

PREPARATION FOR DEATH

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Most people who think about life and death would like to be able to face their death in the same manner that the Apostle Paul did. His ability to react as he did was not by accident but he made preparation for it. Read carefully his words.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2Tim. 4:6-8).

This is a great statement of confidence that is based on the manner of life that Paul had lived. We also note that this confidence is extended to all who make preparation for the time of death. The perilous times in which we live makes this statement even more appreciated. We face difficult times as we live here on the earth but the promise of Heaven makes it a reasonable and a reachable goal for our lives. Paul reminded us that this promise is for all who love his appearing. As we discuss death and preparation for it, there are some things that we must realize.

Remember that death is a reality for all men. This fact should go down without a great amount of proof. We have abundant proof in our own neighborhood. Our neighbors, friends and relatives pass away around us. Death does not respect the person of a man. The rich die as do the poor. A quick visit to the funeral home in our area is a reminder of the fact that all are going to die. The Hebrew writer refers to death as an appointment. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Appointments in our lives can be ignored, changed or cancelled but the appointment with death cannot be changed. We cannot hide or run away from this appointment. We will all meet it. Psalms ninety gives an extended discussion on the subject of death. Our time here on the earth quickly passes.

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight *are but* as yesterday when it is past, and *as* a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are *as* a sleep: in the morning *they are* like grass *which* groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. (Ps. 90:3-6).

Our life is compared to grass that comes forth in the morning and in the evening it is cut and withers away. All should realize that there is no guarantee that comes with life. At the most, life is over very quickly. In verses nine and ten we have the discussion of the length of life.

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale *that is told*. The days of our years *are* threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. (Ps. 90:9-10).

This certainly is not a guarantee that we will live seventy or eighty years. These figures are used to remind us of the shortness of life. Then in verse twelve we are urged to make the best of the time we are given. "So teach *us* to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). It is not hard to see that in view of the shortness of time, we should take care to use properly, the time given to us. Most of us are familiar with the New Testament description of the shortness of life as recorded by James.

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth

for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. (James 4:13-15).

Many of us take for granted that we will have more hours or days ahead of us but James reminds us that this is a big mistake. Each day should be approached with the attitude that accepts the fact that we are dependant on God for each moment that we enjoy.

At this point it would be well for us to remember that the life we live will determine how we will stand at death. We cannot die a sinner and raise from the grave a justified saint. The world in general seems to think that death clears up any problems we have had in life. We seem to think that all that is needed to make preparation for Heaven is for us to die. Some of the worse characters that we know of in life are described by some as being 'in the arms of Jesus' after their death. We should be aware of the fact that death does not clear up our lives. As we die, we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for the way we have lived here. God has chosen to give His Son the work of judging all men.

For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. (Jno. 5:22-23).

Honor would be given to the Son of God by giving to Him the responsibility of judging all men. Paul reminded the young preacher, Timothy that Christ will be the judge. "I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1). When the Apostle Paul came to Athens, Greece he found a city that was wholly given to idolatry. There were idols everywhere. Paul reminded the people that idols cannot do anything for you but are entirely dependent of mankind for any movement. However, it is through God that we live, move and have our being. (Acts 17:28). He gives life, breath and all things to men. We are totally dependent on Him. He then concludes his sermon by giving this exhortation.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31).

Men need to know that they will be standing before Christ to give account to the Son of God. The judge of all the world will deal with us as we left this earth. Death does not change the kind of person we were. A clear picture of the judgment is recorded in the account given by Matthew.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats. (Mt. 25:31-32).

The Son of man is pictured as the judge to whom glory is given. His final judgment is described in Mt. 25:46. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Note that the final judgment was based on the actions that were performed during life. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (Jno. 5:28 -29). A very strong statement that makes it clear that we will not change our condition just by experiencing death is made by Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of

Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). What we have done in the body determines our condition in judgment.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (Rev. 20:12).

The book of life will reveal the manner of life we have lived. Our manner of life will determine our standing in judgment.

Any preparation we do for death will be done during the time God allows us to have while we live. We must not waste or misuse our time here. It is limited. Jesus spoke this way in regard to His own time on earth. “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (Jno. 9:4). In our wicked world we need to make preparation to leave it in peace with God. The sixteenth chapter of Luke give us the account of the lives of two men. One man was rich and the other was poor. The rich man lived in abundance during his lifetime. The poor man begged the crumbs from the table of the rich man. Both men died. The rich man was buried but no word was spoken of the burial of the poor man. The rich man was in torment and the poor man was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man became concerned about the condition of his brothers. His request for them was not fulfilled. He was reminded that “during his lifetime” he had his good things and the poor man was deprived. One used his time on earth to be prepared for eternity while the other did not make preparation. The lesson on preparation was clearly pointed out in the lesson recorded in Matthew twenty five.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (Mt. 25:1-4).

The difference in being wise or foolish was a matter of preparation. This lesson is followed by the following warning. “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Mt. 25:13). Using our time while we are here on the earth to make ready for death just makes sense.

Paul spoke of his hope for eternal life in a very confident way. Is it possible for us to have a similar confidence in our lives? Think of how much better our life would be if we possessed this kind of confidence. Instead of living with a constant fear that we are not going to be saved we can live believing that we have a home in Heaven. As Paul spoke of his coming death, he did so believing that he was prepared. He reminded us that this hope is available for us also. He based this hope on three things. He fought a good fight. This referred the battle he engaged in during life with the Devil. Satan tried to get Paul to lose his salvation many times but was unsuccessful. Read carefully this statement of Paul. “But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). He fought with Satan and won the battle. Next, he had finished his course. His purpose in life was fulfilled. Solomon described our purpose in life in this way.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Eccl. 12:13 -14).

Our whole duty and purpose in life is defined in two ways. Fearing God and keeping His commands. In observing the life of Paul, we can see the great respect he had for God. He served

God with reverence and godly fear. (Heb.12:28). He certainly was obedient to the instructions that were given by God. A third quality that Paul brought up was the fact that he kept the faith. His loyalty to the faith of Christ was without question. The term, 'the faith' is used in the Bible to represent the totality of the teachings of Christ. Paul stated that there is one faith. (Eph.4:4-6). Paul was loyal in his teachings and practice of that faith. Based on these three things, Paul expressed his confidence in receiving the crown of life. Of course he recognized that even after he had done all of these things, he still needed the grace of God. He described salvation in this manner to the church at Ephesus. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:8-10). With God's grace and his diligent pursuit of the Christian life, Paul could speak of his salvation with great confidence. He also spoke in this manner about the matter of death.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:1-8).

Notice Paul's use of the term 'confident'. He faced death believing that he had made proper preparation for it. Therefore, he anticipated the crown of life. This passage refers to the time when life here on the earth is over and we pass from the human form to the spiritual. Paul did not stand in total fear but was confident that all was well with his soul. In verse nine he made clear that the work he did during life was a part of the reason he had confidence. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Judgment day will be a great day for those who have prepared for it.

Is it really worth it to use our time here in making ready for eternity? Consider the length of time that men live here, to eternity. If we should be blessed with life for eighty or even one hundred years, what is this in comparison to eternity. Eternity has no ending. Time here is nothing when compared to eternity.

Is our family of greater value than eternity with God? Jesus discussed this subject and reminded us that we must put God first.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. (Mt. 10:34-38).

Our families are of great value to us but if they stand in the way of our preparation for eternity, God must come first.

Money has a place in our lives. It can be used properly and thus would not stand in the way of our receiving the reward in Heaven. If money hinders us, is it worth it?

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21).

Some people seem to think that worldly pleasure is the most valuable use of our time here. Have they considered how long pleasure lasts? “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:24-25).

The choice is yours. Will you use life preparing for a home in Heaven or will you misuse the time God has given you? “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).