

## INTRODUCTION

Today I'm concluding the series on death and dying by talking about your final appointment.

Who is the most well-known preacher in the world? Billy Graham? Luis Palau? Chuck Swindoll? W. A. Criswell? No. There is another preacher who travels to all parts of the world. He preaches in every language and dialect under the sun. He visits the rich and the poor; he preaches to all religions, even to those who claim no religion—they listen to him. His name is death. He's not popular and his message is not fancy; it's always the same. He often stirs feelings no other preacher can and he brings tears to eyes that seldom cry. Most people fear him or hate him but they are still compelled to listen to him. He's not very refined or polite. In fact, he often interrupts people's lives and disrupts their carefully planned schedules. He doesn't just preach in churches. He visits offices, mills, shops, schools, hospitals, highways and homes. Whenever he visits, people stop and listen. He has a daily article in every newspaper. Every tombstone is his pulpit, every funeral procession is his choir. One day, he will take you as his text and preach to others. So today, let your heart thank God this moment that you are still alive and are able to heed his message.

That day in time you will meet God is written down on God's calendar. You'll either meet God at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ or you'll meet God at the point of your death, but somewhere on God's calendar, a date and the time has already been written down for you. It's your final appointment and although you may be late or miss some appointment here on earth, you can be assured you will not be late for that appointment and you will not miss it. You'll be there. I'm talking about how we must all face the reality of our death. Even though we are a death-denying and necrophobic society, we don't like to think about or talk about death. But for a few moments think about your own death.

You may be like the little boy who was sitting on the front pew of the church and the preachers good up and thundered, "Every member of this charge is going to die!" And the boy smiled. The preachers saw him and thundered even louder, "Every member of this church is going to die!" And the boy burst out laughing. Preacher asked, "Son, what's so funny about that?" The boy smiled and replied, "I'm not a member of this church." Whether you are a member of this church another church or no church whatsoever, you'll either meet God at the second coming or you'll meet him at your death. Today I'm going to talk about how to prepare for this final appointment. I'm going to give you three areas of advice. Two are very practical (and maybe you didn't expect to hear from a preacher), and then third is your spiritual preparation.

## I. PROVIDE A WILL

First, to prepare for this final appointment, you should provide a will to take care of your arrangements. Is that biblical? Look at 2 Kings 20:1. "In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, 'This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.'" Order is a phrase in Hebrew that means take care of your legal and financial matters. I suppose if God can say that to a dying king, I believe he is saying the same to each of us. We need to provide a will.

## 1. A legal will

There are two kinds of wills to consider. First is a legal will. This is a legal document in which you say who will be the executor or of your estate and what you want done with your estate. You don't think you have anything? If you have equity in a house or have personal property then you need to leave instructions on how it is to be distributed. Statistics tell us only one in five American adults has a will. Everyone needs to have a will, because if you don't have a will, the state decides how to disseminate your property. They will try to give it to your family; but your family may incur inheritance taxes and legal costs. This can be avoided if you simply have a will. If you don't have a will, you can be assured that none of your possessions will go to any charitable organizations.

A few years ago, a couple that attended Green Acres died. We were pleased to learn that they put GABC in their will. Their estate was worth \$1 million. Half went to Oklahoma State University, and the other half went to GABC to be used for benevolence here in Tyler. Even though this couple is with the Lord, they are still giving to people through the Ministry of Green Acres Baptist Church. If you don't have a will, you can be sure the state will not give one dime of your money to any charitable organization.

Some of you young couples may not think you need a will, but it is even more important for parents to have a will, because in your will, you'll determine who will be the legal guardians of your children or dependents should both if you die. I'll never forget in my first church out of seminary there was a tragic accident on Christmas Eve in which a young husband and his wife were killed, leaving three young children. They didn't have a will. Both sets of grandparents and aunts and uncles wanted to care for them. It became a massive family feud simply because there was no will indicating the wishes of the parents. In case you think I'm trying to drum up business for lawyers in this town, I'm not getting a kickback, but you can tell them you heard it from me and your attorney can donate money to Bridge to the Future.

You need to have an updated will. I mentioned last week that my father died of cancer. One of the most unpleasant memories was to discover he didn't have a will and everything was in his name. I recall having a will hastily prepared and going into the hospital room and literally having to prop him up on the edge of the bed. I had to take his hand in my hand, he was so close to death, and scribble His name on that will. Actually, it probably wasn't legal, because he wasn't of sound mind, but it was our attempt to try to say this is what needs to happen with his possessions after he died because everything was in his name. That's too late to wait. Take care of that now.

## 2. A living will

Number two. Consider providing a living will, which is not necessarily a legal document, it can just be a letter of instruction to your family. If you have a desire not to be kept alive by artificial means, should that ever occur, you need to express that in writing to your family. As a pastor, I've had to sit in emergency rooms with families as they struggled with this decision as their loved ones were being kept alive to with a ventilator or other medical equipment. "Should we pull the plug or not?" They wrestle with the question about the quality of life. If a family

member had already said in a letter or document, "I don't want any heroic measures used to resuscitate me should I come to a certain place of death," that's good for families to have. Should you ever desire to have any of your organs or tissue donated after you die, you need to state that beforehand in your living will as well. You can sign the back of your driver's license, you can contact the organ bank of East Texas or you can talk to a hospital or funeral home if you are interested in that. If you don't take care of those details, your family won't know what your desires are. A living will is very important.

I'm often asked what the Bible says about organ donation. It says nothing, simply because the Bible was written when medical technology didn't exist. But I can't find anything in Scripture that prohibits Christians from doing it to help someone who is still alive. There are 25 organs or tissues in your body that can be donated. Right now there are 40,000 people in America on a waiting list for organ and tissue donation. 30,000 are waiting desperately for a kidney transplant. If you are interested in something like that, indicate it in a living will. Check list number one: do you have a will? Is it updated? If you don't, you're not prepared for your final appointment.

## **II. PLAN YOUR FUNERAL**

Number two. Plan your funeral even if you don't like to talk about death or dying. I believe it's biblical. Jacob indicated his wishes in Genesis 49:29. "Then he gave them these instructions: 'I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron in the Hittite.'" Don't you love the way the Bible describes death in the Old Testament? "Gathered to your people?" What a beautiful picture.

### **1. Talk to your family**

First, you need to talk to your family. Better yet, put your desires in writing. Talk to your family and tell them what you want your funeral service to be like. My wife and I have talked about some of the elements of each of our funerals that we have strong feelings about. Through the years I've had church members give me written instructions for their funeral. I don't mind that a bit. I keep it in a file. It's so much easier on the family if you plan: If you want preaching at your funeral, what Scripture you want used, what songs you want used, the atmosphere of your funeral. Plan it. Talk to your family. If you don't plan in advance, there's no telling what's going to be said.

There was an old fellow who lived out in the country who died. John was one of the roughest, vilest people in the community. His brother went to see the local Baptist preacher and said, "I know John never came to your church, but I want you to preach his funeral tomorrow. I want you to tell everybody that John was a saint." The preacher was stunned and said, "I'm sorry, I just can't do that because he wasn't."

"You're in a building campaign aren't you?" The brother asked.

"That's right."

"I'll give you a check for \$5,000 for your building campaign if you'll just say John was a saint."

"Well, I don't know."

The next day the little church was filled and John was laid out in the casket. The preacher got up to speak. John's brother pulled out an envelope so the preacher could see it and waved it a little.

The preacher got up there and said, "All of you knew John. You know he had one of the vilest mouths you've ever heard. He was a drunkard, a gambler and a brawler. He never darkened the doors of his church. He was an awful reprobate. But compared to his brother, John was a saint."

What are people going to say about you and your funeral? You can ensure some of the things that will be said if you write it in advance. There is nothing morbid about that. It's just good preparation. Talk to your family.

## **2. Talk to your funeral director**

Number two. Talk to your funeral director. I believe prearranging your funeral makes good sense, because it removes a lot of the stress from your family members. I've seen this happen more times than I care to talk about. Within 24 hours of learning of the death of a loved one, a family is called to go to a funeral home, walk into a room full of caskets and models of vaults and select something. Many times family members are still in the shock and numbness stage I talked about last week. Most of them want to say one final time how much they loved the deceased, so they buy the most expensive thing they can and sometimes it causes financial hardship. Dead noses smell no roses. There's nothing you can do to express your love to that person after they're dead but sometimes families do that almost out of a sense of guilt. I've seen it happen. But you can't blame them—they're in shock. When you prearrange your funeral, you go in and you pick it out yourself—maybe even take it for a test drive if they let you. When the time comes to use it, you're not going to feel it anyway.

Prearrangement relieves your family from having to make that stressful decision. It also helps them financially as well. You can go to any local funeral home, prearrange your funeral right now. If you die in five years, 10 years or 40 years, the price does not increase. It's the same price. How can they do that? It's regulated by the Texas Banking Commission. It's put into a trust fund and your family will never have to spend more. A family in our church recently benefited from their loved one's prearrangement from 10 years ago. The price they paid 10 years ago was less than half of what it would have been for the family today. It just makes sense. Talk to a funeral director.

A good friend of mine in my former church in Alabama was the local funeral director who owned his business. He used to take me to lunch and he never would let me pick up the ticket. He always said, "You're a prospect, it's a tax deduction." Everybody is a prospect for a funeral director. Some of you remember when Franklin Delano Roosevelt died in office after being elected to an unprecedented fourth term. His funeral was a very ornate ceremony with pomp and circumstance. He lay in state in the Capitol rotunda in a beautiful gold and bronze casket. He was laid to rest in a beautiful covering in the cemetery. A lot of things went on after he had been embalmed. Did you know he wrote these words about his funeral? "If I should die in office, I want of utmost simplicity held in the East room of the White House." Instead it was held in Washing National Cathedral. "There should be no lying in state, no gun carriage and no hearse." There were both. "The casket should be of the most simplicity in dark wood. The body should not be embalmed nor the casket hermetically sealed. The grave should not be lined with brick or cement stones." Why didn't they follow his desires? Because they did not discover the document

until five days after his funeral. He never told anyone in his family about his desires. Talk about your funeral plans with your family. Checklist: provide a will; plan your funeral.

### III. PREPARE FOR JUDGEMENT

You can provide a will and plan your funeral and still not be ready to die, because the last area of preparation is the most critical. You need to prepare for judgement. Amos 4:12 says, "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel. He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—the Lord God Almighty is his name." God is saying "You need to prepare to meet me." The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement."

What's going to happen to you after you die? Two weeks ago we talked about what's going to happen ten seconds after you die. There is a place of torment called Hades. There is a place called Paradise. And ten seconds after you die—whether you are lost or saved—will be determined by where you go. But a little after that, the Bible says we are all going to face judgement, whether or not we are a Christian or not. I want to explain the kind of judgement you will face and the difference between the two judgements.

#### 1. Great white throne judgement

First is what I call the great white throne judgement. Only lost people will be at this judgement. Even though I'm talking about this first, chronologically this is *not* the first of the two judgements to happen. This judgement is going to happen *after* the rapture of the church, after the seven-year tribulation, after the battle of Armageddon, after the 1,000 year reign of Christ, the millennium on earth; then will come this great white throne judgement. Revelation 20:11-13 tells us exactly what's going to happen at that judgement. If you are not a Christian, this is what you are going to face: John says, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, [that's the word for spiritually dead *thanatos*] great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead [spiritually dead] were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done."

Every lost person who dies today goes to Hades. It's like they are kept waiting there, and it is a place of torment—and at this great white throne judgement, Hades and the grave will deliver up all of those for this judgement. "Then death [literally the grave] and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (verse 14) At this great white throne Judgement, God will not declare if you are lost or saved. Everyone there will be the *thanatos*, the spiritually dead, and they will be judged according to their works, not good works or bad works, by all of their works. All of their sinful deeds will be revealed and all of their good deeds will be revealed. Of course, their sinful deeds will be just testimony that they are sinners, but all of their good deeds will be testimony that good works can never save one person.

There are going to be some people present at the great white throne judgement who believed they were saved, and who were very religious people. Jesus said "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23) That's the key. It's not how many good works you do, it's knowing Jesus Christ.

Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? The Bible says salvation is "not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:9) Imagine some deceived Baptist or Presbyterian or Methodist, who all their life thought religion—doing all these good deeds—would get them into heaven. They attended church, read their Bible, gave their money, served in civic organizations around the community, tried to help hurting people and did all of those works thinking it could gain them acceptance with God. They'll stand there at the great white throne judgement and God will say to the angel. "Angel, is his name written in the Lamb's book of life?" The angel will say, "No Lord, his name is not there." Can't you hear the deceived persons say, "Wait!! There's a mistake, you'd better check again. My name was on the roll at that church down there. Wait a minute! I did all of these good deeds; I did all of these good works," God will say, "Here they are in this book, the book of good works." And that person, if he could be saved by his works, could stand there and brag about all the good things he's done. But God will say to him, "Depart from me, because you never had a personal relationship with me."

When you come to know Jesus personally, your name is written down in the Lamb's book of life and it's not your bad deeds that send you to hell and it's not your good deeds that gain you access into heaven; the only book that matters is the book of life. Jesus said, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20) And the moment you meet Jesus personally, your name is written down.

Those at the white throne judgement will be cast into hell after judgement and it is the second death. They've already died physically and then they will die eternally. If you were born only once, you'll die twice. If you were only born physically, you'll die twice. But if you are born twice you'll only die once. If you were born physically, and then as Jesus said to Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5) If you are born again you are born of the Spirit, you come to know Jesus; you'll only die once (physically) and then you won't ever have that second death. God loves you and wants to take you to heaven with him for ever and ever. Don't be deceived. Salvation is not by doing good works; salvation is by knowing Jesus Christ, repenting of your sins, and putting your faith in him. Only lost people will be at the great white throne judgement. I'm not going to be there. God doesn't want you to be there either.

## **2. Judgement seat of Christ**

But there will be judgement for Christians and it is the second judgement, the judgement seat of Christ. I believe it's going to be long before the great white throne judgement. I believe the Bible teaches what is going to happen, is the next thing Jesus could come and rapture the church and then for what Revelation calls "the marriage supper of the Lamb," I believe we are going to pass

through this judgement seat of Christ. (see 1 Corinthians 3) 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him." The word "judgement seat" is the Greek word *bema*, it is not the scene of a courtroom where the judge says, "guilty," it is the scene of an athletic contest in which a guest of honor sits on a raised platform and gives out rewards to all the competitors who finished the race. That's the picture here. At the judgement seat of Christ, Jesus will not be saying, "lost" "saved" "lost"... everyone at the judgement seat of Christ will be saved. He's going to hand out rewards.

The Bible says, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." (1 Corinthians 3:11-15) If you truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, you will not be at the great white throne judgement, but you *will* face judgement. It is the judgement seat of Christ where Jesus will determine at that time what you did with what he has given you. The foundation of salvation is Jesus Christ, but we are all building a superstructure of Christian service, some using gold, silver, precious stones, that means it really lasts, it's permanent, some using wood, hay and stubble, that means it's perishable, temporary. But when we stand before the Lord, he'll try it with the fire of his eyes and he'll pass out rewards.

Some of you are thinking you don't want any rewards. That's the point. If you're serving the Lord for rewards, you won't get any but if you're serving the Lord because you love him and because you obey him, you can't help but get rewards. He is the one determining it—not you. Others say, "All I want is my little shack on the corner of Glory Avenue. I don't want any of those big rewards. I just want to make it into heaven. I've got my eternal fire insurance, I just don't want to burn. Rewards? Forget it." That is the most selfish self-centered attitude anybody could ever have. If that's your attitude, I doubt whether you are saved in the first place, because salvation is not for selfishness, salvation is for service. If going to heaven was all there was to the Christian life, the best thing we could do for you is after you get saved, shoot you dead and send you on to heaven. That's not the point of the Christian life. The point of the Christian life is God conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ, using you here on earth to be a blessing, the body of Christ still functioning on earth. God has given all of us spiritual gifts and at the judgement seat of Christ, the question is going to be: What did you do with what I gave you?

Billy Graham is going to stand there and God is going to reward him because millions have come to Christ. God gave him a lot. He will not hold you accountable for what he gave Billy Graham, but he will hold you accountable for what he gave you. You make sure you're not like the person who received one talent in the parable of the talents, and dug a hole and hid. You'll suffer loss, you'll be saved but you will not be satisfied. As a Christian, when you stand before God at the judgement seat of Christ and he asks, "Why did you not serve me? Why didn't you to teach Sunday School? Why didn't you sing in the choir? Why didn't you work down at Good Sam? Why didn't you invite those people to go to the crusade with you?" I don't know what you're going to answer, do you? God says, "I gave you this. What did you do with it?" You will give an account of what you did with what you were given. You won't give an account for me

and I won't give an account for you but you'll stand before the judgement seat of Christ. Salvation means that you want to serve God, you want to grow and you want to do those things that he tells you to do—that's what you'll be judged on. Are you ready? Are you prepared? What's your attitude as you face death? As you face judgement?

## CONCLUSION

Don't put me on your psychiatrist's couch, but through the years I've had a recurring dream, I guess you could call it a nightmare. I know some of you have had the same dream. I guess it's because of my 42 years; I've spent 24 in formal education. In my dream, I'm in college or high school somewhere and I haven't been to the class all semester and I'm wandering the halls trying to find this class I'm registered for and haven't attended all semester and it's the day of the final exam. And I haven't studied for it. Plus, I have a phonebook-thick term paper due and I haven't done any work on it. You talk about the anxiety in that dream! What's funny about that dream is the reality is just the opposite. When I was in college in seminary I was a very diligent student. I studied for hours before the exams. God gave me a little ability to retain information and I could go into some classes confident in the knowledge that there was absolutely nothing that Professor could ask me that I couldn't give the answer for. I could go into those tests with the assurance, not like those dreams where I'm afraid and anxious.

Do those two attitudes describe your attitude toward death and judgement? Do you feel like there are still some things you need to do? Are you like the old man who was reading his Bible and when asked what he was doing, said, "Cramming for my finals."? Do you feel like you need to put in a lot of service for the rest of your life? Are you afraid of death and judgement? Can you really face death and judgement with a calm sense of assurance, like the apostle Paul who said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Do you have that kind of attitude? You can. If you're not a Christian, repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus. Don't put it off—do it today. You never know when any of us are going to stand before the Lord. Your heart will beat 100,000 times today but one of those days may be the last beat. Your lungs will breathe 23,000 times today but one of these days it will be the last breath and after that are you ready to meet God?

## OUTLINE

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2. A living will

### II. PLAN YOUR FUNERAL

"Then he gave them these instructions: 'I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron in the Hittite.'" *Genesis 49:29*

1. Talk to your family
2. Talk to your funeral director

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes