

Death: The Universal Appointment



Victory Over Death (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you out of truths that life has taught me, truths that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same for you.

Let me begin by saying "Thank you" to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. Feel free to share with us your personal needs, your problems, your prayer requests.

This week, I'll be dealing with a theme that is of vital importance for every one of us, without a single exception. My theme is "Victory over Death."

Is there something in you that flinches just for a moment at the mention of the word "death"? Is your first reaction to switch to another program? If so, that's a sure indication that you, in particular, need to stay tuned to this program and to listen carefully to what I'm going to say.

In our contemporary culture, there's a strong move to take away anything that might be unpleasant or painful from the concept of death. There have been subtle changes in terminology introduced. We no longer speak about an undertaker or a funeral home; instead we use phrases such as "a parlor of rest" or perhaps "a chapel of rest." We no longer speak about a cemetery; instead we use a phrase such as "a memorial garden." And when the body of a dead person is displayed for view before burial, everything possible is done to minimize the change caused by death.

I've heard psychological arguments advanced on behalf of these changes and I'm not interested in contesting these arguments; however, I'm concerned that we do not allow ourselves to forget one simple, objective, unchanging fact: death is real and it is unpleasant, painful and cruel. Any view of life that cannot accept this fact is deceptive and unrealistic. Any philosophy or religion that does not have a positive answer to the fact of death is inadequate to meet the needs of humanity. What distinguishes the Christian faith from all other religions and philosophies is that it does have a positive, proven answer to death.

My basis for approaching this subject today is threefold: Scripture, personal experience and personal observation. Let's look at Scripture first. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul says: "The last enemy… is death…" Death is an enemy, the universal enemy of the whole human race.

Then let me talk for a moment of my own personal experience. Being over 60 years of age, I have, of course, experienced the loss of close relatives and loved ones: father, mother, and most of all a beloved wife with whom I'd shared thirty years of happy marriage. And then I can speak also from personal observation. During World War II I served as a hospital attendant in the battlefields and in the hospitals of North Africa. And of course, I encountered death many times. Also, as a minister counseling and helping the bereaved. So I'm not speaking merely from theory or from ministerial training. I'm speaking from the realities of life as I've lived it and seen it.

Over the centuries man's reaction to death has taken various forms. One response is cynicism. This is expressed in a passage in Isaiah 22:13, a picture of men faced with the imminent reality of death, and it says:

> "Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.'" (NAS)

That's just cynical. Let's eat and drink, death is soon coming.

Another reaction is pessimism. This was common in Medieval Europe. The whole of Medieval society was prevailed by a sense of death. It occurred in all their letters, their religion and their books, and even in their art.

Beyond this, another reaction is what I would call morbid preoccupation. This attitude is described by the British poet, T. S. Eliot. Writing about a poet of the Elizabethan period in England named Webster, he says this:

> "Webster was much possessed with death; He saw the skull beneath the skin, And breastless creatures underground Leaned backwards with a lipless grin."

There's a man whose mind was totally occupied by death.

Another attitude is escapism. This is really the attitude of many Oriental cults and philosophies which are claiming our attention today. It speaks about aiming at the release of the individual from his personal being into a kind of vague, non-personal existence called, in the language of these cults, "nirvana" and other names. However, this is unreal. It's also contrary to Scripture. I, myself, was in that kind of study and cult for quite awhile as a younger man and I found in it nothing but frustration, no fulfillment.

Let's turn now the faithful record of Scripture and see what that has to say. Hebrews 9:27 tells it like it is:

> "…it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment…" (NAS)

Somebody has said, "You may miss every appointment you ever made while you live but there are two appointments you're going to keep. The first is death, the second is judgment." The Bible clearly reveals (and we'll see this in greater detail later this week and next week) that there is continuing conscious existence after death and also personal accountability for what we've done during our lives.

That's a word that's not popular today in contemporary culture: accountability. There's an attempt to run from it. But the fact remains it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. We will be held accountable.

When modern medicine encounters a physical problem it seeks to provide three things: diagnosis, prognosis, and remedy. The diagnosis tells the cause; the prognosis tells the course that the disease will take; the remedy, of course, is the answer to the disease.

When we face the problem of death, the Bible offers us all these three things: diagnosis, prognosis and remedy. Let's look first at the diagnosis, the cause. This is stated very simply in Scripture. Romans 5:12:

> "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned…" (NIV)

So death came through sin. If there had never been sin, there never would have been death. But because all men have sinned, death has come to all men.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 15:56, Paul says: "The sting of death is sin…" What is a sting? It's the means by which some kind of insect (maybe a scorpion) injects its poison into the body of its victim and thereby produces the negative result or consequence. So the means by which death injected its corruption and its doom into our bodies was through sin. Sin is the sting that injected the poison of death.

Then the prognosis. The Bible indicates that death follows three successive stages. The first is spiritual death. In Genesis 2:17, God said to Adam, as He warned him about the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He said:

> "but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

Notice that, "in the day that you eat," you will die. As we understand death, Adam lived another 900 years and more, but in the very day that he sinned he was cut off or alienated from a life with God and in that moment he died spiritually. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul says to those who have become Christians, about their life before they knew Christ:

> "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins..." (NAS)

That's not, of course, physical death, but it's spiritual death, alienation from God. Once man's spirit was cut off from God by sin, his physical life was like a battery that could not be recharged. It continued quite a while but ultimately it had to run down.

The second phase is physical death. That's what we call death. The separation of the soul from the body. But in actual fact, there is no real change in the condition of either.

And then the third phase is what the Bible calls "the second death," and this is something that is known only through the revelation of Scripture. In Revelation 20:14-15, we read this:

> "This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (NAS)

As we study the picture presented there in Revelation, we see two important things. First, this second death is final, eternal, irrevocable banishment from the presence of God. From the second death there is no way back. Secondly, it is not a cessation of consciousness. There is never a cessation of consciousness. Personality remains conscious both in this life and in the world beyond. For ever and ever. We never escape from our own consciousness.

Let me just review those three phases of the prognosis of the course of death in human life. First, spiritual death, the alienation of man's soul from God through sin. Second, physical death, the separation of the soul from the body. And third, the final irrevocable banishment from the presence of God but yet with continuing consciousness, which is called the "second death."

In the talks that follow, both this week and next, I will go on to the Bible's remedy for death.

Our time is up now and I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow my subject will be "The Life-Giver and the Life-Taker."

Radio Program

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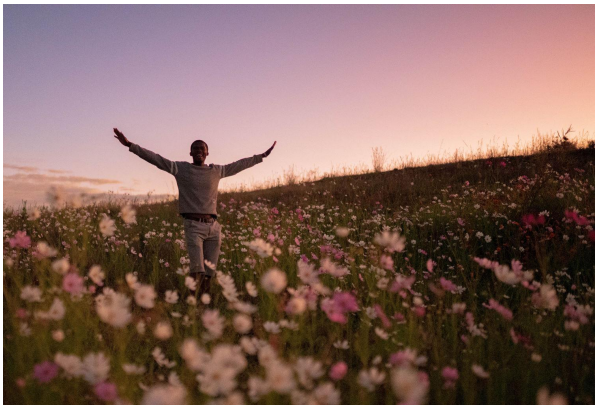

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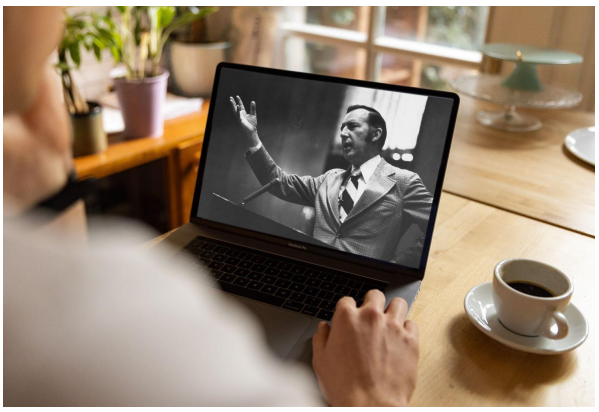

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