging a very solemn responsibility. And that responsibility was leading the funeral service and the subsequent interment of a former friend and once regular attender here at our assembly. The man moved to Tennessee several years ago; got up this past Tuesday morning to go out and work in his yard. Though an eighty-two year old man, no signs that death was anywhere near at his doorstep, and yet by Tuesday night he lay dead in a funeral parlor. And as I was privileged to take that funeral yesterday and stood to minister the Word of God to those who gathered in that funeral home with an open coffin and the earthly remains of this man some ten feet from me as I stood to speak, and as I stood by his coffin at the graveside just a few minutes after the conclusion of that service and realized that within minutes after leaving that graveside, that coffin with those earthly remains would be let down into the cold earth, I believe I had a sense of the answer to my prayers as to what I should preach upon tonight. As we look back over the past months and much of the ministry, when not in the regular course of preaching through 1 Peter, has been focused on trying to minister to distressed and at times confused and distraught sheep, I realized in anticipating this Lord's Day evening and the privilege and responsibility that would be mine to preach, that it had been some time since there has been a ministry of the Word of God which focused exclusively upon the great central issues of what it is to be right with God, those central fundamental issues of death and of judgment and of the necessity of repentance and faith. And a funeral has a very rude way of rattling one's cage and reminding us that at the end of the day, this is the end of all the living. And barring the coming of the Lord Jesus, someday I will lie lifeless in a coffin while someone preaches at my funeral. And someone will stand at the head of my coffin and say, "We commit the earthly remains of our brother to the ground in the hope of the resurrection." And dear children and young people, barring the coming of the Lord Jesus, someone will stand by your coffin and preach. And someone will stand by your coffin when you are also laid in the cold, damp earth. And realizing that I may never preach again, though I have no premonition, but neither do I have any assurance from heaven, I'm constrained this night to preach to you with the shadow of yesterday's events very much cast over my own spirit. And I want to do so under this topical sermon head of three facts and one important question. And I plead with each one of you, that if you've ever made an effort to listen with both ears, not only externally, but the internal ears of the soul, and if you have any reason to believe that I am something other than a professional cleric--I don't do what I'm doing because it's the only thing I can do to make a living--if you have any sense, dear children, young people, and adults, that I'm not playing games when I'm in this pulpit or doing my professional clerical thing, then I plead with you to give me an earnest and a fair hearing as I seek to speak into the depths of your own soul as we consider these three facts and the one important question that grows out of them.

Fact number one: life is brief and uncertain. Think first of all of those Scriptures that underscore the reality of the brevity of life. In Psalm 90, the great theme of which is Moses the man of God contrasting God's eternity with man's transitory and temporal existence upon the earth. Moses writes in verses 9 and 10, "For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Here Moses says that if we even live out our seventy or our bonus years that make us eighty, yet this life is soon gone. Eighty years soon gone, and we fly away. Or take the testimony of the patriarch Job. And it's particularly significant because these words come in a setting in which Job is greatly distressed with physical discomfort, emotional trauma. And he says in chapter 7, verses 4 and 5 of the book of Job, "When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome." Here is man in tremendous physical trauma, a time when he wonders when a night will pass. He's full of tossing and turning. Yet in the midst of a situation in which time seems to pass so slowly--and some of us have known that kind of intense physical trauma when we have lain upon a bed of pain and looked at a clock in the middle of the night and thought for sure we must have misread the clock when it showed that only five or ten minutes had past, and we thought surely an hour and five or ten minutes had past--yet in that setting look at what Job says in verse 6: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle [swifter than that block of wood that goes through the various strands on the weaver's loom, that shuttle that is thrown back and forth in the process of weaving]." He says, "My days, in spite of the trauma of pain and the tossing to and fro throughout the night, are swifter than a weaver's shuttle." Look at verse 7: "O remember that my life is a breath." Think of it, how many breaths have you breathed sitting here tonight? You inhale. You exhale. Job says, "That's my life." It's one inhalation followed by an exhalation. "My life," he says, "is a breath." The brevity of life. Moses the man of God highlighted it. Job underscored it. Look at what the old man Jacob says in Genesis 47. He's 130 years old, and yet looking back upon that lengthy life, notice how he views it from the perspective of the terminal point of that life. Verse 9: "And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." He lived to be 130, yet compared with the earlier patriarchs, he said, "I've not attained to their length of days. My 130 have been few." He came to the painful awareness of the brevity of life. And how clearly this is underscored by James in James 4:14. Writing to people who are careless and presumptuous about the future he says, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." You are a vapor. You know what a vapor is, don't you, kids? On that cold wintry morning, Dad starts up the car and out of the exhaust pipe comes that what you might call steam. It's that visible vapor. And it looks so thick that on a real cold morning you think you could go out and grab a hunk of it. By the time you got out of the house to go out and grab it, it's gone. It appears for a little time and then it's gone. Or think of the contrail of a jet passing high above us in stable upper air. And sometimes those contrails are as straight and seem to be as dense as something solid. And you look up and see that vapor, and you get involved in what you're doing. You look back in a few minutes and that solid line has been broken up. Look up in a few more minutes, and it's utterly gone. God says that's your life and that's my life. It is a vapor that appears for a little

time and seems to be so substantial and permanent, and yet it is but a vapor. It appears for a little time and then is gone.

Life is not only brief, but it is also uncertain. Proverbs 7:1: "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Now, would you argue with that? We can say, "I think I know what tomorrow will bring." And we listen to the weather prognosticators, and they give us their five day forecast. And we have a reasonable expectation given all of the modern technology that can track the direction and the speed of jet streams and cloud formations--and satellites pouring in information. And we have some reasonable idea of what the weather will be. We have reasonable expectations of the structure of our lives. And that's right and proper, but the text says you do not know what a day may bring forth. And you don't know. There's not a one of you so foolish as to mark yourself a public fool who would dare to stand tonight and say, "I can guarantee what the next twenty-four hours will hold for me." You know better than to do that. You've got enough sense not to mark yourself as a public fool. You and I do not know what a day may bring forth. This is not a Bible scare tactic. This is a statement of a simple, plain observable fact of life. Do not boast of tomorrow, for you and I do not know what a day may bring forth. You see, emergency rooms don't keep specific hours. They are open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Why? Well, if you went to Chilton Hospital, or you went to any other local hospital and did an little interview of all the people in the emergency room and said, "How many of you expected to be in here." They'd look at you like you were crazy. They'd say, "Don't you see the sign? This is the emergency room. This not prescheduled same-day surgery. This is not an admissions to three or four day surgical procedures. This is the emergency room. Do you think I knew this morning that some drunk was going to hit me in the car and I'd come in here with my neck out of whack?" Do you think my wife knew she was going to break her toe in the middle of the night two weeks ago simply stepping out of bed? She would have been one of those you could have interviewed at Chilton's emergency room two weeks ago today at 8:00 in the morning. No, it's an emergency room. Why? We do not know what a day may bring forth. And James underscores life's uncertainty in that same context from which I quoted a moment ago. In James 4:13-14, he says, "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Not only is life brief like a vapor, James says it is uncertain. Most people don't anticipate the aneurysm that in a moment of time takes them from active, intelligent, vigorous life down to death or to where they lie in a hospital bed like a vegetable. They don't anticipate that fall that may radically alter the whole pattern of their life for years to come. The people that in recent days have had all of their life's possessions taken away in a moment of time by the fierceness of a tornado that's come, as it were, out of nowhere, and in minutes has left an area in devastation. A lightning bolt that's left a family in Long Island homeless as it struck in such a way that it ignited the home yesterday afternoon. These are not preacher's scare tactics. This is reality. Life is not only brief; it is uncertain. That person that this afternoon will lie choking in a restaurant on a piece of a \$20 stake didn't anticipate the piece of gristle getting caught in the throat. Life is brief, and life is uncertain. That's a fact, a simple, plain, straightforward, unadorned, non-scare tactic fact. Would you want to debate with that fact and still maintain any reputation of being a rational, reasonable human being? That's fact number one, true for all of us. Life is brief. Should we live to be 130 like Jacob, we would say, "Few as well as evil have been the days of the years of my life." You see, he's marking out life in its daily increments. Your life is a

vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away. You know not what shall be on the morrow.

Second fact: death is unavoidable and sometimes sudden. Death is unavoidable. Romans 5:12 states the fact: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Spiritual death, the judgment of God upon a race that was piggy backed on Adam. The whole world comes under the sentence of death in Adam. And the visible, undeniable, indisputable result of that is that all men die physically. The great ones of the earth, the rich and the famous, the power brokers, the little obscure ones of all ages and all societies and all races and all social, economic standards and structures--death is the universal reality of the human race as it now lies bruised and battered as a result of the fall of our first father. Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed unto men once to die." From the time you and I breathe our first breath in the delivery room at that hospital, only one thing can be said with absolute certainty about that little one with its piercing wail and its first lung fulls of air: he or she, barring the coming of Christ, will die. Once someone records your birth day, only one thing is certain: someone will record your death day. You say, "Pastor, we made the effort to come out to church on a Sunday, and we've got to be told such doleful, weighty...." My friends, smiling won't drive death away. Wishful thinking won't vaporize death. Death is unavoidable--utterly unavoidable for every single one of us. And how we've been reminded of that. Some of us can remember when the teenagers with their buckskin shoes and their bobby socks were screeching and sighing and fainting when old "Blue Eyes" first hit the scene during the second world war. We are old enough to remember when Frank Sinatra was a little skinny kid out of an obscure town in New Jersey. And all of his fame and all of his influence and all of his power--when God said, "It's time to go, Frankie," he went. And there's nothing he could do. All the power brokers in Hollywood couldn't give him one extra minute--he died. And Princess Di with all of her money and all of her influence--when God said, "Your appointment has come, woman," she died. Death is unavoidable. Sitting where you're sitting, one thing is true of you. One thing I can say and know that my prophecy will come true, barring the coming of Christ, every one of you from the youngest to the oldest is going to breathe your last. Somewhere, at some place, at some time, in some set of circumstances, someone's going to say, "He's gone. She's gone." That's reality. Don't stick your head in the sand and say, "If I don't think about it, it will go away." Death will not go away by ignoring its inevitability. It is unavoidable. You and I need to look ourselves in the mirror and say to ourselves, "John, Sally, Mary, Pete, Henry, Albert, what I see in that mirror is going to die."

Not only is death unavoidable, death is sometimes sudden and unexpected. Many times death comes as the spring of life gradually winds down. Many times death does come that way. That's what Moses observed in Psalm 90: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years...." Moses had seen a whole generation in the wilderness with the spring of life wind down and wind down, and one and after another. And one time I calculated how many deaths he saw per week through that wilderness wandering--a frightening amount of them. The tragedy is that so often if life ebbs out as the springs of life wind down, the faculties are so impaired or so occupied with the exertion simply to exist, that the ability to think of important issues is almost a physical and mental and psychological impossibility. So even if you knew you were going to live out your 80 years, how foolish it would be to avoid the serious thoughts about death and its sequel. However, the Word of God and human observation both declare that death

sometimes does come suddenly and unexpectedly. Can you think of the classic illustration of this in the Scriptures? You remember what our Lord taught in Luke 12? He described this wealthy fat cat all ready to retire and live the "good life" somewhere down in the posh retirement sections of Florida or out in some place around Phoenix, Arizona, one of the other retirement havens. And he had it all figured out. Verses 19-20: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. [You've worked hard. You've paid your dues. Now enjoy your golden years.] But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." He hadn't factored in the possibility of a sudden, unexpected death. Apparently he had no pacemaker. Apparently there was no indication that his cholesterol levels were high; that he might be a sitting candidate for a stroke. He worked out three or four times a week. His cardiovascular system was in good shape. He watched his diet; kept his animal fat intake low; supplemented with necessary vitamins. He did everything to make himself think he was going to have a nice long period of his golden years, and God burst his bubble in one night. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Death came upon him suddenly. And the Bible is full of examples of this. And we see it with our own eyes in our own society in our own generation. Think of those--it says they knew not until the flood came and took them all away: children, teenagers, young adults, and old men and women. All but eight who were safe in the ark were suddenly swept away. Think of those men who went out to apprehend the prophet. They went out one day, polishing their buckles and their brass, and they're going to have some fun with the prophet of God. And fire comes down out of heaven in an instance and consumes fifty of them. Think of what's happened in our own day. Those kids who one minute are in a classroom laughing with their peers listening to their teachers, and the fire bell rings, and minutes later they're nothing but slaughtered carcasses out on the school playground. Death came suddenly, unexpectedly. The illustrations abound. These are not preacher's scare tactics, folks. This is reality. This is a fact. Not only is it a fact that life is brief and uncertain, but death is unavoidable and sometimes sudden and unexpected.

But then the third fact is this: that judgment is certain and irreversible. Judgment is certain. Hebrews 9:27-28: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." The paradigm of a fixed and an inseparable relationship between the death of Christ and His coming in triumph for those on whose behalf He died. The inseparable, unbreakable bond between the death of Christ and the fruition of that death is the paradigm of the inseparable relationship between death and judgment. You see, so foundational is this inseparable relationship that it becomes an indisputable paradigm, a framework on which to establish this other reality. Judgment is certain. Jesus stated it in unmistakable terms. He who is Truth incarnate said, "I speak only the words that My Father gives Me." Look at His words in John 5:28-29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Jesus said the hour comes in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth. And it's that truth that gripes one when one stands by the open grave and realizes that, though that coffin is let down into the earth and though with the passing of time what is there in that coffin may be eaten by the worms, as surely as the grave diggers opened up the earth and the funeral directors place the coffin in that hole, the

Son of God will speak, and all that are in the tombs shall come forth, including you, including me. Judgment is certain. Christ will call us from our graves to stand before Him. Look at His words in Matthew 25. Here, again, Truth incarnate is speaking. Verses 31-32: "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Judgment is certain. You have that graphic description of it in Revelation 20 verses 15 and following in which John says,

"And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."

The picture of a certain coming judgment. Judgment is certain. It is not a fable. It is not the invention of sick minds that want to oppress people with guilt trips. It is the reality of our ultimate destiny to stand before the God who made us in that final day of judgment.

And not only is judgment certain, but it is irreversible. Whatever occurs in the judgment is settled for all eternity. Here in the Matthew 25 passage, the Lord goes on to describe His activity, speaking to those who are blessed, speaking to those who are cursed--blessing upon the sheep, cursing upon the goats. Then we read in verse 46 at the conclusion of that passage: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." The same word "eternal" is used with respect to punishment as is used for life. And as sure as that life is a quality of life but also a duration, so the punishment is not only a quality but a duration. The judgment is irreversible. Similarly in the Revelation 20 passage, it says that those who are condemned out of the books are cast into the lake of fire. And what will happen in that horrible reality set forth under the image is described in the earlier verses: the beast and the false prophet cast into that lake of fire; tormented forever and ever. It's a simple, simple reality. As death leaves you, the judgment will find you. And as the judgment finds you, eternity will hold you. Do you get that, dear people, do you get that? As death leaves you, the judgment will find you--no moral, no spiritual, no ethical change between death and judgment. And as the judgment finds you, eternity will hold you. That's a sobering reality--no escape from it. I can remember as a little boy lying upon my bed, and though those were not the words that were in my head, that reality fastened itself upon my young soul. And I lay upon my bed many a night afraid to go to sleep, knowing that if I died in my sleep, as death left me, the judgment would find me. And as the judgment would find me, eternity would hold me. And I can remember thinking in my tortured little boy brain, "But, O God, forever and ever and ever--what is eternity? Forever and ever--surely, God, after so many years...." I thought as a child thought and tried to define and understand eternity in terms of the succession of blocks of time. And I can remember many a night falling to sleep distressed and terrified. You say, "What a horrible thing." No, my friend, I thank God for it, because God was bringing my little boy mind in touch with reality. And the fact that you've been able to pillow your head night after night and year after year with no such thoughts is no credit to your good sense. It's a monument to the power of the devil to blind you to reality and to stupefy you and to benumb you and to paralyze all

efforts to seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near. There will be no systems of appeal in God's day of judgment. There will be no overturning of the verdict because of some discovered irregularity in the legal process. There will be no one to declare that the evidence that condemned you was somehow inadmissible. We read this morning of Him who judges every man's work without respect of persons. Dear children, young people, and adults, this is the third fact that I want you to contemplate and think upon for but a few moments: judgment is certain and irreversible.

Well, we've looked now at these three facts: life is brief and uncertain. Would you debate that? Would you want to prove that to be none fact? You say, "No, I can't deny that." That's a matter of common observation. And also, it is affirmed in the Scriptures. Death is avoidable and sometimes sudden." Would you want to say you're going to be the first one since Adam to find a way to cheat death? Do you really believe when utterly godless, purely mechanistic scientists and philosophers say eventually they're going to find the secrets that will let us perpetuate this life forever? You really don't believe that. You know better. No, death is unavoidable and sometimes sudden. And judgment is certain and irreversible. Those are the three undeniable facts. And that leads to one simple, reasonable, personal important question that I would ask if I had the time, and you would give me the privilege of sitting down with you personally and sitting with every one of you here from the youngest to the oldest: in the light of these three facts, are you prepared to die? Very simple question. Are you, right now, sitting here tonight, prepared to die? Would you want to die, all other reasons being set aside for extending your life and just isolating this issue: what will death do with me? Will it release my spirit from this body to go immediately into the presence of Christ? To be from the body is to be home with the Lord. "I desire," Paul says, "to depart and be with Christ, which is very far much more better." That's a more literal rendering of the Greek. He piles up one thing after another: "It's much much better." Would you be able to say, "Yes, I'm prepared to die, and death holds no terror for me." Are you prepared to die? You say, "How can I be prepared to die? What is the heart of preparation for death?" Well, let me give you three texts of Scripture in answer to that question. First of all, preparation for death is found in a Person. It's not found in what you are, what you do, what you hope to do, what you've not done. But listen to this Person who speaks in John 11:25-26. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Our Lord is using a play on words. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in Me, though he dies physically, yet shall he live." In the day of resurrection, he shall not only be called out of his grave; he'll be called out of his grave to everlasting life. "And whosoever lives and thus believes in Me shall never die." That is, he will never know death as the wages of sin; he will never know death as separation from God; he shall never know death in the torments of hell, for all of that is in death out of Christ, Christ has swallowed up in His own death and in His own resurrection. John Owen rightly entitled his work on the significance of the death of Christ, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Christ took to Himself everything that is penal, everything that is judgmental in death, and He swallowed it up in His agonies upon the cross in His literal death when He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." And by His own resurrection, according to 1 Corinthians 15, He brought out of the tomb with Him in principle and in covenantal engagements of God the Father and God the Spirit all of His redeemed ones. And all who come to Christ and believe upon Christ--they need not fear death, for He says they shall never die.

Yes, they may pass through the valley of the shadow of death. And they may experience death as separation of soul and body. But they do not die in the sense of the terrors of the law coming upon them for the wages of their sin. Christ has borne the curse for us. He has taken all that God's justice demands because of the sins of His people. A second text. How can we be ready to die? The answer is in a Person and believing in Him. Hebrews 2 gives us another strand of the answer. Verses 14-15: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." You see, when the writer to the Hebrews penned these words, he assumes that people not given over to judicial hardness experience a form of bondage when they think of dying and standing before God in the nakedness of their sinfulness. And so they live under the fear of death. One of the tragedies of the paganising of our current American society is that multitudes have no fear of death. I didn't think that's possible, but I've interacted with enough people to believe that they really don't fear death. They have so imbibed a totally secular view of man and of life and of what it's all about. But the writer to the Hebrews speaks of those who through fear of death are crippled with this horrible bondage. And how are we released from that? If I speak to some dear children for whom the thought of death is terrifying; to some who are closer to the end of your threescore and ten or your fourscore years, and you know that the next great crisis in your life is going through the rough door of death, and there is an element of fear and with it bondage. What is the answer of this text? It is to recognize that in the incarnate Lord of glory, the second person of the Godhead, who took to Himself flesh and blood. He took to Himself a true humanity in order that in that humanity He might destroy the one who has the power of death, the devil, to whom we sold ourselves when in our first parents we sinned and aligned ourselves with the him. God came and broke up that alignment and said, "I will put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman." Had God not injected that enmity, we would have all been the willing slaves of the devil forever. But Christ has come. The incarnate God has come. And through His own death, He has destroyed him that had the power of death so that believing in Him we are liberated from that crippling, carking bondage of the fear of death. The answer is in a Person who is incarnate deity who died to destroy the power of the devil himself. And one third text is in Revelation 14, the text I preached on at the funeral parlor yesterday. When we ask the question, "How can I be prepared to die?", this text is very helpful in answering the question. Verse 13: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Blessed (perfectly happy, completely fulfilled with covenant life and blessing from the hand of God) are the dead who die in the Lord. That is, those who, when they come to the rough door of death, they do not come alone. They come in union with Christ. That's what "in the Lord" means. Blessed are the dead who die united to Christ (in Christ), bound to Christ. But you say, "How do I get into Christ? How am I bound to Christ?" From God's perspective, we are bound to Christ when by the Spirit of Christ we are made new. We are born again. We are quickened to life. We are made new creatures. From the human response perspective, we are bound to Christ when by faith we embrace Him as He is offered in the Gospel.

So as we come around full circle, having faced these three sobering facts: life is brief and uncertain; death is unavoidable and sometimes sudden; judgment is certain and

irreversible. And in the light of those facts, we contemplate this important question: "Am I ready to die? How can I be ready to die?" The answer is in a Person who said, "I am the resurrection and the life," in a Person who is incarnate deity who by His death destroyed him that had the power of death that He might deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Those who are in Christ by faith--they and all of them are prepared to die. But they and they only they can contemplate their death as a blessing. Isn't it grievous when people just churn out all of this nonsense, regardless of a person's relation to Christ. If they've suffered a long, lingering death, people so lightly and in a cavalier way say, "Well, they're better off now. They're at rest." Not if they died out of Christ. Their fiercest agonies in this life are playthings to what they now and shall yet experience. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." You see, dear children and young people, you may be able, in God's common grace, having surrounded you with loving parents, stable home, relatively good health--you may be able to think life is very full without Christ. But I want to ask you a very simple question. If you knew you were going to die before this day was over, what comfort could you find in all the things that now fill up your soul and make you indifferent to Christ? Not much, could you? If you were lying on a death bed, would your friends standing around you weeping and holding your hand prepare you to stand before Almighty God? All of your ambitions and plans for the future--if you could materialize them before your own eyes and then touch them with your hands, do you want to cling to them as you go through the rough door of death? There's only one consolation in death, and that's to know that you cling to the pieced hands of the Son of God and that you are in Him by a real and lively faith as the old writers would say. You're united to Him who has already gone into the jaws of death and died death in all of its horrors and came forth in resurrection power and glory and now says to all, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

As I was preparing the message, I thought of some of you dear children. You're in my arms every Lord's Day at the door, and your love for me is in your eyes. And I hope you read my love for you in my eyes and in my arms. And the last thing I want to do is to unnecessarily terrify you. Dear children, let me tell you what I used to tell my children. From time to time I would be called out of bed, and one of the children would say, "Daddy, I've been thinking about God and my sins and dying and what would happen if I died tonight." And again and again I would tell them, "Jesus died for sinners; Jesus promises all who believe in Him are forgiven. No one ever dropped in hell trusting in Jesus. Are you ready to say here and now, 'Lord Jesus, I want to trust in You to forgive my sin?'" And without in any way "decisioning" them and making a monument to what they did, I just pointed them to Christ and said, "Pillow your head with peace if you're trusting in Jesus." And I can say that to any one of you children. If you are trusting only in the Lord Jesus to forgive you, death can do nothing but land you in the presence of Jesus. That's all it can do. It can just chase you up to heaven. That's all it can do--nothing more. But the question is: are you trusting in Jesus? Are you saying,

"Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I have nothing to present to you. I do try to obey mommy an daddy. And I do try to be a good girl, a good boy. But, O Lord, I know I'm not as good as I ought to be. I'm a sinner. And I know my first father, Adam, sinned, and somehow I was connected to him. And what he did affects me. And God, I know that can't earn heaven by what I've done or what I am. But I thank you that you sent your Son to die for sinners. And Lord Jesus, I trust in You and only in You."

You need not be terrified, children. Trusting in Jesus, no one young or old ever died, went to judgment, and was cast into hell.

But those of you who've come beyond those infant years, and you've begun to sort the directions and priorities of your life. You've sat in this place many a time and heard the Word of God preached. I want to ask you sitting here tonight, what grounds do you have to do anything other than go home tonight terrified unless you seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near? You do not know what a day may bring forth. Life is brief and uncertain.

As I was prayerfully considering how I can get inside your head to reason with you, my final perspective is this. Suppose this next coming week you were to be the next living proof that life is uncertain. And I were to receive the unexpected phone call at my study that I received this past Wednesday: "Mr. Boonshire went out to work in his garden on Tuesday, and he dropped dead." Suppose the phone call came: "Pastor Martin, (put your name in there right now in your mind) was killed in an accident at work--on his on her way to this or that was struck by a car and suddenly dead." I want to ask you a simple question. What words of comfort from the Bible could I give were I asked to conduct your funeral? What words of comfort could I give to your mom and dad, to your husband, to your wife. What solid Biblical grounds of comfort could I give to say, "Mom/Dad, I know it's painful and grievous. All the hopes and plans suddenly shoved to one side by the intrusion of death, but listen, it is evident that (your name) was trusting in Christ, looking only to Christ, manifesting a vital attachment to Christ. Our loss is the Savior's gain." We said, "O Lord, I will that they be with us for a long time." But Christ was praying, "Father, I will that those You've given Me be with Me where I am." And His "I will" overruled ours. Could I give that consolation to your husband, to your wife, to your mom, to your dad? Do you see what I'm doing? I'm trying to get you to think seriously about the issue. Are you prepared to die? If not, I urge you to seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. And let him return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. He will multiply pardon. May God grant that the shadows cast over my own spirit from that modest service in a funeral home yesterday will be shadows that will issue in life for some who sit here tonight and find that the Spirit of God through the Word has arrested you, and you say, "I must delay no longer. I cannot afford the luxury of playing Russian roulette with my never-dying soul. Outer darkness, weeping and wailing, gnashing of teeth--it's too serious to trifle with my soul." An incarnate God hanging on a cross, crying out in dereliction, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" His cry of triumph: "It is finished!" "These things will no longer be treated as common place by me. They will become the stuff that mean more to me in life than life itself." May God grant that it shall be so.

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