

INTRODUCTION

Were going to be talking about how to deal with your coming death and how to deal with the death of a loved one, because I'm convinced there is a lot of confusion out there. Some of you are perhaps are still struggling through an unhealthy grief experience from someone in your family who died years ago. We'll talk about that too. For some of you it's where you are right now. For others, you've already been there. But for each of us, it's where we're going. If you don't need this information today, you'll need it in the years to come.

Today I want to talk to you about "Deceived by the Light." There are a lot of people who are confused about what happens at the point of death. The title of this series is "Embraced by the Truth about Death." Actually it's a critique of the book that has sold 6 million copies called *Embraced by the Light* that many of you have read. Through the years several of you have asked me what I thought about this book. I'll definitely be telling you what I think about this book today. There are a lot of people who are misled by things like this. One of my jobs as a pastor and shepherd (Jesus is the chief Shepherd, I'm the under-shepherd) is to try to protect you from false, harmful doctrine.

Let's talk about death. It's all around us. Perhaps you've heard the words written on a tombstone that said:

CONSIDER YOUNG MAN
AS YOU WALK BY
AS YOU ARE NOW
SO ONCE WAS I
AS I AM NOW
YOU SOON SHALL BE
SO PREPARE YOUNG MAN
TO FOLLOW ME

That sounded pretty wise, but some guy came along and added this little postscript to it. It said:

*To follow you
Is not my intent
Until I know
Which way you went!*

I. THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

Notice three things about death. First is the certainty of death. If the Lord tarries, we all will die. I honestly believe Jesus Christ could come back at any moment and rapture the church. Paul says, "We will not all sleep" meaning to physically die, but we'll all be changed. But if the Lord tarries his return, we will all die.

I have conducted funerals of people ranging in age from stillborn infants to a man whose family claimed he was a 108. People are going to die. Benjamin Franklin coined the phrase: Nothing is

certain in life except death and taxes. Too bad it’s not in that order. Death and taxes aren’t that similar. People do avoid paying taxes, but no one is going to avoid death.

(1) *Thanatos* — spiritual death

In the New Testament, there are two different words used for death. *Thanatos* means “spiritual death.” That’s not talking about when you stop breathing and your brain stops functioning. Spiritual death means separation of the spirit from God. The Bible says in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” That doesn’t mean you are going to die physically because of your sin, it means because we are sinners by nature and by choice, we are all spiritually dead. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul says, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.” Some of you are dead spiritually. Your heart is beating, your brain is functioning, your lungs are breathing but you are dead, spiritually, because you’ve never been born again. When you become a Christian, the spirit of God comes in and breathes life into your spirit and then you become spiritually alive.

(2) *Nekros* — physical death

The word the New Testament uses for physical death is *nekros*, we get our word “necrophobia” from it, which means a fear of death. Many people have a fear of death. Have you noticed we don’t want to talk about death? We tried to call it different things, surround it with flowers and sweet words and phrases. We try to deny death as long as we can. We think we can avoid it for ever and ever. Someone once said a hundred years ago in America people never talked openly about sex, because it was too holy and private. But people talked and joked openly about death because a larger percentage of Americans were Christians at that time. A hundred years later, it’s totally reversed. Today everyone is talking about sex, but nobody wants to talk about death. Notice we don’t say, “I’m sorry your husband died.” We say, “I’m sorry you lost your husband.” We don’t call it “the corpse,” we call it “the deceased” or “the dearly departed.” We have all these words to help us avoid death.

The French philosopher Pascal wrote, “We spend our lives trying to take our minds off death.” You’re not really ready to die until you come to grips with your own mortality. I love what that great theologian Katharine Hepburn had to say about death, “I think I’m finally at a point where I’ve learned to face death with a sense of humor. I have to. When you’re my age it’s as if you’re a car—first a tire blows and you get that fixed; then a headlight goes out and you get that fixed. And then one day you drive into the shop and the mechanic says ‘sorry Miss, they don’t make parts for this model anymore.’”

Statistics about death are pretty interesting. Every year 70 million people die. Two people die every second. And in the time it took for me to tell you that, 10 people died. But the most interesting statistic about death is one out of one people die. You may be surprised to learn that in the medical and scientific community there is great disagreement over what constitutes physical death. Before modern medical technology, a person died when their heart stopped beating and their lungs stopped breathing. Today we can measure their brain waves and we all know people who seemingly died—their heart stopped beating and they were revived. For this purpose, we are going to use the definition of physical death as the point at which physical resuscitation is no longer possible.

Thousands of people have had some sort of near-death experience, where they thought they died, maybe their heart did stop beating for awhile and had some sort of experience and were brought back to life and they talk about it. Interestingly, many of these are very similar. I've read dozens of them myself. The only thing wrong with that is these people didn't die. Our definition of death is when you get to the point where physical resuscitation is not possible. They got close to the doorway of death, but they were brought back. We're going to look at some of these. That leads us to our second point

II. THE CONFUSION ABOUT DEATH

There is a lot of confusion about death. Many of these near-death experiences create some of this confusion. A lot of people want to know what death is like, like Mike, a little boy who wrote this letter to God:

Dear God,
What is it like when a person dies? Nobody will tell me. I just want to know, I don't want to do it.

Your friend,
Mike

Many of us want to know the same thing: what happens at the point of death? Existentialists believe death is the end. That's it there's nothing else. You only go around once in life, grab for all the gusto you can get. Life is short so live it up. The Eastern religions teach reincarnation, when you die you are born again into some other creature. If you lived a good life, you're born to a higher level; if you lived a bad life you are born to a lower level. That's why in India you can't step on a bug eat a cow.

In the Old Testament, even Job asked the question everybody wants to know: If a man dies, shall he live again? Death is not a period; it is a comma. There is something after death but so many people are confused about it.

These near-death experiences have confused a lot of people. I've chosen this one because by far it is the most popular. Betty Eadie grew up on an American Indian Reservation and has some American Indian spiritualist ideas. She was married at age 15 and had four children before she was 20 and then divorced, remarried and had three more children. In 1973, after her seventh child, she had a partial hysterectomy and died in the hospital. Interestingly, she refuses to divulge the location and name of the hospital and the name of her doctor. She didn't write a word about it until 1993, 20 years later. I don't doubt she had some kind of experience. She claims to have died and was going down a dark tunnel at an amazing speed, being sucked toward a light. On either side, she could see animals and other people also being drawn toward this light, but she was going faster than everybody else. When she arrived at this light, there was an illuminated figure—the Lord Jesus Christ. This figure embraced her, thus the title *Embraced by the Light*.

I think Betty Eadie and many, many others have been deceived by the light. She says, "It was the most unconditional love I've ever felt. I saw his arms open to receive me. I went to him and received his complete embrace and I said over and over 'I'm home! I'm home! I'm finally home!' I felt his enormous spirit and knew that I had always been a part of him, that in reality I've never been away from him I knew that I was worthy to be with him, to embrace him."

She stayed in heaven for awhile and Jesus taught her about life, about God, about angels and everything else. She claims to have learned some things contrary to the Bible. For instance, she said, "I understood to my surprise that Jesus was a separate being from God, not equal, with his own purpose. I knew that God was our mutual father." She speaks in glowing terms of Jesus in this book; in fact she dedicates it to him. She calls him a highly advanced "spiritual brother." Let me remind you, we believe God the Father and God the Son are co-equal and co-eternal.

Betty stays around heaven for awhile, learns all this stuff, and then appears before a council of 10 men in heaven. I haven't read anything about that in the Bible, have you? They tell her she's got to go back. Betty says, "I was led into a room, which was exquisitely built and appointed. I entered and I saw a group of men seated around the long side of the kidney shaped table. I was led to stand in front of them within the indented portion of the table." They said, "Betty we want you to go back to planet Earth, tell everybody what you experienced." She said, "I don't want to go back." They argued back and forth. Finally, Jesus, who seems to be her defense attorney, stepped up beside her and encouraged her to go back. All her life was reviewed by the council. "I felt the love of the Council come over me. They watched my life with understanding and mercy. I realized that the council was not judging me, I was judging myself. The Savior stepped toward me, full of concern and love, his spirit gave me strength and he said that I was judging myself to critically. 'You're being too harsh on yourself.'" Then she came back to planet Earth and wrote a book, which by the way has made her a multimillionaire.

(1) False doctrine

Some of you have read this book. I've had Christians in this church come to me and say, "Somebody gave me this book and says it's just wonderful what do you think about it?" There are two dangers to a book like this. Number one. I think some of these popular near-death experiences promote false doctrine. Let me hasten to say that much in this book is great and wonderful. It makes for good reading. Read this and you get the warm fuzzies all over. There is some truth. but even a broken clock is right twice a day. The insidious danger of this book is that it promotes false doctrine. She says Jesus is not equal to God. Why did she approach Jesus in heaven? There is absolutely no worship of Jesus. In my Bible, I'm told that when Isaiah saw the glory of God, he fell on his face and cried, "Woe is me!" When Ezekiel saw God's glory, he fell down on his face. And in Revelation when the apostle John sees Jesus, he falls down as a dead man. When you see Jesus, you're going to fall on your face. But not Betty. She walks up to him and hugs him. He is an "advanced spiritual brother." There is no worship in the book. As comforting and as beautiful as that thought sounds "Oh, I want Jesus just to hug me," I think he will eventually, but your first response and my first response will be to fall down and worship before the Lamb that was slain: that's what my Bible teaches. If you know anything about what she teaches in here and if you know anything about Mormon beliefs, you'll find some similarities. Betty Eadie is a Mormon. In the first two editions of this book, the first chapter

describes her conversion to Mormonism. But they decided they wanted to make money, so they took it out. Nothing in recent editions of this book say anything about her being a Mormon, because they wanted Baptists and Methodists and Presbyterians to buy it—and believe me, you are buying it by the millions! Sadly, many of you are also believing it.

One of the most tragic things about this and its false doctrine is there is no accountability for sin. "You are judging yourself too harshly," Jesus said." Of all the things Betty Eadie learned in heaven, nothing was said about the atoning work of Jesus on the cross! The Bible tells me the most important thing to Jesus Christ ever did on earth was to come to die for us! Nothing is said about that. Nothing is said about the blood of Jesus Christ. If you are familiar with Mormon teaching, they don't have much to say about the crucifixion and death of Jesus. There's no accountability for sin; there's no hell.

I studied dozens of these near-death experiences and strangely, they all seem to be toward some kind of all-loving, benevolent light. In fact, Dr. Maurice Rawlings was interviewing a young man who wanted to give blood for money (he was not necessarily a good candidate). When Dr. Rawlings questioned a man about several recent wounds that might infect others, the man reluctantly confessed to having murdered two people. He had also been shot by a transvestite after beating him up for deceiving him into thinking he was a woman. While receiving CPR in an ambulance, this man had undergone a near-death experience that included passing through a tunnel and seeing a heavenly, welcoming light. When Rawlings asked him how he felt about that the man said, "Well, it felt good to be in a beautiful place, you know? But I kept wondering why the light never asked me about my beating the ***** out of that cross-dresser. And the light never mentioned the two murders in the past. I'm glad they didn't ask me about those things, but if he was from God why didn't he? I thought about bringing it up, but I said to myself, 'Why knock a good thing?' I kept my mouth shut. I knew I should be in hell instead of this nice place, but I kept quiet."

I would say 90% of near-death experiences have absolutely no kind of teaching or experience that has anything to do that is negative or about hell. Even a murderer, who said he was not a Christian, said something was wrong with that picture. The Bible says "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that judgment." (Hebrews 9:27) We will all be accounted for our lifestyle. Many of these near-death experiences don't talk about that. If I wasn't a Christian or if I was a weak Christian, I would love to read this book and I'd believe everything about it: In the arms Jesus, no accountability for my sin, no hell, wonderful place in heaven...but be careful, every thing you read has to be filtered through the truth of the word of God. If it contradicts the word of God, please don't believe it.

(2) Fatal desires

There is another danger of these near-death experiences, particularly this one. Not only does it promote false doctrine but number two, it actually promotes fatal desires. You read Betty Eadie's description of heaven and you want to go there quick. Has anyone committed suicide because they read her book? Of course. It may never be proved in a court of law, but in his book *Deceived by the Light*, Douglas Groothuis talks about an 18-year-old girl named Allison Bierma, who lived in Greeley Colorado. This happened in May 1994. She and her boyfriend read

Embraced by the Light together and they were so enamored by what Betty wrote, they talked about going there together. Her boyfriend committed suicide, and a couple of weeks later she disappeared. They found her car in the Rocky Mountain National Park with a suicide note under the windshield. What she wrote in the suicide note indicated many of the things she believed in this book. "I'll always continue to grow no matter where I am. Take some peace in knowing that I do not judge myself too harshly. Take comfort in knowing that if God still wants me on this earth I'll not leave, I'll be more than willing to return if God asks me to. Soon we'll all be together dancing and playing." She had read the book six months before her suicide and then two days before her suicide read it again. She drove to the mountains, to the top of a high cliff and then plunged her death.

Her parents are convinced that some of the ideas expressed in the book played a key role in their daughter's death. In fact her father, who was not a Christian at the time his daughter died, became a Christian and later wrote, "Alli fell victim to subtle distortions of the truth. She was searching for an end to the pain that she was feeling inside...she read books and developed concepts sets that glorified death and made her hunger to go home. However, the only way to get closer to God is through His Word, that Word can only be found in the Bible." There is so much confusion about death. If you want to know what's going to happen to you at the point of death and after death, don't read books like Betty wrote. I'm not saying Betty Eadie is a liar; I'm not saying she didn't experience some of the things she experienced. I'm just asking you to consider: Is what she is saying in this book the truth of the Word of God? For me it absolutely is not. Be very careful how you read that. Next week I'm going to be talking about what the Bible says what happens at the point of death.

III. THE CONFIDENCE TO FACE DEATH

The final thing is the confidence to face death. You aren't ready to live until you are ready to die. You can't get on with living until you come face-to-face with the fact that you are going to die and you are prepared to die. There are basically two kinds of ways that people approach their impending death.

(1) Fear

Number one. Some people exhibit fear. There are afraid to die. Most people are afraid to die. Why is that? The popular concept of death is that it is a terrible enemy. Edgar Allan Poe's allegory of death, "The Pit and the Pendulum," is about a man strapped down with a razor sharp blade swinging back and forth over him. With each swing, the blade gets closer and closer. He lies there, anticipating with fear that terrible death. That's a picture of many people today. They know death is coming and they're afraid of it. Actually, most people aren't afraid of the point of death, most people are afraid about how they're *going* to die. If most people knew they could just take a bath, put on their pajamas, get in bed, turn up their toes, close their eyes, go to sleep and wake up in heaven, they could handle that. Let's be frank, most people fear a gruesome death by accident, burning, suffocation, drowning, murder, or long-term illness. It's the process leading up to death most people are afraid of.

Fear is the natural response of the human heart (I didn't say supernatural). The Bible says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (Hebrews 2:14-15) Notice the Bible doesn't say we are held in slavery TO death, it says we are held in slavery to the FEAR of death. Jesus died on the cross; he experienced death and he truly came back from death and he says you don't have to fear it or be in bondage to it, you can be set free from the fear of death.

(2) Faith

Number two. The other response to death is faith. In Philippians 1:20-25. The apostle Paul expresses faith in the face of death. Paul was in prison suspecting at any moment his head would be chopped off. "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in this body." In the Greek language, he piles up three superlatives "which is much more for better" Did the apostle Paul had suicidal urges? No. He had a healthy understanding of death. He was facing death and wasn't afraid. If he lived: It's Jesus; if he died: Even better. It was like "heads I win; tails I win." But Paul left the choice up to God. Paul desired to depart to be with Christ but he stayed because it was better for the church.

If you put anything else in that blank: For me to live is [blank], you cannot say to die is gain. If you say, "For me to live is [money]," to die will be loss. If you say, "For me to live is [family]," as great as that is, to die as loss. "For me to live is [popularity][pleasure][education]," to die as loss. But if you put Jesus in that blank, to die will be gain.

CONCLUSION

In acts 16, the apostle Paul was in prison (he spent a lot of time in prison). God sent some angels and an earthquake and he and Silas were set free. The Roman guard was terrified, because the prisoners were escaping. In the Roman Empire if a guard lost his prisoners, he would immediately be executed at dawn, no questions asked. So the guard decided to wait until dawn. He drew his sword and placed the handle on the cobblestone of the prison floor and positioned the point just under his sternum and he was waiting to fall on his sword and die. He was seconds from death, a Christless eternity in hell when Paul rushed up and grabbed him saying, "Wait a minute! We're all here." There is no doubt he had heard Paul preach and probably thought it was a bunch of lies. The guard turned to Paul and asked the most important question anybody could ever ask: "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" I'm glad Paul didn't say, "You've got to be baptized," or "You've got to fill out a card," or "You got to join a choir." I'm so glad the apostle Paul said "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31)

That may be the question you need to ask today, because you may not be a half a second from death, but you may be half a day, half a week, half a year, half a decade, or half a century—but still the most important question you can ask is "How can I be saved?" First, it involves your

mind. You must say, "I know I need to be saved." Secondly it involves your heart where you say, "I want to be saved." But there are thousands of people, perhaps millions, who have taken those first two steps, but they aren't saved because they haven't taken the third and final step. It's your will that says, "I will trust Jesus to save me." Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you can be saved.

OUTLINE

I. THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

- (1) *Thanatos* — spiritual death
- (2) *Nekros* — physical death

II. THE CONFUSION ABOUT DEATH

Many popular near-death experiences promote:

- (1) False doctrine
- (2) Fatal desires

III. THE CONFIDENCE TO FACE DEATH

You aren't ready to live until you are ready to die

(1) Fear

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." *Hebrews 2:14-15*

(2) Faith

Salvation is a three-fold response:

1. Mind: I know I need to be saved
2. Heart: I want to be saved
3. Will: I will trust Jesus to save me



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes