

## I. Quotes

A. We say we want a good death, but we act as if we will not die at all. Valarie Butler

B. For each person death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the gate to eternal separation from the only thing that will ultimately fulfill human aspirations. James Sire

C. Whether we like death or not, death is a constant point of reference, an unavoidable horizon, a question mark over everything. Everyone, gravedigger or intellectual, atheist or fervent believer, is forced by death to think in some way about realms beyond the visible world. Carlos Eire

## II. Campus Pastor Transition

A. Years ago, in his book, *A Christian Critique of the University*, Dr. Charles Malik argued that we have to listen very carefully to hear what is not being talked about,<sup>1</sup> because what is being collectively avoided tells us a lot about a group. He then argued that what is not being talked about on our colleges and university campuses is Jesus. Today I'd argue that what is not being talked about in our culture is *death*. This represents quite a switch. One hundred years ago the Victorians would not talk about sex but would talk about death at great length. Today we have few thoughts about sex that are not expressed but little is said about death.

---

<sup>1</sup> Malik writes: The fundamental spirit of the whole university is determined by the humanities. Philosophically and spiritually, where the humanities stand, the entire university stands – administrators, professors and students, individually and, what is more determinant, in their meetings in groups. The view of the nature and destiny of man, the general outlook on life and being, the interpretation of history, the fundamental orientation of the mind, the formation of personal character and the fixing of basic attitudes and habits, the nature of good and bad and right and wrong, the meaning and purpose of human existence, the whole spirit which stamps the individual human person – all these radiate in the first instance, not from the sciences, but from what is taught and presupposed in the humanities. And the example of the life of the teacher is here most decisive. I say “presupposed,” because what is presupposed is often far more subtle and potent than what is explicitly taught; what you are silent about will pass as something so much taken for granted that you do not need to say a word about it; while what you explicitly put forward may be arguable. **Therefore seek first what the university is silent about, and then you know the secret of the university.** The scientist himself, both when he takes courses in general education as an undergraduate student and from the general climate of opinion of the university, is stamped in his mind and character by the pervasive spirit of the university, whatever that be, which, as we saw, is originally determined by the humanities.

- B. This is odd. On the one hand, we see thousands of death portrayed on movie screens and in video games. We also get news reports about death virtually every day. And people we love die. (Which may be your situation. You may be facing your own death or you may be facing the death of someone you love – of have just lost someone you love. For any number of reasons this may be a difficult topic for you. I’m sorry. I think I understand. We do not want to be insensitive to your pain. There is good news here. Please hang in. My prayer has been that what you hear today will be helpful to you.)
- C. My point here is, on the one hand, death is all around us – we are aware of it. But we do not generally process it very well, or think about our own death very clearly. And in fact, we often go out of our way to avoid thinking about it at all, acting as if it will not happen to us. Many avoid any conversation about it. In fact, one person recently complained that her family had talked more about an upcoming three day weekend than about her impending death, and no matter how hard she tried to bring it up, they would not allow her to go there.
- D. But we need to, and our text today brings up the topic: Jesus references Jonah to draw attention to His upcoming death and resurrection, and in doing so we are reminded that He is greater than death.
- E. Let me read this passage and then we are going to watch a very powerful faith story. Here is Luke 11: 29 -33
1. As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.
- F. Let’s now watch this faith story from Kimberly Lynch.

### III. Introduction

A. Years ago, churches had cemeteries, so every week when you showed up you were reminded that before too long you were going to die. Some cemeteries even kept an open grave – that is, they always had a spot ready to bury the next person who died. This meant that as you walked in to the church building, you were aware that your grave may have already been dug. That might strike you as macabre, but I wish we had a cemetery because today there are more than a few people who think and act as though they will never die. And that’s not helpful. It forces me to say things like: I am going to die, and so are you. Death is more certain than taxes. Barring the sudden return of Christ, we are all going to die.

B. This is not the way things were initially designed. Death is one of the tragic effects of sin and the fall. It is ugly, and I understand that people would rather not think about it. But not facing reality is not helpful. And as Christians we do not face it without hope. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Death has lost its sting.”

C. I remember when I realized I needed to more aggressively raise this topic. I was visiting a man in his late 70s. He had – by his own admission – cheated death three times. The first time had prompted him to reassess his life and had led him to the church, where we shared the Gospel, he made a decision for Christ and got plugged in. A few years later he was back in the hospital. He was supposed to die. All the doctors said so. And then he didn’t. He rallied, confounding them all, checked out and went about his life for the next few years. And then a few years later he was back in the hospital for something different. Again, he was not expected to live. But he did. And a few years later he did it again. On this particular day – round four – he was in the hospital following a heart attack. But when I walked in to see him, he was sitting in a chair looking fine. Others were there and they were talking. When I walked in he lashed out at me. Then he lashed out at God. He said that what was happening to him was unfair. In fact, he announced that he was no longer certain he was going to believe in God. It was a little awkward given that others were there and he was being so belligerent. I laughed a bit and suggested that I return the next day so we could talk more. He agreed. I prayed for him and left. But tragically, the conversation never happened. He died an hour later.

D. When I heard that he had died I thought, I failed that man twice. I should have talked to him in the last hour of his life. But even more than that, I let him show up at church for a couple years, apparently without ever realizing that he was going to die. He missed that memo.

E. So, since then – when I’ve had half a chance – I’ve tried to make death the topic. I have that chance today as we motor through Luke 11. As was mentioned, this can be a hard topic for many reasons. I’m sorry. I really do think there is good news here, and if you are struggling because you or someone you love is facing death, or just passed away, please let us pray for you as the service ends. But, in our text, Jesus foreshadows his death and his resurrection. We need to be reminded that Jesus is greater than death.

IV. Let me walk us through this passage: Luke 11:29-32.

A. *As the crowds increased*

1. Earlier, Jesus had sent out the 70. They had apparently helped spread the word quite effectively. The crowds will start to grow quite large now. And what we will see as Jesus get closer to Jerusalem is that three things happen:

a) The crowds get larger

b) The altercations with the religious leaders will grow more frequent. Last week we saw them accuse Jesus of having power over evil because he was the Prince of Evil – and he pointed out how shallow and nonsensical that thinking was.<sup>2</sup>

c) The third thing that will happen is Jesus becomes clearer that when it comes to God there is no Switzerland. You are either in or out. There are no bleacher seats for this game – everyone is playing and you have to pick a side. You are for Jesus or against him. As he said in verse 23: “Whoever is not with me is against me.”

B. Back to verse 29: *As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign (everyone wanted Jesus to do miracles for them – heal people, multiply food). It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Let me remind you that in doing so, his enemies concede his power over evil, just as later on they will concede the empty tomb by claiming that the disciples stole the body. This is strong evidence. Historians refer to it as the Hermeneutic of Embarrassment. You do not concede a point against your position unless you have to.

1. As you may remember, Jonah was an Old Testament prophet who was told by God to head one way and he went the other. He was supposed to go to Nineveh and tell the Assyrians to repent, but he boarded a ship headed in the other direction. God sent a storm to thwart his escape. His fellow sailors eventually figure out the storm was because of Jonah, and at Jonah's request they pitched him overboard. We then read that he is swallowed by a fish, which spits him out on shore three days later. At that point he goes to Nineveh, tells them to repent and they do.

2. When Jesus brings up Jonah to the Jews listening back in the first century, they would have heard it as a reminder that God did an end run around them – the Jews – and offered grace to their enemies. They might have understood it as a suggestion that they were Gentiles or that they should repent. As we read this today, we understand that Jonah's three days in the belly of a fish was a miracle that pointed ahead to what Jesus would do – spend three days in the grave but then emerge.

3. Matthew's account of our text has a few more details.<sup>3</sup> There we read:

a) A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here”

C. Jesus says, the pagans in Nineveh turned their hearts to God after smaller miracle than you've been given. You are wicked. I'm not going to keep performing miracles to impress you, other than the way I will one-up Jonah. (Which they will only fully understand after his resurrection).

D. Jesus then goes on in V31 to offer another example: *The Queen of the South* (she is more generally known as the Queen of Sheba, she was probably from Ethiopia) *will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 12:38.

1. Again, they would likely hear this as another example of a Gentile who turned to follow God. And not fully appreciate all that Jesus is saying until later.

E. At this point, Jesus will go into more detail about their religious practices – which he will be quite clear, are not good enough. Next week we will see that Jesus is greater than religion, greater than The Law. He will point out that the challenge we have is not what is on the outside, but what is in our heart. Ritual cleaning is not enough. He will develop this point at some length. But, I don't want to miss something big that is assumed in today's text: Jesus is greater than death. He is killed, buried and spends parts of three days in the grave, and then comes back to life with a new body, because He is greater than the grave. It cannot hold him back – nor can it hold those who follow him. Jesus is greater than death.

V. Let me make a few basic points about how the Bible understands death before setting a few challenges in front of you.

A. First, the Bible has its own definition. Medically speaking, death is described as: permanent and irreversible cellular damage resulting from lack of oxygen, or something like that. The Bible describes physical death as the separation of our soul from our body, and spiritual death as the separation of the soul from God.

B. Second, The Bible makes it clear that death is an unnatural act – it's an intrusion into the created realm. There is no mention of it in Genesis 1 and 2. Death came as a result of sin.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein describes death as not being an event of life but a boundary. Christ followers can add, it's a boundary that should not be there. (Carl Trueman, "Death: The Final Boundary," *Minority Report*, Christian Focus, 2008). Also, the Bible makes other points about death, such as the fact that though death is a result of sin and a consequence of the fall, it is not punishment for those who have embraced Jesus. In Romans 8:1 Paul tells us that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Yes, Christians die, but this is the result of living in a fallen world. For reasons He does not explain, God did not choose to apply the benefits of Christ's death all at one. Likewise, he has not chosen to remove all of evil from the world immediately, but to wait for final judgment. So, we live in a fallen world and all of the benefits of Christ's death are not yet realized.

C. Three: death is not the end. The Sadducees were among the few who rejected the common idea that we lived on after death. Jesus clearly rejected their view and consistently taught that death was a transition – that those who stand with Him go to a place far better than our good but broken world. Even as he hung on the cross, Jesus promised the repentant, dying thief beside Him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”<sup>5</sup>

D. Four: The Bible promises that one day death will be destroyed. Jesus defeated death on the cross. In I Cor. 15 we are told that when he makes all things right, he will destroy death.<sup>6</sup> It will be no more.

---

<sup>5</sup> Luke 23:43.

<sup>6</sup> See: I Cor. 15:26, 54-55. You can also see John Owen’s classic work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.

E. Five, at that time we will get new physical bodies. Let me be clear, because this is a point few understand. Our hope is for a resurrection of the body and it's re-unification with our soul. Some think that after death we become a spirit or an angel or something.<sup>7</sup> The Bible makes a very specific and unique claim. If we take a step back we see that there are a few common assumptions:

1. The materialist holds that death is the end. Our reputation, our works and our family may outlast us – but we will know nothing of any of it. When we are dead we are done. What you see is all you get. When your heart stops it's game over.<sup>8</sup> To quote the dying prince in the last act of Hamlet, “the rest is silence.”

---

<sup>7</sup> In *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC Paperback*, (1993), Frederick Buechner writes the following about immortality. “Immortal means death-proof. To believe in the immortality of the soul is to believe that though John Brown's body lies smoldering in the grave, his soul goes marching on simply because marching on is the nature of souls just the way producing apples is the nature of apple trees. Bodies die, but souls don't. True or false, this is not the biblical view, although many who ought to know better assume it is. The biblical view differs in several significant ways:

- As someone has put it, the biblical understanding of man is not that he has a body but that he is a body. When God made Adam, he did it by slapping some mud together to make a body and then breathing some breath into it to make a living soul. Thus the body and soul which make up a man are as inextricably part and parcel of each other as the leaves and flames that make up a bonfire. When you kick the bucket, you kick it one hundred percent. All of you. There is nothing left to go marching on with;
- The idea that the body dies and the soul doesn't is an idea which implies that the body is something rather gross and embarrassing like a case of hemorrhoids. The Greeks spoke of it as the prison house of the soul. The suggestion was that to escape it altogether was something less than a disaster. The Bible, on the other hand, sees the body in particular and the material world in general as a good and glorious invention. How could it be otherwise when it was invented by a good and glorious God? The Old Testament rings loud with the praises of trees and birds and rain and mountains, of wine that gladdens the heart of man and oil that makes his face shine and bread that strengthens him. Read the 104<sup>th</sup> Psalm for instance. Or try the Song of Solomon for as abandoned and unabashed a celebration of the physical as you're apt to find anywhere. As for the New Testament, Jesus himself, far from being a world-denying ascetic, was accused of being a wino and a chow-hound. When he heard that his friend Lazarus was dead, he didn't mouth any pious clichés about what a merciful release it was. He wept. The whole idea of incarnation (q.v.), of the word becoming flesh, affirms the physical and fleshly in yet another way by declaring that it was a uniform God himself wasn't ashamed to wear. St. Paul undoubtedly had his hang-ups, but when he compares flesh unfavorably to spirit, he is not talking about body versus soul but about the old man without Christ versus the new man with him.
- Those who believe in the immortality of the soul believe that life after death is as natural a function of man as digestion after a meal. The Bible instead speaks of resurrection. It is entirely unnatural. Man does not go on living beyond the grave because that's how he is made. Rather, he goes to his grave as dead as a doornail and is given his life back again by God (i.e., resurrected) just as he was given it by God in the first place, because that is the way God is made.

All the major Christian creeds affirm belief in resurrection of the body. In other words they affirm the belief that what God in spite of everything prizes enough to bring back to life is not just some disembodied echo of a human being but a new and revised version of all the things which made him the particular human being he was and which he needs something like a body to express; his personality, the way he looked, the sound of his voice, his peculiar capacity for creating and loving, in some sense his face. The idea of the immortality of the soul is based on the experience of man's indomitable spirit. The idea of the resurrection of the body is based on the experience of God's unspeakable love.

<sup>8</sup> This view was also held by a few ancient philosophers, such as Democritus and Lucretius.

2. The spiritualists contend that we live on as a spirit. This includes the generic spirituality that keeps growing in the US, and also some forms of Eastern thinking. Some contend that we survive as some kind of ghost or angel or liberated, disembodied spirit; others that we meld in with the grand cosmic force.<sup>9</sup> Some see this as a bad thing – we are a pale shadow of our former self. Others think being a spirit will be a good thing. (Plato, and other Greeks, thought of the body was a dungeon. They wanted their soul to be free from the confines of flesh.)

3. There is a third group that says our spirit goes to reanimate some other body – that we are reincarnated, literally “re-fleshed” in a different form.<sup>10</sup>

*F.* The Christian claim is unique. The Bible argues for a supernatural resurrection of the whole person, not just the soul, but the body as well. When we die our soul goes to be with God and our body goes into the grave, but in the Book of Revelation<sup>11</sup> we are promised that in the end there will be a resurrection of the body and that it will be reunited with our spirit. We will get new, perfect bodies that are every bit as real as the ones we have.<sup>12</sup> That is what we affirm when we say the Apostles’ Creed: I believe in resurrection of the body.

*G.* Men and women, heaven isn’t some mystical, magical, ethereal, never-never-land where we are vaporous spirits. It’s a real place and we are real people

VI. OK, with that as a backdrop, I want to alert you to two points about death.

A. First: Our understanding (our attitude or view) of death and dying have changed in the past few decades, and not generally for the better. .

---

<sup>9</sup> Those in Hinduism and some braches of Buddhism see the goal to be to blend into the join great cosmic consciousness, the One, the perfect, eternal trans-individual spirit that existed before anything else.

<sup>10</sup> For materialists, death is everything. It stops everything. For Hindus and Buddhists, death is nothing because we already are everything. For Platonists, death is a form of liberation. In the mythic view we become less than we were. In reincarnation we become the same sort of thing we were. Only in Christianity do we become more.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 20

<sup>12</sup> In I John 3:2 we read, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” In Phil. 3:21 we are told that Jesus “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

1. One of the reasons for this is that death and dying have changed.<sup>13</sup> We still die 100 percent of the time, but:

a) It happens later. We live about thirty years longer today than we did 100 years ago<sup>14</sup> – giving us a second adult life that we can invest as we see fit.

b) It happens for different reasons. Medical care has improved on so many fronts that we now tend to die of different things.<sup>15</sup>

c) It takes longer. Most of us will spend a few years fighting the disease that will claim our life, which means we will have a pretty good idea of what will kill us and we can prepare for our death should we chose to: we can repair relationships and achieve a sense of spiritual well-being and calm<sup>16</sup>. My sense is that few do this. But we can.

2. If you read the popular literature, there is a lot of talk about dying well. Best I can tell, for most this means, dying at home and not being in pain.<sup>17</sup> I think this is an improvement over dying in the hospital surrounded by people you do not know. But it does not go far enough. I think dying well means being spiritually ready to meet God and also having made peace with others.

---

<sup>13</sup> Some note other ways that death has changed: 1) We have become fascinated by it in an odd, unhealthy way. (INSERT – AAA); 2) we have replaced funerals with celebration services. (XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX).

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Mayer, *Amortality: Why Acting Your Age is a Thing of the Past*, *Time*, April 25, 2011, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> In spite of lots of research, cancer fatalities in the past 30 years have gone up by 22%. That is because we used to die of heart attacks, strokes and accidents, but we have gotten quite adept at treating those.

<sup>16</sup> Stepehn Kerman, author of *Last Rights: Rescuing the End of Life from the Medical System* (St. Martins), writes: 1) “For the first time in human history, we can anticipate our mortality.” And, 2) writing about the fact that we live longer and can prepare to die, Kierman writes, “That shift presents an opportunity for sublime end-of-life experiences – last wishes fulfilled, pain managed, relationships repaired, spiritual calm attained – which almost everyone misses.”

<sup>17</sup> Almost everyone I read has much praise to offer the hospice movement, and my recent experience with my father’s death under hospice care was very positive. There are exceptions: some argue that as Christ followers we need to reinsert ourselves with more vigor into caring for those who are dying, allowing them to die at home under our care. We need not think we need medical professionals to feed and clean up after them. Also, some argue that by “good death” some hospital staff mean, “clean, painless, euphoric and on their time schedule.” (See Ken Peirce, *On the Matter of Morphine*, Touchstone, Oct. 2007, p. 6).

3. Thirty years ago – when I was starting in ministry – if you were in the hospital room of someone who was dying, important conversations were often taking place. Now, often times it seems that all anyone is talking about is the possibility for a new clinical trial, and those conversations do not happen.<sup>18</sup> The patient may have not accepted that they are going to die. In some cases, they have but no one else has.<sup>19</sup>

4. If you step back and think about it, you see that we spend a lot of effort avoiding death.<sup>20</sup> I’m not suggesting that we are courageously “death-defying;” but rather that we are foolishly death-denying, acting as if we can keep death at bay.<sup>21</sup> This is not helpful.

B. Second: We need our view of death to be framed by the Gospel. This means we need to hold two ideas in tension. One: death is ugly and bad. And Two: Death is a transition to eternal life. It’s a door a Christ-follower wants to walk through.

---

<sup>18</sup> In “Death Unplugged,” Paul Gregory Alms writes: Increasingly, the experience of death and even, yes, specifically Christian death (that is, Christians dying with Christians there to witness it) is mostly filled not with moments of meditation on Scripture, nor with prayer, nor even with bittersweet memories. No, the hours of passing are used up staring at computer screens that spit out mysterious data we barely understand but think somehow is crucial... Death comes to us not as angels carrying the soul to distant shores, not as a grim reaper grabbing his prey, not even as one falling asleep. Death comes as a system failure, the machine of the body coming to a stop – as planned obsolescence. (Paul Gregory Alms, “Death Unplugged,” *Touchstone*, March 2007, p. 19f).

<sup>19</sup> In some cases I suspect that everyone has but there still isn’t a willingness to talk about it. The term for this is “mutual pretense.” This describes a situation in which everyone knows that the patient is going to die, but they talk as if he /she will not.

<sup>20</sup> Writing in *First Things*, R. Reno writes, “Why,” asks our friend David Goldman, “does the West wallow in images of death – not merely death, but death in massive doses, in the form of zombie armies of the walking dead?” His answer, which makes perfect sense, is that secularism doesn’t make us happy. We have dismissed the Jewish and Christian hope of eternal life as superstition offensive to reason, but instead, we find ourselves trapped in a recurring nightmare,” he writes. “We know that we will die, but (as Woody Allen said) we don’t want to be there when it happens. We act as if exercise, antioxidants, and Botox will keep the reaper away, but we know that our flesh one day must putrefy nonetheless. The more we try to ignore death, the more it fascinates us. The more we tell ourselves that mortality doesn’t apply to us, the more it surrounds us. And the more we try to fight off the fear, the more we feel like the beleaguered survivors resisting the zombie herd.” (*First Things*, Feb. 2013, p. 69).

<sup>21</sup> Socrates – who famously stated that “the unexamined life is not worth living” – had the wisdom to understand that a life lived ignoring the reality of death is a life lived in illusion. And a life lived in illusion he viewed as immeasurably poorer than a life lived in full view of the truth. In many ways, we seem to embrace the illusion. For instance, when someone is pulled from a burning building or a sinking ship, we do not say that their death was postponed but that their life was saved; there is a multi-billion dollar anti-aging business, many people today dress in ways that suggest they are younger than they are. We do our best to deny death even when, after birth it is the only certain event.

1. I appreciate what Kimberly said about cancer. It's ugly – as are other forms of dying. We should not pretend otherwise. Even those who hold out hope of eternal life are free to say death makes them sad and mad. It was not part of the original plan. We were not made to die. Death is bad.<sup>22</sup>

2. But, death in Christ has upsides. It's a transition to something better. When my Dad was told that he was going to die, the doctor asked if he had any concerns. And my Dad said, "I'm not scared of death, but I am not looking forward to dying." I get that. The doctor promised him a peaceful death, which is what he had. But I understand some apprehension about the act of dying, but death itself is nothing we need to fear if we have embraced Christ.

3. The Bible doesn't answer all of our questions about death or what follows, but it says more than enough to give us hope.

a) For starters, it makes it clear that we are with God. As Paul writes, to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ.

b) Secondly, the Bible describes death in a handful of good ways. In many places it is referred to as "going to sleep," which is a temporary thing.<sup>23</sup> In a few places it's referred to as taking down a tent – which is understood as a temporary dwelling place.<sup>24</sup> In his letter to the Philippians, Paul refers to his death as a departure. The word he uses is one describing a ship being loosened from its moorings and setting sail for a new destination.<sup>25</sup> The most comforting may be "coming home." In 2 Cor. 5:6 Paul explains that Christ followers can call two places home: 1) their body – at which time they are "Away from the Lord", or 2) we can be "at home with the Lord."

---

<sup>22</sup> We are right to mourn the death of loved ones – it is not an unspiritual act. See Acts 8:2 – righteous men buried Stephen and wept. It was better for Stephen but they wept their own loss. Jesus cried at Lazarus's death. The Psalms are full of prayers of sadness and lament. Our grief should never be total – death has lost its sting! – but we are certainly allowed to grieve.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Chronicles 9:31; Ps. 133:3; Daniel 12:2; John 11:11-13; I Cor. 11:30; 15:51.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. 5:1. We are assured that when our temporary dwelling is taken down, we have "an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

<sup>25</sup> See Phil 1:22

c) Thirdly, in addition to being with God in a better place, we will have new and improved bodies.

d) This isn't enough to answer every question, but from what little we are told about Christ's resurrection body, it's all good.<sup>26</sup>

4. The Bible portrays death as a part of life<sup>27</sup> and a door to heaven. We are invited to look forward to our own death.<sup>28</sup>

a) In *The Last Battle*, C.S. Lewis describes death as entering "further in and higher up" into real life. There we read: For those who died, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures... had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

C. When it comes to death there are a few other things that need to be said:

1. There are practical matters.

---

<sup>26</sup> In calm, reflective confidence, Christ-followers can greet death with hope. In the past, some have thought of death as the beginning of Life. In Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, death is pictured in the familiar image of the river which must be crossed. His suggestion is that some – those who have great faith – will find the river shallow; others – with feeble faith – may find the river deep and full of hidden dangers. But on the other side, waiting for those with faith great or little, are the heavenly hosts; and Mr. Ready-to-Halt's last known words, as he crossed the stream, were: "Welcome, Life!" The early Christian martyrs, though no doubt frightened and perhaps seeking death for their own reasons sometimes, surely viewed it the same way. Death is the one and only door to Life.

<sup>27</sup> There is a sense in which we are all slowly dying as soon as we are born. As Peter writes, "All men are like grass, and all their glory like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall (I Peter 1:24).

<sup>28</sup> Malcom Muggeridge, who was converted late in life, came to look forward to heaven. At the age of 76 he wrote: Like a prisoner awaiting his release, like a school boy when the end of a term is near, like a migrant bird ready to fly south... I long to be gone. Extricating myself from the flesh I have too long inhabited, hearing the key turn in the lock of time so that the great doors of eternity swing open, disengaging my tired mind from its interminable conundrums, and my tired ego from its wearisome insistencies. Such is the prospect of death.

a) Having sat with some families where everything is buttoned down – the person dying had a will and a trust and insurance and a list of instructions to be followed – everything was settled – and having been in some settings where nothing is done, or where I’m trying to referee a fight between adult kids over who gets what, or the kids and their step Mom, let me say, “The first is better” Please give this some thought.”<sup>29</sup>

2. There could be a long discussion about what happens when we die. I will only say, there is no mention of soul sleep or purgatory in the Bible – we are told that to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ.

3. I should note that there is no talk about second chances.

D. But my big point today is: Jesus is Greater Than Death. If we are right with God, we do not need to fear death. If we are Christ-followers, then death is nothing to fear. Rather, the reality of our upcoming death can be a helpful prompt to live a good life – to love and serve; to do the things pleasing to God; to live today in light of the fact that we are going to live forever.<sup>30</sup>

1. This life does matter. But it’s short. Our days are numbered. And when we die we are going to meet God and live on forever. You want to live this light in front of God and with an understanding that we can store up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal.

E. Jesus is greater than death. Last week we saw that He is greater than evil. Next week we will see that he is greater than religion, then that he is greater than fear and greed and anxiety.

F. Today we can be encouraged – we can find great comfort in knowing – that Jesus is greater than death.

## VII. Wrap Up / Announcements

---

<sup>29</sup> Today only one in five people have completed an advance directive for medical care.

<sup>30</sup> Paul knew that the Philippians would face suicidal temptations, and so he addressed it in terms of his own desire. He wanted to leave now for heaven – for that is far better (Phil. 1:21-30), but he felt it was “more necessary for him to remain” and serve.

- A. Years ago it was not uncommon for people to keep a skull on their desk. You've probably seen pictures of this. It was called a *memento mori* and it was there to remind us, I'm going to die. Which in turn was supposed to drive us to ask ourselves, "Am I living today in light of forever?" I'm not sure keeping a skull on your desk would play well today, but avoiding thinking about our death is not helpful.
- B. We do not live in a death-defying world, but we do live in a death-denying one. Do not deny death. We do not need to. In Christ we are free to acknowledge that it is ugly and long for the day when it is destroyed, but we need not fear it.
- C. Men and women, this is an important topic. I encourage you to make it a focus on your small group discussion this week, and we've given you lots of other resources to think about – all available online.
- D.

#### VIII. Questions

- A. Do you fear your own death? British philosopher Simon Critchley writes, A detailed national survey by the "Opinion Dynamics Corporation" from 2003 claimed that fully 92 percent of Americans believe in God, 85 percent believe in heaven and 82 percent believe in miracles. But the deeper truth is that such religious belief, complete with a heavenly afterlife, brings believers little solace in relation to death. The only priesthood in which people *really* believe is the medical profession and the purpose of their sacramental drugs and technology is to support longevity, the sole unquestioned good of contemporary Western life." He goes on to express surprise that the belief in heaven doesn't alleviate fears of death. Do you share his surprise? Do you fear death?
- B. Are you spiritually ready to die? Why or why not?
- C. Are you practically ready to die – i.e., do you have a will, matters attended to, etc.?