

Facing Death with Hope

By: David Burruss

Death is a reality that every human being must face. Regardless of how much we may wish to avoid it or deny it, death is inevitable for all. The Bible teaches us that no one has the power to prevent death. Ecclesiastes 8:8 reminds us that no one has control over their spirit when the time comes to die. Similarly, James 2:26 explains that the body without the spirit is dead, and Ecclesiastes 12:7 emphasizes that our bodies will return to dust, while our spirits return to God, the Creator of all life.

The Bible offers a clear distinction between what happens to the righteous and the unrighteous after death. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16, we see that the righteous are taken to a place of comfort, referred to as Paradise or Abraham's bosom, while the unrighteous are sent to a place of torment. These two realms are separated by an impassable gulf, and this waiting place, known as Hades, serves as a temporary holding place for all spirits until the Day of Judgment.

For Christians, death need not be something to fear. As believers, we have the assurance that our eternal destiny is determined by the choices we make in this life. We are given the free will to follow God and live righteously, or to turn away and live in sin. The focus for Christians should be on preparing for death by living a life of obedience and faithfulness to God.

Life is Short, Use It Wisely: The brevity of life is a recurring theme in Scripture. Our lives are compared to a fleeting shadow (1 Chronicles 29:15), a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:14), and a flower that quickly withers (Job 14:1-2). Recognizing the shortness of life should motivate us to make the most of the time we have. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us that death is appointed to every person, and after that comes the judgment.

This understanding should lead Christians to redeem their time, serving God with all their strength. While some may fear death, believers can find comfort in knowing that death is not the end but the beginning of eternal life with God. Hebrews 2:14-15 teaches us that through Jesus' death, He has conquered the devil, who holds the power of death, and freed us from the fear of death. Death is the final enemy that will be destroyed on the Day of Judgment (1 Corinthians 15:26), and on that day, we will proclaim, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The Blessings of Death for Christians: For the faithful Christian, death brings many blessings. Ecclesiastes 7:1 even suggests that the day of one's death is better than the day of their birth. This may seem counterintuitive, but the apostle Paul sheds light on this idea. In Philippians 1:21-24, Paul expresses his inner conflict between living on in the flesh, where he can continue to serve Christ and others, and departing to be with Christ, which is "far better." For Christians, death is a transition from the struggles of this world to the joy and peace of being in the presence of the Lord.

As believers, we can take comfort in the fact that when a faithful Christian dies, they are precious in God's sight (Psalm 116:15). While the world may not recognize or honor the death of a righteous person, God does. Isaiah 57:1-2 tells us that the righteous are taken away from the evil of this world and enter into peace. The angels will carry the spirits of the faithful to Paradise, just as they carried Lazarus (Luke 16:22).

In Paradise, the faithful will rest from their labors and enjoy eternal comfort. Revelation 14:13 declares, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Death for a Christian is not something to dread, but something to look forward to with anticipation, as it marks the beginning of eternal peace and rest.

Preparing for Death: The most important step in preparing for death is becoming a Christian. Romans 8:1 assures us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and Ephesians 1:3 teaches that all spiritual blessings are found in Him. The forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life are available to those who are in Christ (Ephesians 1:7).

The path to becoming a Christian is clearly laid out in Scripture. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Once we hear the message, we must believe in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24). However, belief alone is not enough, as even demons believe (James 2:19). We must also repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Baptism is the point at which we are united with Christ in His death (Romans 6:3) and where our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16).

Once we become Christians, we must strive to live faithfully until death (Revelation 2:10). While we may stumble and sin along the way, God's grace and forgiveness are available to those who are genuinely striving to live according to His will. Obeying God's commandments is how we show our love for Him (1 John 5:3), and by following His Word, we can be confident that we are prepared for death.

Mourning the Death of a Christian Loved One: While the death of a Christian loved one can bring sorrow, it can also bring comfort. King David understood this when he mourned the death of his child but found solace in the knowledge that he would see his child again in the afterlife (2 Samuel 12:19-23). As Christians, we can take comfort in the fact that our loved ones who have passed on in the Lord are in a place of comfort and peace, and we will be reunited with them if we remain faithful.

The Reality of Death for the Unfaithful: Sadly, there is no such comfort for those who die outside of Christ. The rich man in Luke 16 serves as a sobering reminder of the fate that awaits the unrighteous. Those who reject God and His offer of salvation will face eternal torment, and there are no second chances after death. The rich man's plea to warn his brothers demonstrates the seriousness of the consequences of dying without having followed God's will.

Death is a reality that everyone must face, but for the Christian, it is not something to fear. By preparing ourselves spiritually and living faithfully according to God's Word, we can look forward to the blessings that come with death. The decision to follow Christ is ours to make, and it is a decision that will determine our eternal destiny. If we live in Christ, we can confidently say that death holds no fear for us, only the promise of eternal life with our Lord.