



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

DEATH — the topic men strive to ignore



O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! Deuteronomy 32:29.

Based upon a sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church by Rev. Ivan Foster.

These words of Moses are a passionate cry, in which he expresses the desire that Israel would give serious thought to that which will come upon her, as a result of her wilful and continual rebellion against the Lord. The consequences of Israel's provocation of God are found in this chapter. The Lord desired that Israel would consider what He had said and be converted from their idolatry. It would do good to all who are tempted to forsake the truth of God and embrace idolatry, to consider what is said here, for it has clearly come to pass in the experience of Israel. In like fashion, all those who in this age turn from God's Word will reap the dreadful harvest of judgment.

Is there not a word for our own land which has gone awhoring after the idols of ecumenism and popery, for a generation now? The price to be paid for such a rejecting of the gospel of saving grace will be high. We see the first payments in the continued success of the undemocratic and pro-terrorist political groupings such as Sinn Fein and the Progressive Unionist Party. These groups, though representing a small minority of public opinion here in Northern Ireland, are nevertheless supported with all the influence and power of the British Government, simply because Prime Minister Tony Blair is in full sympathy with the anti-Protestant goals of such organisations. It has long been the aim of the British Government to break the influence of Ulster Protestantism and so end Northern Ireland's union with Great Britain. Nothing has aided this programme as much as the anti-gospel doctrines of the ecumenists. They have spread a cancer in Ulster which has decimated the evangelical ethos of this province.

We will leave the context of our text and consider the latter end of our days here on earth - our death. Doubtless, God would have us consider our death. For this reason, it is stated in Ecclesiastes 7:2: *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.*

Men are most diligent in avoiding any thought of their death. Man would live for ever, but he cannot. He would cheat the grave, but he cannot. Therefore, he does the next best thing and, being unable to banish death, he banishes all thought of his own death. He will not dwell upon his own demise or, more especially, what will follow it! He may speak of death but it will be in such a form and with such words as to leave his mind and soul untouched by the sentences of his mouth. How often I have overheard people at funerals speak in language that is designed to cloak the reality of what has happened to their friend. They speak of the deceased's "good innings." They ignorantly speak of it "being far better for them", irrespective of the spiritual state of the soul of the one whose passing they mourn. Such utterances are used to avoid consideration of the most vital matter -- HOW WAS IT WITH THEIR SOUL? I have often heard and seen the disapproval of sinners at



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the preaching of the gospel at a funeral service. The one thing many do not wish to hear reference to, at such a gathering, is any mention of the soul and its place in eternity.

How foolish this is! How unwise this is!

It was Moses also who said: *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom* , Psalm 90:12. It is a wise man indeed who takes the length of his days and the approaching end of them into solemn consideration. I would urge such wisdom upon you tonight.

I. THE WISE CONSIDER DEATH

1. They consider its ancestry. From whence has death come? What is its parentage? What are its origins? Such questions will bring us to the Bible. There we learn that death is the penalty for sin. Had not Adam sinned, death would be unknown in our world today. *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* , Romans 5:12. Death is the consequences, the wages of sin. How we ought to hate sin! It is our murderer. Rather, it turns us into a suicide, for we bring about our own eternal destruction through our sins.

2. They consider its universality. All are doomed to die. By the process whereby life is communicated to our offspring, so also we pass on death! The deadly virus of corrupted nature is passed to our offspring so that they become partakers of our sinful natures. All of us were *shapen in iniquity* , Psalm 51:5. We were *estranged* from God and His Word from the womb. We went *astray* as soon we were born, speaking lies, Psalm 58:3. Consequently, death is the universal experience of all mankind.

3. They consider its agonies. Death comes as an enemy, a terrible enemy. It robs the body of its strength, its beauty, its vigour. It lays us all in the dust. All this it does amidst the pain and tears, both of its victims and their loved ones. But after death, what then? O what grief lies beyond the grave for those who die in sin! *The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments*, Luke 16:22-23. Death, the outcome of sin, ushers the sinner into the embrace of damnation, the eternal fruit of our sins. Death is, as it were, the warder who escorts the sinner into the cell of everlasting punishment and locks the door forever.

Dear friend, if you are unsaved, ought you not to give serious and immediate consideration to these matters?

Let me show you also that . . .

II. THE WISE PREPARE FOR DEATH

A right consideration of death and its consequences drives us to seek a way of escape. Bless God there is a way of escape but it must not be neglected! It is the subject of the gospel. *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him* , Hebrews 2:3.



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1. It is a spiritual preparation. It is not the body that we prepare but our souls. The body will be laid in the bosom of mother earth and crumble to dust. That cannot be avoided. It is the experience of both the saved and the unsaved. But it is what happens to the soul after death that is important and over which we have an influence. The story of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, has already been referred to. Both died, yes! But the rich man's soul went to hell, whereas the beggar's soul went to paradise. It is the soul then that must be prepared. It is the soul that ought to be the centre of our attention. It is an inward spiritual work that must be done.

How many are hoping to get to heaven by their outward rituals and works, all of which are linked to the body? For many, religion consists of the lips and the hands and the feet. The Lord said of such: Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men, Isaiah 29:13. It is our heart that needs to be changed in preparation for death. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh, Ezekiel 11:19. Is your heart right with God?

2. It is a divine preparation. It is not something we can do for ourselves. It must be done for us. It is our responsibility to seek after salvation but we cannot save ourselves. We must partake of the labours of another, even Jesus. *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man*, Hebrews 2:9. He savoured the bitterness of death in its fulness for those who are His people. If we would be prepared we must partake of the redemption that Christ purchased at the cross and which He freely proffers in the gospel. I am saved from the eternal consequences of death through embracing the sufferings and death of Christ as mine.

Upon a life a I did not live, Upon a death I did not die, Another's life, Another's death, I stake my whole eternity.

God's salvation is enjoyed by those depending upon Christ as their substitute. He suffered, the just for the unjust, to reconcile us to God so that when we die, instead of going to hell where we deserve to go, we are welcomed into the presence of God. Our sins have been paid for by Christ, the One we made our Saviour by believing in Him. Listen to His words: *And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*, John 11:26. *This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die*, John 6:50. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, John 3:16. Believe on Christ and your soul will not endure the second death which is the lake of fire, Rev 20:14-15. The thief, on the cross beside the Saviour, believed on Him in the closing moments of his life. When he died, he went to heaven. How do we know? Christ told the man that it would be so. And Jesus said unto him, *Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*, Luke 23:43.

3. It is an urgent preparation. We could die tonight. *Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*, Proverbs 27:1. Remember the story of the



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man Christ called a fool. *And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 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. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luke 12:16-20.* The greatest possible urgency is required! Tomorrow you could be in eternity. What then of your soul?

III. THE WISE WELCOME DEATH

Those who give due consideration to this matter die an enviable death.

1. Because of the companionship they enjoy. Consider these words which comfort the Christian when he thinks of death. *For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death*, Psalm 48:14. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*, Psalm 23:4. *He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*, Hebrews 13:5. The presence of Christ is especially promised to believers at the time of their death. Little wonder the old false prophet Balaam uttered those memorable words: *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!* Numbers 23:10. If you could but conceive for a moment the joy of the Christian's death you too would wish for such a latter end.

2. Because it marks the end of life's trials. Our leaving this mortal body will sever us from sin's plagues and life's trials. It marks the dawn of the perfect day. *But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*, Proverbs 4:18.

3. Because it ushers us into the glorious presence of Christ. *But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?* Job 14:10. As far as the believer in Christ is concerned, the answer to that question is simple. He is in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle stated it so. *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*, 2 Corinthians 5:8. Here is something that the child of God is confident about. We need have no doubts. The word absent in this verse means to emigrate. How precious that is! The Christian at the end of his days emigrates to heaven. Our entrance is assured. We have our passport for we are born again. We have our citizen's papers for long ago God delivered us from *the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*, Colossians 1:13.

My friend, please consider this matter. Death is inevitable. It cannot be avoided and if you die in your sins, Christ said: *Whither I go, ye cannot come*, John 8:21. Call on Christ today and be saved.