

2. Death in a Sinful World (4Q 2022—Life Everlasting: On Death, Dying, and the Future Hope)

Biblical material: Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 3:1–7; Ps.115:17; John 5:28, 29; Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Quotes

- None of us, in our culture of comfort, know how to prepare ourselves for dying, but that's what we should do every day. Every single day, we die a thousand deaths. *Joni Eareckson Tada*
- Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. *Steve Jobs*
- Pale Death beats equally at the poor man's gate and at the palaces of kings. *Horace*
- There's something about death that is comforting. The thought that you could die tomorrow frees you to appreciate your life now. *Angelina Jolie*
- For death is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity. *William Penn*

Questions

Is death a punishment or a consequence? How do we explain the impact of sin on the world God created? Why is the prospect of death so troubling, particularly in our modern society? Is it "fair" that we are under a "death sentence" because of the sin of our first parents? How can we speak about death without making trite, well-meaning but ultimately unhelpful comments?

Bible summary

"The Lord God ordered Adam, "You are free to eat fruit from every tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because the day you eat from it you are certain to die." Gen. 2:16, 17 FBV. The temptation and the fall of Adam and Eve is recorded in Gen. 3:1–7. Ps.115:17 identifies the non-conscious state of the dead. Jesus promises resurrection in John 5:28, 29. "Now that we are made right by his death, we can be absolutely sure we'll be saved by him from the coming judgment. While we were his enemies, God made us his friends through the death of his Son, and so we can be absolutely sure that he will save us through the life of his Son. In addition to this we now celebrate what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ to reconcile us and make us his friends. For through one man sin entered the world, and sin led to death. In this way death came to everyone, for everyone sinned." Rom. 5:9-12 FBV. "God made Jesus, who never personally sinned, experience the consequences of sin so that we could have a character that is good and right just as God is good and right." 2 Cor. 5:21 FBV.

Comment

The subject of death is very much shunned in our society. It is just about the only taboo subject left! We focus of youth and being active. Death is just such a negative that we do not want to face it.

This has not always been so. In most of human history death was a frequent visitor because of the high mortality rate. Additionally, people coped with death and even made sure to remember death: "memento mori"—remember that you will die. Such a view found expression in medieval paintings and sculpture of subjects holding skulls,

Different societies have their own ways of relating to death, but common to all is an attempt to cope with the experience of death for both the dying and those left behind. It is here that religion plays its most prominent role. In fact some have suggested that religion is based on giving answers

to death—what happens when we die. There are of course many answers: reincarnation, soul migration, absorption into the Infinite, resurrection, progress through astral planes—or nothing!

In our world death is that “thing” that never happens to you. That ugly, unspoken word. The one nobody wants to talk about.

In Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* children are taken into wards full of dying patients to cure this death dread, to make death seem normal. The idea is that repeated exposure to death will somehow make it more acceptable.

But death is not “natural,” not the way this world was meant to be. Deep inside we feel “rage against the dying of the light” (Dylan Thomas), a bitter anger that all this should be for nothing. And whatever we may say to rationalize our fears, to claim death is natural, that death is perfectly reasonable and acceptable—we know we lie. Yes death is a fact of life, life’s only certainty, inescapable. It comes to every man, woman and child—and animal and plant and bug and microbe... But to say this is right and proper and good...?

We’re born under the curse of death. In the words of Bernard Shaw’s chilling statistic: “One out of one dies.” In Adam we all die. Separation from the divine source of life is death. Our sins have separated us, built up a barrier of evil, and the wage that sin pays is death—an automatic consequence of the way we are. (1 Corinthians 15:22; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23.) So for us, that’s it. No escape. No alternative. No hope. Whatever we try to do, we can’t change the fact of death. Fountains of eternal youth, cryogenic chambers, miracle drugs—all failures that cannot deliver what they promise.

What is life? A sparrow flying out of the darkness into the warmth and light of a banqueting hall for a time. And then flying through a window on life’s far side, to disappear once more into the darkness. This was the old Anglo-Saxon picture of life, expressing a dark and fatalistic understanding. Truly that’s all we have. In ourselves, there is nothing more. But...

We cannot leave the discussion there. If you do believe in this Jesus and his resurrection from the dead (which is the heart of the Christian message), then Jesus says to you: “I tell you the truth: those who follow what I say and trust the one who sent me have eternal life. They won’t be condemned, but have gone from death to life.” John 5:24 FBV.

Not that we won’t die. But we are now spiritually alive. Death will be just a brief sleep until the trumpet call of God splits the skies as Jesus returns, “and the dead in Christ will rise.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The arrival of the destroyer of death, the conqueror of the grave.

Ellen White Comments

Satan is the author of death. What did Christ do after He brought Satan under the dominion of death? The very last words of Christ while expiring on the cross were “It is finished” (John 19:30). The devil saw that he had overdone himself. Christ by dying accomplished the death of Satan and brought immortality to light. {CTr 287}

Moses was directed to lift up a brazen serpent and bid all the wounded look to it and live... The dead and dying were all around them, and they knew without divine help their fate was certain... While we realize our helpless condition without Christ, we must not be discouraged; we must rely upon a crucified and risen Saviour. Poor, sin-sick, discouraged soul, look and live. Jesus has pledged His word; He will save all who come unto Him.

Come to Jesus, and receive rest and peace. You may have the blessing even now. Satan suggests that you are helpless and cannot bless yourself. It is true; you are helpless. But lift up Jesus before him... Let no one here feel that his case is hopeless, for it is not. You may see that you are sinful and undone, but it is just on this account that you need a Saviour. {FW 37}