

Death

FROM THE
OTHER SIDE

YOUR MINISTRY TO THE BEREAVED

PAUL W. POWELL

**All scripture quotations are from the King
James Version of the Bible(KJV)**

**©1991 by Annuity Board of the Southern
Baptist Convention**

**All Rights Reserved
Printed in the United States**

Dedication

*To all God's servants
who minister in times
of grief.*

*We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.*

John Fawcett

Introduction

Dear Fellow Ministers

I will never forget my first funeral as a young pastor. I was terrified. The deceased, a truck driver, had been burned to death when his truck collided with a car and exploded. He left behind a wife, three young children, and his parents. His body was burned so badly the family couldn't even view the remains.

What could I say to comfort this grieving family? Where could I turn for help in preparing the funeral sermon? When I began my preparation I found almost no funeral sermons in print. I was on my own. What I would have given for a volume funeral messages to get me started.

I think the idea for this book was born that day. Now, thirty-five years and almost 500 funerals later, I have put together this volume of brief funeral messages. I hope it will supply for you what I was looking for that day years ago. If you find in it a text, an idea, an illustration or a whole sermon that will make your task easier, my work will have been sufficiently rewarded.

God bless you in your important work.

Sincerely,

Paul W. Powell

Contents

Introduction	7
The importance of the Funeral Service	11
Preparation of the Funeral Sermon	15
1. God Our Helper	21
2. Faith To Go On	27
3. Our Confidence in God	35
4. It is Well With My Soul.....	41
5. The Promise of Heaven	49
6. Victory in the Valleys of Life	55
7. When is a Man Ready to Die?	61
8. Death from the Other Side	67
After the Funeral is Over	75
Additional Sermon Outlines	83

The Importance of the Funeral Service

There are few responsibilities of the pastor that present a greater challenge or offer a greater opportunity to minister than a funeral sermon. In times of sorrow and loss many people look to God and are more open to Him than any other time in their lives. When the funeral service is conducted correctly, the minister becomes an instrument of God for bringing God and persons together. It becomes an important means of ministry.

In my years as a pastor I conducted almost 500 funerals over a period of 35 years. Like most experienced pastors, I have confronted every situation imaginable - babies stillborn, children dying of leukemia, young people killed in accidents, murders, suicides, men in the prime of life dying from massive heart attacks, young mothers dying of cancer and, of course, the elderly dying of old age.

Through the years and tears of experience I have learned that the funeral service is an opportunity to do three very needful things.

An Opportunity to Heal

First, it is an opportunity to heal the brokenhearted. That was an important part of Jesus' ministry and it should be an important part of yours (Luke 4:18-19). As someone has said, the pastor has a two-fold task - to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable. Funerals are important because they provide an opportunity to give comfort to the living.

The apostle Paul, speaking to the church at Thessalonica about the return of Christ and the role dead believers would play in that great event, ended his teaching by saying, "Wherefore, comfort ye one another with these words. " The funeral service gives us an opportunity to do that.

An Opportunity to Give Hope

Second, the funeral is a time to proclaim our hope in Jesus Christ. For most pastors the funeral service provides an opportunity to present the gospel to more lost people than any other single thing he does. Rightly conducted, it becomes an opportunity for both sowing and reaping.

An Opportunity to Honor

Third, it provides an opportunity to honor the dead and to affirm the value of life. The Bible tells us that we are made in the likeness of God. That fact alone gives dignity and worth to every person, regardless of who they are or what they have done. The Lord's first warning against murder was based on this fact (Gen. 9:6). G.K. Chesterton expressed it well, "...all men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the king."

It is right, therefore, that we recognize that dignity and worth through a funeral service.

The ritual, the friends, the flowers, the music, and the Word of God all together make the funeral service an important means of accomplishing healing, the giving of hope and the paying of honor.

Preparation of the Funeral Sermon

At the outset of His earthly ministry Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from Isaiah the prophet, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18 - 19).

If ministers today are to be true to their calling they must make Jesus’ priorities their priorities. And high on this list must be the work of “healing the broken-hearted,”

How do we do this? In many ways. We do it, in part, through ministering to people in times of sorrow and death. And, especially through the funeral sermon. This is no easy assignment for several reasons. First, it is because we must deal with people in the most traumatic time of their lives. And, second, death often comes with such short notice that there is little time to prepare the funeral message in advance. With all the other demands placed upon him and such a short time to prepare, the minister may be tempted just to muddle through the sermon. But, as Andrew Blackwood said, “Death comes but

once, there should be no ministerial muddling. Our God is no muddler.”

Somehow, some way, the busy pastor must find time to prepare and preach effective funeral messages.

The one thing I did as a pastor that helped me most at this point was to develop a dozen good funeral messages that clearly and concisely set out the Christian view of death and our hope in Christ. Some of these were prepared and preached as regular sermons and then condensed and polished for use in funerals. By using this method I developed a variety of texts, illustrations and outlines. Once prepared I used these sermons again and again, choosing the appropriate text and emphasis for each occasion. Periodically I added a new sermon to the collection so that I did not grow stagnant.

Fifteen of those first sermons were published in a book entitled, “Gospel for the Graveside” in 1981. Some of the later additions are included here. By mid-ministry I had an ample supply of well-prepared sermons for almost every circumstance. Then when a funeral came in the midst of a hectic workload I was already prepared. My only regret is that I did not do this earlier in my ministry. I think this approach would help any minister- especially young pastors.

Here are several basic suggestions that I offer concerning the preparation of funeral sermons.

Be Biblical

First, be biblical. The question of the ages was first posed by Job, “if a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Through the years persons have sought to find an answer to that question in science, in nature, and in human reason. Ever since Raymond Moody’s best-selling *Life After Life* came out in 1975, near death experiences have fascinated many Americans. To many people,

accounts of near-death experiences bolster the belief that dying is not an end, but a transition to another realm, a place so blissful and love-filled that people who have approached it are reluctant to return to the earthly world.

The only certain word, however, concerning life after death comes from God's Word. The only real assurance there is of life after death rests in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because He lives, we shall live also.

The poet, John Richard Moreland, expressed this when he wrote:

*The hands of Christ
Seem very frail.
For they were broken
By a nail.
But only they
Reach heaven at last
Whom these frail, broken
Hands hold fast.*

So root your funeral message in God's Word as it centers in Christ and you will offer real assurance and real comfort and real hope to people.

In each of the sermons in this book I have used the King James Version. I did this by habit and by choice. The last 40 years of multiple translations have done nothing to replace the lofty, poetic majesty of the 1611 English Bible. Someone once asked the late Raymond B. Brown, "What would you do if you knew you would die tomorrow?" He replied, "I'd read the 14th chapter of John in the King James Version. "

Funerals always bring the unchurched into the influence of the minister. Nearly every person has at least one Bible. For those with no church relationship, that will usually be a King James Version. I like to speak to

persons in the context of their own lives. Using the familiar translation is one way to do that.

Be Personal

Second, be personal. Death is not a factory gate through which men go in crowds. It is a turnstile through which they go one by one. Remember this when you preach the funeral sermon. It will help you to make the sermon personal.

The pastor should take time to talk with the family of the deceased before the funeral and learn something about him/her. Every person is special and unique and by visiting with the family you can learn something about the birth, work, background, character, age, or family of the deceased that will allow you to add a much appreciated personal word about them. A few well chosen personal remarks can transform a cold, formal message into a warm, personal word of comfort and hope. A word of caution, however. Don't talk too much about the deceased. Focus mostly on Jesus Christ. He is our hope and our comforter.

Be Brief

Third, be brief. The funeral service should be characterized by orderliness, simplicity and brevity. With music and message combined, the funeral service should not last more than thirty minutes. A well-prepared message can say all that needs to be said and can be absorbed by a grieving family in 10 to 15 minutes.

If we are to fulfill our calling as ministers, a part of which is to heal the broken-hearted, we must become masters at the craft of funeral sermons. Our ministry to the bereaved is too great to be taken lightly.

Identification, Not Transference

It is appropriate to identify with those who grieve. In some instances, you will conduct a service where you, yourself, feel profound personal loss.

*We share our mutual woes,
our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.
John Fawcett*

But be careful that the funeral message does not become a place of psychological transference, a time to transfer your own feelings - especially something dredged up from your childhood - onto the family and congregation. You may need to find a trusted counselor to resolve your own grief, but for now, you have other work to do. You have come to minister, not be ministered to.

Keep Records

Finally, keep records. Attach to your notes for each funeral message a record of date and person's name for each funeral.

Inevitably, you will conduct funerals for more than one person in a family. If you know what you used for one, you have choices when you conduct another. You may want to remind the family of earlier content, or you may want to avoid repetition. Don't trust your memory. Keep records.

1

God, Our Helper

Psalm 121

Sadie Wheelles was a real saint. As I prepared her funeral sermon, I thumbed through her wellworn Bible, reading the notes she had written in the margins over the years. One quote in particular captured my attention. It said, “God may not give us an easy road to the Promised Land, but He will give us a safe one. “ in life and in death, that is our assurance. The Lord will be with us and will ultimately bring us safely home. The Psalmist, by inspiration and experience, spoke of God’s traveling mercies on the road of life when he wrote:

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from
whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord,
which made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall
neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper:
the Lord is thy shade upon
thy tight hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day,*

*nor the moon by night
The Lord shall preserve thy going out
and thy coming in from this time forth,
and even for evermore*

(Ps. -12 1).

Behind this Psalm is a question we all ask ourselves sooner or later, “Where can I find help in time of need?” Life presses in on us, circumstances overwhelm us, at times they seem too much for us. We desperately want to know, “is there help in time of need?”

The Psalmist answers our question when he writes, “I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”

This Psalm was probably a hymn sung by pilgrims as they made their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship. The journey was dangerous because of the threat of outlaws who found the pilgrims easy prey. The Psalmist pictures God as a sentinel who watches over his people in a never-ceasing vigil to protect them from all harm.

It is a beautiful description of how the Lord watches over us and helps us on life’s journey. It describes God, our helper, in three ways. He is the God of creation, the God of preservation, and the God of salvation.

The God of Creation

First, our help comes from the God of creation. The Psalmist says, “My help comes from the Lord which made heaven and earth” (v. 2).

The Bible opens with the affirmation, “in the begin-

ning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1: 1). The Hebrew word translated “ God” is the word “Elohim.” It is a common name for God that means “the one to whom all power belongs.”

God, Who has all power not only created all things, He also charged creation with His mighty power. Astronauts on Skylab 11 photographed an explosion on the sun. Such explosions are occurring all the time. They estimated that the energy produced from that one explosion was sufficient to supply all the electrical needs of every man, woman, boy and girl on the face of the earth for one-half million years. That’s power!

It is God who has that kind of power who helps us in time of need. Some unknown poet expressed it this way:

*I to the hills will lift my eyes,
From whence shall come our aid?
Our help is from the Lord alone,
Who heaven and earth has made.*

If God had the power to create in the beginning, He certainly has the power to re-create in the end. If He formed man from the dust of the earth in the beginning, he can raise him from the dust in the end. He is the God to whom all power belongs, and He helps us through life and through death.

The God of Preservation

Second, He is the God of preservation. The Psalmist declares, “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He

that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night” (v. 3-6).

Some form of the word “keep” is used three times in this Psalm. It means “to hedge about, to guard, to protect, to attend to. “ Think of it, the great God who created all things has a personal interest in you and me. Like a sentinel standing on the city walls watching to keep it safe, so God keeps a constant vigil over us to attend to our needs.

Paul Reese tells the story related to him by a missionary friend who was aboard the ill-fated ship, Zam Zam, sunk by the Germans in the early days of World War 11. Many of the passengers were missionaries and they were picked out of the sea by the crewmen of the armed German freighter. This was certainly enough to strain everyone’s nerves to the breaking point.

The passengers were separated on the basis of male and female, with the men spending the first night in one end of the ship, and the women in the other. The next morning they were permitted to come on deck and see one another. All of the expected questions of concern were asked such as, “Were you nervous?” “Were you afraid?” “Could you sleep?”

An old missionary was asked how he managed to get through the night. The substance of his answer was: “I thought at first I couldn’t possibly sleep. The floor was terribly hard and, as you know, I was very concerned and anxious. But then I began talking with the Lord. He reminded me of His word in Psalm 12 1: ‘My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven

and earth. He shall not allow thy foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.' I was greatly struck by the words 'He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.' So I said, 'Lord, there isn't really any use for both of us to stay awake. So if You're going to keep watch, I'll thank you for some sleep.'

'And I got it,' he said."

We can live with that kind of confidence also. The God of creation is also the God of preservation, and our source of help in time of need.

The God of Salvation

Third, He is the God of salvation. The Psalmist writes, "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this day forth, and even for evermore" (v. 7-8).

The Hebrew word translated "Lord", used four times in this Psalm, is the Hebrew name "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." Jehovah is the God of Israel who delivers, saves, and redeems. So the God of creation and the God of preservation is also the God of our salvation.

How does God save us? He does not save us from trouble, He saves us in trouble. He enters into our experiences with us and helps us through them. God did not save Daniel from the lions' den; He saved him in the lions' den. He got into the lions' den with him and shut the mouths of the lions to keep them from devouring Daniel.

God did not save the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace; He saved them in the fiery furnace. He entered into the furnace with them and became

their shield to keep the fire from consuming them.

And, God did not route David on some outer loop around the valley of the shadow of death; He became David's shepherd and walked with him through the dark gloom of suffering and sorrow.

That is most often God's way with His children. He does not isolate us from trouble, He insulates us in it. He does not get us out. But He does get us through. He loves us and enters into these experiences with us to help us and sustain us.

And, His salvation is not just temporary, it is eternal. As the Scriptures declare, "He will preserve thy soul ... from this time forth and evermore." So, while most people come to the open casket and the freshly dug grave and see only a hopeless end, the people of God rejoice in an endless hope. Our help comes from the Lord! He is the God of creation, the God of preservation, and the God of salvation. Look up to Him and you will find a friend and helper in time of need.

2

Faith To Go On

John 14:1-6

Dr. Kenneth MacFarland, in one of his motivational speeches, told of an item he found on the obituary page of the newspaper in a small Southern town. It read, "Billy, it was just a year ago today that you left us and the sunshine went out of our lives. But, we turned on the headlights and we're going on ... and Billy, we shall keep on doing the best we can until that glorious day when we shall see you again. "

It was signed simply, "Love, the family." No names, just a simple confession of faith – the kind of faith that enables a person to go on in the face of sorrow and death.

When a person loses a loved one in death as you have we need the same kind of faith as this family, the kind of faith that turns on the headlights and goes on in the dark hours of sorrow.

Jesus gave us the ingredients of that kind of faith when He said:

Let not your heart be troubled.. ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye maybe also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. - no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"

(John 14.-1-6).

The occasion for these words was Jesus announcing to the apostles that He must go away, i.e. He would soon die.

This was devastating news to them. They had left all to follow Him. For three years they had built their lives around Him. Their hopes and dreams centered in Him. Now, He said He was going away.

Naturally, they were perplexed. How could they go on? How could they continue without Him? Then, as if to tell them how, He gave them, and us, the ingredients of a strong and sustaining faith.

It involves three things: faith in a person, faith in a place and faith in a promise. Jesus was saying, we can go on in spite of our sorrow and loss if we believe in Jesus as our Savior; if we believe in heaven as our home; and if we believe in the return of Christ as our hope.

Jesus is Our Savior

First, we can go on if Jesus is our Savior. Jesus said, "You believe in God, believe also in Me." It is one thing to believe in God, it is something else altogether

to believe in Jesus. Moslems believe in God. They say, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Deists believe in God. They believe that He created the world, wound it up like a giant clock and left it to run itself.

So to believe in God may mean that you simply believe in a power that creates. To believe in Jesus means you believe in a person Who cares.

The Bible declares, "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). And believing in His love and care can keep us going.

A pastor friend told me a story that confirms this. Early in his ministry he and a layman in his church worked together in a number of revival meetings. He did the preaching, the layman led the music.

His friend began to have throat problems and checked into a hospital for tests. The results revealed he had throat cancer.

The man's wife called the pastor to the hospital. When he arrived, she told him the diagnosis and said, "My husband doesn't know. I need you to help me tell him."

When they walked into the hospital room, the layman said to his wife, "Honey, why don't you get us a Coke? I imagine the pastor is thirsty. We can drink while we talk."

When she was gone, the layman said to his pastor, "Preacher, I know I've got cancer and they don't know how to tell me. But it's OK. All these years we've been telling people Jesus is enough. Now He is going to give me a chance to prove it."

Sometime later, just before he died, the layman said to my friend, "Pastor, wherever you go, as long as you live, you can tell people Jesus is true to His word. Jesus is enough."

J. Wilbur Chapman's hymn "Jesus! What a Friend of Sinners!" expresses what faith in Jesus does for us.

*"Jesus! What a help in sorrow!
While the billows oer me roll,
Even when my heart is breaking,
He, my comfort, helps my soul
Hallelujah! What a savior!
Hallelujah! What a friend!
Saving, helping, keeping, loving,
He is with me to the end. "*

That's how belief in Jesus gives us the faith to go on.

A Land That is Fairer Than Day

Second, we can go on if heaven is our home. Carl Sandburg, in his book, "The Prairie Years," tells of the hardships endured by the early pioneers in Illinois who were contemporaries of Abraham Lincoln. Life was hard and death was common. Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother, lost one child and later died herself. It was said that a fourth of all babies died within their first year.

Sandburg said the one bright spot in their otherwise bleak lives came when they gathered in their crude log churches each Lord's day to worship. They sang and prayed and usually a circuit riding Baptist or Meth-

odist minister was there to preach to them.

As they worshipped, they could look out the windows of their little church and see new mounds of dirt – the graves of their loved ones who had died. And one of the songs they sang was:

*There's a land that is fairer than day
And by faith we can see it afar
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.*

*In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

Sanford F. Bennett

Life for my grandparents was not much different. When I was a boy I used to visit them each summer and while there I attended their little missionary Baptist church deep in the back woods of east Texas. The one-room frame building was lighted with Coleman lanterns, the pews were homemade slat benches, and the men sat on one side, the women on the other. And much of their music was about heaven. I now understand why.

Life was hard and the people were poor in those days. They had few of this world's goods and little hope of things getting better. Heaven was the only real hope they had for a better life. One of the songs I remember in particular was "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be."

*How beautiful heaven must be
Sweet home of the ransomed and free
Bright hope for the end of life's journey
How beautiful heaven must be. "*

It was that faith that kept them going, and it keeps us going also.

I am sometimes asked, "What is heaven like?" In the words of R. G. Lee, "it is the most beautiful place the mind of God could conceive and the hand of God could create." The apostle John described it as "a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

A young lady is seldom more beautiful than on her wedding day. Usually more money and more time and more planning goes into that appearance than any other of her life. And when she stands at the altar with her bridegroom she is the personification of purity and beauty.

That's what heaven is like.

Our Blessed Hope

Third we can go on if the return of Christ is our hope. What happens to a person at death? Death is defined in Scripture as a separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). At death, the body is buried in the ground where it will remain until the resurrection, and the spirit of the Christian returns to the Lord to await the resurrection.

The apostle Paul, speaking of death, said, "To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). And Jesus, as He died on the cross said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." His

body was buried in Joseph's tomb. But His spirit went to the Father. Three days later His spirit reinhabited His body and He was raised from the dead.

Just so, one day the trumpet of God shall sound, and Christ shall return to the earth in power and glory. When that occurs, the first thing that will happen is the dead in Christ will be raised. And their spirits which have been with the Lord will reinhabit their new resurrected bodies. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the air. Thereafter we shall live eternally with Him in our new and glorified bodies, free of disease and no longer subject to decay and death (1 Thes. 4:16).

What will our resurrection bodies be like? Our burial is sometimes referred to as a planting. In the spring-time farmers and gardeners everywhere break up the soil in their fields and gardens and bury seeds in them. In time, the tiny seeds, watered by the rain and warmed by the sun, sprout and grow. From out of their earthly graves little plants poke their heads into the sunlight. Then they grow into beautiful flowers or fruit.

As the plant that comes out of the earth is far more glorious than the seed that was placed in the ground, so our resurrection bodies will be far more glorious than the dead bodies we bury in the grave. Our resurrection bodies will be like unto His resurrection body. They will be glorious, transcendent and recognizable.

The hope of our resurrection and eternal life rests solely in His return. That's why His return is called "blessed hope" of believers. And that's why belief in the return of Christ keeps us going.

Jesus ended this teaching by saying, "I am the way, the truth and the life: No man cometh to the Father,

but by me,"

Jesus & the way - without Him there is no
going.

Jesus is the truth - without Him there is no
knowing.

Jesus is the life - without Him there is no
growing.

Put your faith in Him and you can go on.

3

Our Confidence in God

Job 1:20
(The Death of a Child)

On a mission trip to Thailand several years ago, Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, saw a Buddhist funeral procession. As it moved down the street, mourners waved huge fans over the casket of the deceased. On the fans were inscribed slogans that expressed the Buddhist view of the life beyond. On one was inscribed the words, "Gone, never to return." On another, "Asleep, never to awaken." And on another, "No hope."

In contrast to this dismal view of life and death shared by the non-Christian world is the hope of eternal life we have in Jesus Christ. The light of hope shines in its full brilliance in the New Testament. But there are glimpses of it as far back as the book of job, perhaps the oldest book in the Bible.

On one occasion job said, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (job 19:25-26).

Job was one of the best men who ever lived. He had a deep reverence for God, a mature faith and he lived a righteous life. Yet he suffered great loss and experienced deep sorrow. In a series of tragic events all his children were killed and his vast fortune lost. He was left bereft of almost all we count near and dear.

In all his tragedy job did not sin against God by being critical of Him or complaining to Him. He rather confessed his confidence in and commitment to God by saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (job 1:21).

Job believed in God's right, God's reason and God's redemption. He lived with the confidence that God had a right to do whatever He wanted, a reason for whatever happened and would in time reward those who were faithful to Him.

There are three aspects to Job's confession of faith that I want us to examine - the gift, the grief, and the grace.

The Gift

Job speaks first of the gift when he says, "The Lord gave

The Bible tells us every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father above. That includes life itself. Life is not something we have a right to or a guarantee of. It is a gift. The day we are born we are old enough to die. And each day of life thereafter, whether our own or that of a loved one, is a gift. We need to remember that. We are too prone to take life and one another for granted. And when we're young, we think and act as though we will live forever. We assume that our parents, our children, our friends, our teach-

ers will always be here. But, when you have lived as long as I have, when you have walked through the valley of the shadow of death as often as I, then you know that life is a gift. It is not to be taken for granted. It is to be taken with gratitude.

The prayer of some unknown saint ought to be ours:

*“Teach me, O Lord, not to hold on to life
too tightly.*

*Teach me to hold it lightly; not carelessly,
but lightly, easily.*

*Teach me to take it as a gift, to enjoy and
to cherish while I have it, and to let
go, gracefully and thankfully when
the time comes.*

*The gift is great, but the Giver is greater still.
Thou, O God, are the Giver and in Thee is
a Life that never dies,*

Amen.”

When we see life as a gift we treasure it, and our loved ones more.

Thornton Wilder reminds us of the importance of this in his play, “Our Town.” Emily Gibbs, who died giving birth to her baby, comes back to the earth and watches herself reliving the morning after her twelfth birthday. It is an exciting occasion at the breakfast table, with presents, greeting cards, and kisses from her parents, brothers and sisters. Through it all, the people in the house, her childhood self included, are rushing about scarcely paying attention to one another. Suddenly, from the unseen she begs them to stop and cries out, “Just for a moment we’re happy. Let’s look at one another.”

But the living are too busy, so Emily sadly bids the earth a last farewell, "O earth, you're too wonderful for anyone to realize you. " Then, turning to the stage manager, she asks through her tears, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it - every minute?" The philosopher/stage manager answers, "No, the saints and poets, maybe they do some."

So job reminds us that life is a gift, not a right, and we need to savor every moment of it.

The Grief

Second, job speaks of the grief when he says, "The Lord hath taken away. " if life is given, it can be taken away and eventually will be. This is not to lay the blame of everything directly at the feet of God. He doesn't indiscriminately swoop down to destroy our nearest and dearest. He allows us freedom of choice and our choices involve consequences. We bring much of our grief on ourselves.

But while this does not blame God for everything it does recognize that death is a fact of life and that life has its limits.

For some, death comes suddenly and violently. For others it just leaks away. But it does come. W. H. Auden has a sobering little quatrain:

*"In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And time will have his fancy
Tomorrow or today."*

Eric Hoffer, the longshoreman philosopher, described human life as a brief bus trip that is taking everyone

to the place of execution. With all of our fretting and fussing, according to Hoffer, all we succeed in doing is changing our seats on the bus. But we never get off the bus. He was right. Death is inevitable. Hoffer himself is dead now.

The Bible affirms us, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die;..." (Ecc. 3:1-2). And again it says, "It is appointed unto man once to die" (Heb. 9:27).

Regardless of how it happens, life goes. And when it does there is grief. It's the price we pay for love.

The Grace

Finally, job speaks of the grace when he said, "blessed be the name of the Lord. " The word "blessed" comes from the Hebrew word that means "to kneel . " It suggests bowing in adoration and praise to God . In the midst of his deep sorrow job, the great man of faith, knelt before God and worshipped Him.

If through tear dimmed eyes we can do that also, then we are on solid footing and we will come through our sorrows victoriously.

"Can I," you ask, "really praise God in this hour of grief?" Oh, yes! Especially if you will focus on what you have had rather than on what you have lost.

The movie, "The Silence of the North," is the story of a family's struggle against nature as they tried to eke out a living on the northern frontier of Canada. The father died in a trapping expedition leaving his wife and three children. The youngest child was a boy named Lewis. When Lewis was seven years old he contracted spinal meningitis and died. The mother, who

had already lost a husband, now lost her only son. And, her heart was broken. Her little daughter, in an effort to comfort her, said, "Mother, it was a real honor knowing Lewis as long as we did."

It is not easy, but the Lord can enable you to look at life and death like that also. Alfred Tennyson lost his best friend in young manhood. Although he was tempted to bitterness and despair, Tennyson eventually recognized that despite his grief, life had been richer for his relationship with his friend, Arthur Hallam. The poet grieved many months before he could write these lines:

*I hold it true, whate'er be fall;
I feel it, when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.*

Anyone can rejoice and praise God in times of health and prosperity. It is only the person with a deep and abiding faith who can say, through tear dimmed eyes, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

In life we ultimately have two choices. We either swim with Jesus or we sink in despair. When we commit our lives to the risen Christ, he gives us confidence even in our grief. And by His grace we can say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

4

It Is Well With My Soul

Romans 8:35-39
(The Death of a Suicide)

In 1871 Chicago was largely destroyed by fire. Horatio G. Spafford, a prominent Chicago businessman, lost most of what he owned in that fire. Shortly after this tragedy Mr. Spafford put his wife and four daughters on a ship for passage to England. On a stormy November 22 night, the ship on which they were sailing was struck by a ship from England, and in the confusion and turbulence that followed, all four daughters were swept overboard and lost. Upon arrival in England Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband just two words, "Saved alone!"

On the first available ship Mr. Spafford sailed to join his wife in England. While at sea he asked the captain to alert him when they reached the spot where the ship had sunk. So, one night a steward came to his cabin and said, "Mr. Spafford, we are almost at the spot.- Mr. Spafford quickly went up to the deck and, as they passed over the watery grave of his daughters, the words of this song came to him:

*“When peace like a river,
attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
it is well, it is well with my soul*

In times like this we realize, maybe as never before, the need to be sure it is well with our soul. For that assurance we turn to the word of God. The apostle Paul writes:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, or thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus the Lord”

(Rom. 8:35-39).

These words, perhaps more than any others ever penned, express the basis of our hope and comfort in this time of sorrow and grief.

God's Astounding Love

Paul begins with the simplest , more elemental truth of the Bible: God loves us. This in itself is amazing. We can understand how God might ignore us, we can understand how God might reject us, or even condemn us. But why and how He should love us is astounding.

F. N. Lehmen described God's love beautifully when he wrote:

*The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell..
Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure -
The saints' and angels' song.*

God's love can be seen everywhere. Someone has said, "The mountains are God's love piled high; the oceans are God's love spread out; and the flowers are God's love in bloom. " But, the surest and purest expression of God's love is in the cross. Paul declares:

*"For when we were yet without strength
(Powerless to save ourselves), in due time
Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely
for a righteous man will one die.. yet
per adventure for a good man some would
even dare to die. But God commendeth*

his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ”

(Rom. 5:6-8).

In your sorrow, don't forget God loves you.

God's Surrounding Love

Second, God's love is all-encompassing. Paul declares that it covers every circumstance of life and that nothing can separate us from it. Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then, before he answers his own question he lists seven tragedies that might befall us, things commonly believed in his day to be signs of divine disfavor. These are things that might make us think God doesn't love us. Paul asks, "Shall....

tribulation?

or

distress?

or

famine?

or

nakedness?

or

peril?

or

sword?

Then to his own question he gives a resounding, "No, in all of these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

And then, to reinforce this marvelous truth, Paul adds a series of ten contrasts. He writes, “I am persuaded (absolutely convinced) that:

neither death, nor life
nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers
nor things present, nor things to come
nor height, nor depth
nor any other creature
shall be able to separate us from the love of
God
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These things may separate us from health and wealth, from family and friends, from comfort and ease, but they cannot separate us from Christ.

Make special note of Paul’s words, “Neither death nor life” shall separate us from the love of God. This means that our relationship with God does not depend upon the way we die any more than it depends on the way we live. It is all of His grace. God’s love for us is not only astounding, it is surrounding.

God’s Abounding Love

Finally, God’s love is abounding. It makes us “more than conquerors” in life. Because of His love we need not be overcome, whipped or defeated by our circumstances. We can rather be overcomers through Him. He gives us strength and grace to stand up to life. He supplies inner braces for the outer pressures we experience.

The greatest enemies we face are sin, suffering and death. Through Christ we can have victory over all

three. We can have victory over sin through His death. We can have victory over suffering through His presence. And, we can have victory over death through His resurrection. As Paul declares, "He hath abolished death (rendered it powerless) and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (1 Tim. 1: 10).

An unknown poet has expressed our hope beautifully:

*"The stars shine down on the earth
The stars shine down on the sea
The stars shine in on the face of God
The stars shine down on me.
The stars shall shine for a thousand years
For a thousand years and a day
But my Christ and I will still live on
When the stars have faded away. "*

Walter Winchill was a famous radio news commentator during World War 11. Once, after a particularly dark week during which the port of Singapore fell, he closed his broadcast with this sentence: "Singapore has fallen, but the Rock of Ages stands. "

You probably feel as though your world has fallen today. But I remind you, the Rock of Ages stands. Christ lives and loves and lifts. He will strengthen and sustain you if you will look to Him. And, nothing can ever separate you from His astounding, surrounding and abounding love.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Suicide is perhaps the most tragic form of death for a family to cope with and the most difficult kind of funeral for a minister to conduct. Not

only does a suicide leave the family of the deceased devastated by grief, but it leaves them to deal with a host of other emotions guilt, embarrassment, anger and fear.

One lady wrote concerning her mother's long past suicide: I can't describe the hell she has put me through these last 14 years. There has not been a day I haven't thought that, had I known, I could have helped her.

"Everyone knows how much I look and act like my mother. Even our hands are alike. I have bouts of being mad at her because she left me of her own free will. It's bad enough when a parent gets sick and dies, but what she did to me was cruel.

"I worry that I will do the same thing when I get to be her age. My daughter looks and acts like me. Will she do it too?"

Having been called to minister to the families of suicides on several occasions, let me offer these suggestions for such a funeral:

First, do not mention how the deceased died unless the family wishes you to. Place the emphasis on the hope we have in Christ and the strength we receive from Christ rather than upon the way the person died.

Second, avoid trying to give simple, trite answers to complex problems. We don't have to be able to explain everything that happens. Life is not a series of riddles to be explained. It is a series of experiences to be borne and lived through. The job of the minister is to help people bear up and live through this tragedy, not necessarily to understand it.

Finally, don't be judgmental. We never know the problems or pressures another person faces. We do not know how many valiant battles the deceased

fought and won before he/she lost this final one. Each of us probably has a final breaking point. Life puts far more pressure on some than on others. And some people have more stamina than others.

Above all, be gentle and supportive. People will never need the comfort and hope and strength of Christ more than they do now.

5

The Promise of Heaven

Luke 23:43

As the much loved Episcopal bishop, Warren Chandler, lay dying, a friend asked him, “Please tell me frankly, do you dread crossing the river of death?” The good bishop responded, “My father owns the land on both sides of the river, why should I be afraid?”

It is with that kind of confidence that every believer can face death. The fear of death has stalked man since Adam’s sin in the garden. But Jesus, as a part of His ministry, came to dispel that fear. The writer of Hebrews declared that Jesus “delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15).

Christ, through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, conquered death once and for all. Paul expressed it this way, “He hath abolished death (rendered it powerless over us) and brought life and immortality to life through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).

He set us free from the fear of death not only by what He did, but by what He said. One of His most powerful statements was made as He Himself was dying. Jesus was crucified between two thieves. As they died, one of them scolded Him with the same

contempt for truth and justice that had led him to a life of crime. The other, however, in the face of death realized the error of his way and turned in repentance to say, "Lord, remember me when thou comest to thy kingdom." Jesus responded, "Verily (truly), I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Jesus had the ability to pack a wealth of truth into an economy of words. This gift was never more evident than in his words to the penitent thief. Jesus' simple promise to this dying man embodies the hope and confidence of every believer in Christ. Today, as we sit in the presence of death, I want to dissect Jesus' promise of heaven to the dying. Every word is important and tells us something important about our hope. I want you to note the intrigue of it, the intimacy of it and the immediacy of it.

The Intrigue of Heaven

First, notice the intrigue of Jesus' promise. He said, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." The Scriptures were originally principally written in Hebrew and Greek. But the word translated "paradise" is generally thought to be of Persian origin. In every non-Biblical usage it refers to a garden or a park, a place of beauty and enjoyment.

It is used three times in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 12:4 Paul describes an experience in which he was caught up into the third heaven, "the paradise of God." The Jews of the first century believed in three heavens. The first heaven was where the birds fly and the clouds float. The second heaven was where the sun and the moon and the stars are. The third heaven

was where God is. We see the first by day, the second by night, and the third by faith.

The second use of the word paradise is in Revelation 2:7. There the believer who overcomes is assured that the living Christ will grant him the privilege of eating of the tree of life “which is in the paradise of God.”

The other usage is here, as Jesus promised the penitent thief, “today you will be with me in paradise. ”

This verse, I believe, forever answers the question for us, “What is heaven like?” Heaven is a garden like place, a place of beauty, a place of abundance, a place of provision. And, most of all, it is where God is.

The Intimacy of Heaven

Second, notice the intimacy of Jesus’ promise. Jesus said, “Today thou shalt be with me. ” The word “with” is a word of association. It suggests union, companionship, fellowship. One thing is certain from Jesus’ statement, wherever He went at death, the thief went with Him.

When the great Christian educator and writer Oswald Chambers died, his family sent a telegram to his friends. The telegram consisted of four words Oswald in His presence just four words but they spoke tons and tons of truth. These four words tell the story of the death of every Christian.

The beloved gospel song makes the truth so precious....

*“Face to face with Christ, my Savior,
Face to ; what will it be*

*When with rapture I behold Him
Jesus Christ Who died for me. !”*

Mrs. Frank A. Beck

What a thrilling prospect! Ronnie Griffin, a friend of mine, was dying with throat cancer. “I find this so hard to understand,” he said one day, “I feel good. I seem to be in good health in every way except for one spot about the size of a half dollar in my throat. And it is killing me. The doctors refer to me as a ‘poor unfortunate.’ There is nothing unfortunate about me. It is thrilling to walk hand-in-hand with the Lord through this experience. To come to know Him personally.”

Then he told me a friend had asked him about dying. He said, “Well, I am ready, and I do in fact look forward to the journey. It is going to be exciting, I know. Nobody can tell me exactly what it is like, but I am excited about the possibilities of the journey and seeing the Lord face to face.”

That’s the hope of all believers – We will be with Him in heaven.

The Immediacy of It

Finally, note the immediacy of this promise. The word “today” indicates a point in time. It suggests the immediacy of heaven.

There is no sleeping in the grave. There is no suffering in purgatory. There is no standing in line to await judgment. What God has for us, is immediate. It is today.

The apostle Paul expressed a dilemma he faced when he said, “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a

desire to depart and be with Christ; which is far better; Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23-24). It was a dilemma between what he wanted to do and what he needed to do. Paul knew as soon as he closed his eyes in death he would open them in glory. This is our hope also.

Some people see death as a hopeless end. We who are Christ's see it as an endless hope. We train our doctors to think of death as an enemy, but it is not. It is the end of a chapter and the beginning of a bright future. It is the entrance into a better world. It is the gateway to heaven, the doorway to eternity. It is the end of temporal life and the beginning of eternal life. And, it is for now.

It is interesting that the Bible opens with the garden and closes with the garden. It opens with the garden of Eden and closes with the garden of heaven. In between those two gardens is the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus sought and found the will of God. Through His surrender to that will He bridge the chasm between man and God, time and eternity, heaven and hell, and made our redemption possible.

So, according to Jesus, heaven is intimate, immediate and intriguing. If you should face death this very day would you hear the Lord say, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise? " If not, do as the dying thief to whom this promise was made. He turned in an hour of desperation and said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest to thy kingdom." Then you will hear Him say to your heart, "Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise. " That's a promise!

6

Victory in the Valleys of Life

Psalm 23

Comfort and strength have come to more people in the hour of sorrow and death from the twenty-third psalm than any other words ever penned. That's because it speaks to our deepest needs and our highest hopes.

The twenty-third psalm tells us more about God and ourselves, about life and death, about time and eternity than any other words in the Old Testament.

Hear again this beautiful psalm:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.
He leadeth me beside the still waters. He
restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the
paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
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. Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies: thou*

*anointest my head with oil; my cup
runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in the house of the
Lord for ever*

(Psalm 23:1-6).

The psalm is a great affirmation about God. Clearly its importance is in what it tells us about Him. He is our Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture. It tells us of His sufficiency, His strength, and His salvation. It speaks of His peace, His presence, and His provision.

In the New Testament the imagery continues. We are like sheep who have gone astray (1 Peter 2:25) and Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who leads and feeds and bleeds for His sheep (John 10: 11).

In Scripture we are repeatedly compared to sheep because of our propensity to wander from the right path and our dependency on the shepherd to guide us and provide for us.

In this psalm David speaks, in words we can understand, of God's wonderful care and comfort. He tells us God's provision is sufficient, God's presence is sustaining, and God's preparation is secure.

He's All I Want

First, His provision is sufficient. In beautiful imagery, the psalmist speaks of God's provision and how He sustains us. He gives us rest in green pastures, refreshment beside still waters, and restoration in times of distress.

We must be careful not to press these images too far. They are the psalmist's way of saying God provides for the deepest needs of our soul: rest for our weariness, refreshment for our weakness, and restoration for our wanderings. In short, He provides for our every need.

A little girl expressed it best. Her Sunday School teacher asked if anyone could quote the twenty-two psalm. She responded by saying, "The Lord is my shepherd; He's all I want. The wrong words but the right idea. God's provision is complete.

One thing is clear, like sheep, our security is in our shepherd, not in ourselves. We cannot make it on our own. As Paul said, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think about anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

Peace in the Valley

Second, His presence is sustaining. David does not linger long in green pastures or beside the still waters. He moves quickly to the dark valleys of life. He says, "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" (Ps. 23:4).

The phrase, "the valley of the shadow of death" literally means the place of deep gloom, of black darkness. It refers to any dark and gloomy experience of life.

We don't live long until we realize that life has many dark valleys. Sickness is a valley. Loneliness is a valley. Depression is a valley. Failure is a valley. Divorce is a valley. And death is a valley.

The promise of Scripture is that when we face the dark hours of life or of death the Lord is by our side to comfort us.

The word “comfort” literally means “to strengthen with.” The Lord never promises us the absence of shadows only the presence of the shepherd. But that is enough.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, took the full force of death’s destroying power for us by dying and paying for our sin, then rising from the grave. Now death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. And, you know, the shadow of a dog can’t bite; the shadow of a thief can’t rob; and the shadow of death can’t destroy. Because of Him we no longer need to be afraid. Trusting Jesus may not remove death’s shadow, but it does remove death’s sting.

Donald Grey Barnhouse was a prince among American Presbyterian clergymen in the first half of the twentieth century. His first wife died from cancer while still in her thirties, leaving him with three children all under twelve. He had such victory that he decided to preach his wife’s funeral sermon himself. The day of the funeral Barnhouse and his children were driving to the service when they were overtaken by a large truck which, as it passed, cast a large shadow over their car. Turning to his oldest daughter, who was staring sadly out the window, Barnhouse asked, “Tell me, sweetheart, would you rather be run over by a truck or its shadow? ” Looking curiously at her father she replied, “By the shadow, I guess. It can’t hurt you.” Speaking to all his children, he said, “Your mother has not been overridden by death, but by the shadow of death. That is nothing to fear.”

At the funeral he then spoke on Psalm 23, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” God’s presence is comforting.

Our Heavenly Host

Finally, His preparation is secure. In verses five and six David writes, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Ps. 23:5-6).

With these verses there is an obvious change in imagery. We have moved from the pasture to a palace. And God, Who was portrayed as the Good Shepherd, is now pictured as the gracious host. In His presence hostility and strife are gone and we are at peace with our enemies.

This change in imagery troubled me until I visited Israel several years ago. There I learned that according to ancient desert custom, a Bedouin sheikh must invite any wanderer who passes his tent to be his guest for up to three days. At the end of this time the sheikh accompanies the traveler to the border of his territory and is no longer responsible for him. The psalmist elevated this custom to a spiritual level; in the valley of the shadow of death, not a Bedouin, but God Himself “preparest a table before me anointest my head with oil; fills my cup to overflowing.” And the hospitality does not end after three days in the tent; the promise extends into eternity, “I shall dwell in the

house of the Lord forever.”

The word “dwell” means “to settle down and be at home with.” When we come to the end of the dark valley there is peace and plenty in His palace forever.

This is not just wishful thinking, it is a divine guarantee. His promise is certain. The Hebrew word “surely” is a word for certainty. Our assurance in the face of death is that beyond the valley of shadows is the Father’s house. We have His word on that.

Think of it:
Beneath me: green pastures;
Beside me: still waters;
Before me: a table;
Behind me: goodness and mercy;
Beyond me: the Father’s house
And with me all the while:
the Shepherd

David was an old man when he wrote this psalm. He had seen tragedy, disappointment, heartache and death. But he had found in the Lord the grace and strength he needed to keep going. We can also.

Vance Havner, having lost his wife of thirty-six years, said, I am still in the valley but thank God I am walking through it, not wallowing in it.” That’s what we must do.

Jacob buried his beloved Rachel – and journeyed on. When Moses died Joshua took charge and crossed over Jordan. John the Baptist died, and his disciples brought their grief to Jesus. Bring your loss to Jesus, but do not sit up with the past. Move on, knowing that the Shepherd is with you.

7

When is a Man Ready to Die

Luke 2:25-32

A retired missionary, Dr. Harry Schweinsberg, and I talked once about the death of a mutual friend. Harry had been on a mission trip in Mexico when our friend died. The family wanted him to participate in the funeral service, so he returned home immediately. As they journeyed one of Harry's traveling companions asked him if he was afraid to die. He responded, "No, not in the least, but I am afraid of living too long."

There are times when a sick person needs to die, like a tired person needs to rest. Most of us do not want to live if we no longer have quality of life, when we are in constant and excruciating pain, or after we have lost our mental faculties.

In such instances, death need not be a dreaded enemy. It can be a welcomed friend. But whether death comes in youth or old age or whether it comes suddenly or after a prolonged illness, the important thing is that a person be ready to die. If we are ready to die, regardless of the circumstances, we can die in peace.

When is a person ready to die? When can a person

die in peace?

The Bible gives us an example in the life of Simeon. When Jesus was but eight days old His parents brought Him to the temple in Jerusalem and they placed Him in the arms of an aged priest named Simeon to be dedicated to God.

Simeon was a godly man who lived in expectancy of the coming Savior. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him in some way that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.

When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms he blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29).

Mark that phrase, "Now let your servant die in peace." It is the affirmation of a man who was ready to die.

Simeon's experience teaches us what we must do to die without fear. There are three things necessary: a person can die in peace when they have lived a good life; a person can die in peace when they have completed their life's work; and a person can die in peace when they have acknowledged Christ as the Messiah.

These three truths should be a source of comfort and encouragement to us today. Look at them for a moment.

Walking in the Sunlight

First, a person can die in peace when they have lived a good life. Simeon was a good man. He is described as just and devout. He lived in expectancy of

the coming Messiah. He was in touch with and responsive to the Spirit of God. Because he lived a good life he could die in peace.

Someone has said, "One must be a wide-awake Christian before he can fall 'asleep in Jesus.'" This is not to suggest that we are saved by our good life. No. Our salvation is never based on our goodness but on His grace. But, if we are saved we should live in such a way that we won't be ashamed to face Him.

The Scriptures say, "it is required of a steward that a man be found faithful." They say, "He that endures to the end shall be saved" and again, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life." We are not told to be faithful until we are tired, or until we are retired, but until we are expired. We are to be faithful unto death.

Gordon MacDonald put it like this, "To follow Christ is to walk with Him first into the presence of His Father. If that is so, we had better know how to act in the divine presence now (in this present life) and then, in the life everlasting. Ultimately, we will be there a long, long time."

When we have lived faithfully, obediently, we can then die in peace.

A Full Life, Not a Long One

Second, we can die in peace when we have completed our life's work. We know nothing about Simeon beyond this experience. He enters the pages of Scripture for a brief moment, plays a bit part in the drama of redemption and then exits to be heard from no more. So far as we know he never wrote a book, he never

led a great movement, he never made a memorable speech. Apparently he was content to serve God in obscurity.

We're not sure how, but it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. When the baby Jesus was placed in his arms he immediately recognized and acknowledged Him as the Savior and then disappears from the scene as quickly as he had come.

It was as if he was born for this purpose, for this moment, for this one act. And once it was done, his life's work was over.

I believe God has a purpose, a will for every one of us. We are not here by accident. Our coming was no surprise to Him. Every great person in the Bible lived with this confidence and died with the satisfaction that he had done that will.

Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work" (John 4:34). On the cross He declared, "it is finished" (John 17:4). He did not say, "I am finished. " He said, "It (God's plan) is finished." Jesus lived His life under the conviction and died with the satisfaction that He had done the will of God.

It was the same with the apostle Paul. His primary concern in life was not his personal safety and ease, but that he finish the course God had for him (Acts 20:24). At the end of his life he said, "I have finished my course..." (2 Tim. 4:12). Paul, like Jesus, lived with the conviction and died with the satisfaction that he had done God's will.

At a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee

second baseman, offered a prayer that ought to express the desire of every believer. It is a classic in brevity and poignancy: "Dear God, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

When Dr. William Culbertson, former president of Moody Bible institute, died several years ago they found a copy of a poem in his desk. It read:

*"Lord, when thou seest that my work is done,
Let me not linger with failing powers,
Down the weary hours.
A workless worker in a world of work,
But with a word just bid me home.
And I will tigh gladly come.
Yes, right gladly will I come.*

When we've lived our lives by the will of God, when our life's work is done, we too can say, "Just bid me and I will right gladly come." We can die in peace.

Make Adequate Preparation

Finally, we can die in peace when we have acknowledged the Savior. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he immediately recognized who He was and said, "My eyes have seen Thy salvation."

With deep spiritual insight Simeon confessed his faith in Christ. Notice how he described him:

- He is the anointed of God.
- He is the light of the Gentiles.
- He is the glory of Israel.
- He is the hope of man.
- He is the Savior of the world.

That's the recognition and confession every person needs to make.

James Jeffries, former all-American football player and a leader in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, spoke at one of Baylor University's homecoming activities. A few months earlier he had learned he

had cancer of the pancreas. The doctor had given him less than a year to live. As he spoke to us that night the ravages of his cancer were already evident in his once strong body. In his testimony he said, "I've told people all my life, 'Jesus is all you need.' But you never know Jesus is all you need until you get to the place where He is all you've got. And, when He's all you've got, then you know He's all you need."

To acknowledge and receive Christ as personal Savior is the best and only spiritual preparation for death. Until that has been done no person is ready to die, but once you have done that you can die in peace.

Pope John XXIII once said, concerning his own death, "My bags are packed. I am ready to leave." Are you?

Death From the Other Side

Psalm 116:15

There are some things that look different from the other side. On the island of Maui in Hawaii, the Haleakala volcano is often hidden by dreary gray clouds. But tourists have learned that a trip through the clouds is rewarded by the view from the other side. Mark Twain described sunrise over Haleakala as “the sublimest spectacle I ever witnessed.”

Today, you can drive the long, twisting highway to the summit, taking care as you pass through the disorienting fog. But at about 9,000 feet, you break out of the clouds, and when you reach the summit it’s a whole new world. The forbidding, barren lava rock of the extinct volcano rests like a jewel in the softness of sunlit white clouds. From above, the mysterious clouds look like the backs of 10,000 sheep racing across the sky. It’s the same mountain and they’re the same clouds, just seen from the other side. Sometimes the clouds look like faces. Even when it is dark and dreary in the valley, the sun or the moon and stars always shine above the clouds.

A few years ago my sister became interested in making rag rugs. From the top side her rugs were beautiful tapestries. But from the back side, they were a maze of knots, unraveled edges and loose strings. The same rug, but viewed from the other side.

Heaven is like that. A little girl was taking an evening walk with her father. She looked up at the starry night sky and wonderingly exclaimed: "Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be!"

The psalmist spoke of heaven and death from the other side, from God's point of view when he said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116:15).

From this side, for us, death is a time of sorrow, of loss, of defeat, and of separation. But from the other side, for them, it is a time of release, of reunion, of rest and reward.

One man about whom I read had the right spirit, for he said to his dying mother, "I'm going to let you go now, Mother. Have a good time. You have earned this joy."

Too often we think of death as coming to destroy everything for which we have lived. We should picture death as coming to save those we love. Many times we think of death as the end; rather we should think of death as the beginning of a more abundant life. We often think of losing, when it should be gain. We think of parting instead of arrival. It is not closing the door of life; it is opening the gate to eternity.

We would do well today to look at death from the other side.

There She Goes

First, from this side death looks like the end; from the other side it is the beginning. When you look at death from this side it seems so final. It appears to be the end of life, the end of relationships, the end of all that we have worked for, all that we have earned, all that we have laid up. But, from the other side, death is not the end, it's an entrance. It is not a goal, but a gateway. It is the beginning of a bright new life, eternal life for the believer in Jesus Christ.

Some anonymous writer comes nearest to describing this view of death in what he called "The Ship":

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails in the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength, and I stand and watch her until at length she is only a ribbon, or a white cloud, just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says: "There! She's gone!"

Gone? Where? Gone from my sight, that's all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight – to the place of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her; and just at the moment when someone at my side says, "There! She's gone!" There are other voices

ready to take up the glad shout, "There! She comes!"

And that is dying.

That's good, really good! And the Scriptures confirm it. Paul speaks of his own death as "a departure" (2 Tim. 4:6). The word "depart" is a nautical term that means to weigh anchor and set sail. Rightly understood, then, death is not the end. It is the beginning of a new life.

Sir Walter Raleigh affirmed this beautiful description of death when he wrote:

*"When men go down to the sea in ships
 'Tis not to the sea they go;
 Some isle or pole the matiner's goal
 And thither they sail through calm
 and gale,
 When down to the sea they go.*

*When souls go down to the sea by ship
 And the dark ship's name is death
 Why mourn and wail at the vanishing sail?
 Though onward bound, God's world
 is round,
 And only a ship is death.*

*And when I go down to the sea by ship,
 And death unfurls her sail
 Weep not for me, for there will he
 A living host on another coast
 To beckon and cry, All hail!"*

The Glad Reunion

Second, from this side death looks like separation, from the other side it is reunion.

The Scriptures describe death in various ways. It is spoken of as a departure - weighing anchor and setting sail; as an exodus - a going out; as a dissolution - taking down one's earthly tent and moving on. But my favorite description is when the Scriptures say of Abraham, "...he gave up the ghost ... and was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8).

The expression, "gathered to his people," clearly implies something more than being carried back to the old family cemetery or being buried in a common tomb or vault. It has a deeper and more spiritual meaning than that. Abraham was convinced of joining his deceased loved ones in fellowship and personal association. It suggests, I believe, that he became a part of a glad reunion that is a part of our Christian hope (I Thes. 4:13-18).

A story I heard many years ago beautifully illustrates this hope. An elderly Christian woman was grief-stricken after the death of her daughter. To adjust, she boarded a ship from England to New York City to visit her other daughter. While at sea a severe storm struck. Passengers frantically raced for lifeboats. The elderly Christian lady showed no signs of panic. A young man excitedly said, "Lady, don't you know we may sink and all die!"

"Young man," she quietly replied, "I have a daughter in heaven and a daughter in New York City, and it doesn't make me any difference which one I go to see."

This hope makes heaven even more wonderful than it would be otherwise. In the words of a poet, who lost a little child in death:

*'I cannot say, and I will not say,
That she is dead: she's just away!
With a cheery smile and a wave of the hand,
She has wandered into a better land.
And left us dreaming how very fair
It needs must be, since she lingers
there.'*

Clearly, death from the other side is not the end, it is the beginning. It is not parting, it is arrival. It is not separation, it is reunion. When two people are Christians they never say goodbye for the last time.

Victory in Jesus

Third, from this side death looks like a loss, from the other side it is gain. From this side it appears to be defeat, from the other side it is victory.

Somerset Maughn said, "Death is a very dull, dreary affair, and my advice to you is to have nothing whatsoever to do with it. " in contrast to that dreary view of death is that of the apostle Paul who said, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." The word "gain" is a business term that means "to make a profit. " The bottom line is, death is not losing, it is gaining. For the Christian it is a paying proposition.

A minister reading the Bible to a suffering hospital patient quoted from The Revelation: ...there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain

From jaws clenched in agony came the reply, “Won’t that be wonderful – no more pain!” That’s why death is a friend.

I love the story of Richard Baxter, a good and godly preacher who spent his last several years (and I use the plural) in physical agony. His pain was intensified by the fact that he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. Shortly before his death a friend visited with him. The friend pulled his chair up next to the bed of Richard and said to the great preacher, “Richard, how are you doing?” And Richard replied, “Friend, I am almost well.” And he died. Think of that, “I am almost well.” And then he died.

The wonderful truth of the Bible is, the moment we close our eyes in death, we open them in glory.

So remember, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints,” and “weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:4-5). What happens in the morning? In the morning we will be healthy. In the morning we will be happy. And in the morning we will be home. That’s death from the other side.

After the Funeral Is Over

The wife of Duke McCall, retired president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and former president of the Baptist World Alliance, died several years ago. In explaining some of his feelings, Dr. McCall wrote, "After a church service, a well intentioned acquaintance caught me off guard by saying, 'I am sorry you lost your wife.' Before I could edit my response I said, 'I did not lose my wife. I know where Margueritte is. I am the one who is lost. ' "

Anyone who has had a loved one die knows how devastating it can be. It leaves you disoriented, distraught and lost. It takes us a long time to find ourselves.

The pastor who is really interested in "healing the broken-hearted" soon realizes that his work is not finished when he has preached the funeral sermon or conducted the graveside service. Grief goes on and so must our ministry to the grieving.

What can the minister say and do at such a time that will be helpful to the family? There is no one dramatic gesture or pearl of wisdom that will dissolve the heartache, but there are many acts of ministry that

can convey your concern and help to soften the blow that the person has suffered.

I offer several practical suggestions learned from personal experience as a pastor who also wrestled with the awkwardness of what to do after the funeral as over.

Reach Out to Them

First, be there. For a long time I dreaded going to see people when they had lost a loved one because I thought I had to say something comforting and I didn't know what to say. In time I realized, however, that words may not be the primary need of grieving people. Your presence is what counts. This is the first thing the bereaved needs above all else. Long after they have forgotten what you say they remember that you came.

Even a government agency like NASA recognizes the importance of being there. Following the fire and explosion that destroyed the Challenger space shuttle, the families of each of the seven astronauts who died had another astronaut family at their side soon after the disaster. The support families were there to help the Challenger families with everything from travel and food arrangements to boarding the family pet. "With all the vast technology of our space age," said Clark Covington, manager of the Space-Station Project at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, "there is still nothing more powerful than one human being reaching out to another."

Bound By a Thousand Cords

Second, help them understand their grief. Grief is a person's reaction to a loss. The more meaningful the loss, the more intense the grief. Many people, when they experience grief, wonder what's happening to them. When there comes a numbness of spirit, the loss of memory, the trembling of limbs, they wonder, "Am I dying, too?" When the tears come uncontrollably-or not at all-when they can't sleep, when they have feelings of anxiety, fear, anger and guilt, they wonder, "Am I going crazy?" or "is there something wrong with me?"

Actually, each of these can be a normal part of the grieving process, and it is important to help people understand that.

As in *Gulliver's Travels*, where Gulliver lay tied to the earth by the stakes and ropes of the Lilliputians, so the grief sufferer, too, is bound by a thousand emotional cords to the person who has died. These ties are not loosed easily or quickly.

A widower may come home from work at night and open the door to the aroma of his wife's cooking – though nothing is on the stove. If you ask a widow, she will tell you her husband is dead. But she may also tell you that she hears him in the kitchen at night, getting a snack as he often did in life. She is struggling with separation. Her husband is gone, but her memory is vividly present, and she misses him terribly. A widow may continue to set two plates at the dinner table for months. She reaches out to touch him in the bed.

Spouses may even find themselves talking to their

dead mate long after they are gone. The husband of a friend of mine died. In their 35 years of marriage she had never taken out the garbage. He always did that. She was putting out the garbage one day, and before she thought she looked up and said, "See what you've done Charlie. You left me and now I have to do something I never did before. I have to carry out the garbage."

Several years ago a teenager in our church was killed in an automobile accident. After the funeral his mother asked me, "Do you think it will be okay if I talk to Kirk?" I said, "Yes, I think so." Then I told her what the late Peter Marshall once said, "Those we love are with the Lord. The Lord has promised to be with us. Now, if they are with Him and He is with us, they can't be far away."

Learn to Listen

Third, be a good listener. For most people, talking is an effective means of releasing emotions and undergoing healing. So listen! That will help as much as anything you do.

In their grief people may ask, "Why, God?" "Why did this happen to me?" Don't be a glib Bible quoter. Simplistic answers to complex questions are not only unhelpful, they can be harmful. Statements like, "This is God's will," or "God knows best," are theologically shallow and provide little or no comfort. It is better to hear their questions as cries of pain rather than literal questions.

And don't attempt to tell the bereaved how he/she feels. To say, for example, "You must feel relieved now that he is out of pain;" is presumptuous. Even to say,

“I know how you feel” is questionable unless someone has told you his feelings. I know how I feel about my father’s death. I really don’t know how you feel about your father’s death. Learn from the mourner. Don’t instruct.

Emotional First Aid

Fourth, let them express their grief. Grief resembles steam in a steam engine; unless it can escape in a controlled way, pressure builds up and the boiler explodes. Griefwork must be done. Griefwork will be done. Sooner or later, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely, in a creative or distorted manner, the work will be done. So, emotional release should be encouraged. Comments like, “Be strong,” or “You’ve got to hold up for others, ” tells the person it’s not okay to cry, to hurt, or to be angry; it’s only okay to “be strong. ” Holding the person’s hand or putting your arm around their shoulder indicates that it’s okay to grieve.

One way to express grief is through tears. There is a Jewish proverb that says, “What soap is to the body, tears are to the soul.” Tears can help cleanse the soul.

Some people think that faith and tears don’t mix. They think a sturdy faith in God and the promise of life eternal are out of keeping with sobbing and a display of grief. But grief does not deny faith.

When Mary and her companions took Jesus to the town cemetery where Lazarus was buried Christ stood before the tomb, and the text states simply and profoundly, “Jesus wept. ” Those simple words speak volumes about the inner feelings of Jesus and His reaction to grief at the death of His friend.

Seeing His tears, friends of the family remarked, "See how much He loved him!" In that incident, once and for all, Jesus refuted by His tears the notion that "big boys don't cry." He who remains history's perfect and complete man stood by the graveside and wept.

Psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers, following the death of her husband, wrote about her own tears, "The standard reaction to a widow's tears is to say, 'There, there, you mustn't cry. Tears won't help.' But tears do help. They are a kind of emotional first aid. A widow will stop when she no longer needs to cry. "

What Can Wait, Should

Fifth, encourage the postponement of major decisions during a period of grief. When a person is in deep sorrow they may decide to sell their home, quit their job or make other decisions they will later regret. Grieving people need to realize that no matter how they feel at the moment, their feelings will change. Things will look different in time. So, whatever can wait should wait until after the period of intense grief.

Comfort the Children

Sixth, don't ignore the children of the family. Children, because of their limited experience, may not understand all that has happened when a loved one dies, but don't assume that a seemingly calm child is not sorrowing. Children do grieve and they grieve deeply. At such times the greatest gift you can give a child is an understanding heart. A child's feelings are worthy of respect. Jesus took time for little children

and so should we.

Use the Lay People

Seventh, encourage others to visit and help. Among life's greatest blessings in times of grief are friends and fellow church members. They are often instruments of God's grace. Since a pastor has many people to minister to, he should enlist, train and encourage his people to join him in ministering to the grieving.

Deacons, Sunday school classes and select individuals can be effective in this way. Some of them will have the gift of consolation. And they will have the time to reach out to the broken-hearted. They can drop by for a cup of coffee. They can take them to lunch. They can listen. And in time they can help draw the grieving back into outside activities.

They need not be trained counselors. As psychologist Bernie Zilbergeld said, "if you simply want to talk to someone, it probably doesn't make a lot of difference whom you select, as long as you feel comfortable and he or she is listening."

Grief is Major Surgery

Eighth, stay in touch. Grieving takes a long time. Exactly how long depends on the circumstances or the loss, the depth of the relationship, and the emotional makeup of the griever. It is not unusual for it to last a year or more.

Grief may be compared to recovering from surgery or the healing of a broken bone. God has built into the human body a remarkable capacity to heal itself. Many physicians will tell you that all they do is cooperate

with and utilize the natural healing processes. But even with the body's capacity to heal itself, as suggested previously, it takes time for it to adjust to and overcome the effects of serious surgery or for a broken bone to heal. The loss that causes grief is major surgery. The healing takes time.

One way to stay in touch is by mail. When I was a pastor I made a practice each Christmas and New Year season of writing a note to each member of my congregation who had lost a loved one during the year. Holidays are the worst times of the year for grieving people and Christmas is the hardest of all the holidays.

In the notes I spoke of my love for the deceased and my concern for and availability to them especially at that time. It was a simple gesture but it was one of the most appreciated things I did.

It Helps Them to Help

Ninth, in time gently draw the mourner into quiet outside activities.

Especially, if you lead them to do something for somebody else, something that helps them feel useful, you will be helping them. Activity is a crucial ingredient to the healing process.

Jesus is our model for ministry as well as our master. When His friend Lazarus died, He went and He wept and He witnessed-after the funeral was over. That's what we must do also if we are to help heal the broken-hearted.

Additional Sermon Outlines

A Life to Remember “He being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4)

The influence of a good man, regardless of how he dies, does not end at death. Our friend, like Abel, continues to speak to us though he is dead. How does he speak to us?

1. Through the life he lived.
2. Through the worship he practiced.
3. Through the faith he exercised.

The Epitaph of a Good Man “He had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb. 11:5)

Nothing finer can be said of a man than that he pleased God. What a wonderful epitaph that would be for any of us.

Our friend, like Enoch, pleased God. What does it take to please God? How does a man please God?

1. By walking righteously.
2. By working diligently.
3. By witnessing faithfully.

The Death of a Great Man
“Know ye not that there is a great man
fallen this day in Israel?”
(2 Sam. 3:38)

Someone has said, “A tree is best measured when it is down. ” Our friend, like Abner, was a great man.

1. He was great in his influence.
2. He was great in his service.
3. He was great in his generosity.
4. He was great in his faith.

What God Has Provided
“God having provided some better thing
for us”
(Heb. 11:40)

1. He has provided a better body.
(2 Cor. 5:1-5)
2. He has provided a better home.
(John 14:1-6)
3. He has provided a better inheritance.
(1 Peter 1:4)
4. He has provided a better fellowship.
(Luke 13:2 9)

The Lessons of Death

**“Like a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him and His righteousness unto children’s children”
(Ps. 103:13-17)**

The death of our friend teaches us some important lessons about life.

1. Life is fragile—we are like dust, grass, flowers.
2. Death is certain – we all must go.
3. Reverence is essential – we are to fear Him.
4. God is merciful – He is like a father.

God Our Refuge Psalm 46

1. God is our help in ages past.
2. God is our haven from the stormy blast.
3. God is our hope of heaven at last.

Set Your House in order 2 Kings 21

The sudden death of our brother reminds us of the need to prepare for death. We seem to always be get-

ting ready for something in life. We are getting ready for school, for a career, for marriage, for the birth of a child, for retirement. Isn't it reasonable that we get ready for the last great event of life – our own death? How do we set our house in order?

1. By making a firm commitment to Christ.
2. By living a faithful life for Christ.
3. By having a future hope in Christ.

The Step of Death
“There is but a step between me and death”
(I Sam. 20:3)

1. It is an inevitable step.
2. It is an uncertain step.
3. It is a solemn step.
4. It is a personal step.
5. It is a final step.

The Death of a Godly Woman
Acts 9:36-42

Our friend, like Dorcas, was a godly woman. Notice the similarities between the two of them. Their lives remind us:

1. We should be something – a disciple.
2. We should do something-good works and alms deeds.
3. We should leave something-the work of our hands.
4. We should expect something – a new life.

The Shepherd of the Shadows **Psalm 23**

1. The plenty of the Lord.
2. The presence of the Lord.
3. The preparation of the Lord.

To Die is Gain **Phil. 1:21**

1. At death we gain rest (Rev. 14:13).
2. At death we gain reward (Rev 14:13).
3. At death we gain reunion (1 Thes. 4:17)

We Must Needs Die
“For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him”
(2 Sam. 14:14)

The death of our friend reminds us of several important things:

1. The brevity of life.
2. The finality of death.
3. The redemption of God.

