

Dying to the Glory of God

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John 21:18-19. “Truly, truly, I say to you when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished, but when you grow old...” So again, Peter must have been middle-aged, right? He wasn't young and he wasn't old. “When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go.” That is, where you do not wish to go naturally. Before Peter was a Christian, when he was young, he went wherever he wanted. His own will, his own way, his own wish. Now as a Christian, he's going to be led. The Lord is prophesying he'll be led to where he doesn't naturally want to go.

What's he talking about? Verse 19 gives us the answer. “Now this He said signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.” So the Lord was talking about telling Peter: you're gonna die a violent death. It's gonna be a violent departure for you, and that that would glorify God. “And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’” “When He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow me.’” This thought that I would like to bring out here is dying to the glory of God. Dying to the glory of God. Five points.

The Certainty of Death

Number one: the certainty of death. I mean Peter, you're gonna die. The Lord was telling him ahead of time. You're gonna die. He knew that, but the Lord was telling him that, and so it is for us - each one of us here - unless the Lord comes first when we're still alive and are raptured out. We will die. We always think it's going to be somebody else that's going to die, but no, I will die. I will die. And we ought to be ever mindful of that. Mindful of death, mindful that our flesh is weak and that our days are few and that death is certain and judgment is righteous and eternity is long and this world is nothing but a dressing room in preparation for eternity. Prepare, prepare, prepare. And there is no preparation apart from being in union with Christ, but through him we can prepare and we can die in a glorious way. So death is certain.

Death. Sin entered the human race right? Romans 5:12, “Sin entered.” An invasion. “And sin entered the human race and with it death also,” and it says, “Death spread to every man.” Just like a disease, death spread to every man. Says in another place, it speaks of the reign of sin and death. Is that your worldview? That this world is an evil world ruled by sin, and ruled by death as though they were two co-tyrants out there managing, ruling, reigning over this present world. No death is certain and death has spread.

And I said this before, I just think of it repeatedly, the farm where I grew up in Northeast Iowa. I could go from that farm right on up that gravel road both ways and I could name off I don't know maybe 25 or 30 farmers that were friends of my father's and now they are gone. Axel Rasmussen, gone. Harry Davis, gone. Floyd Thompson, gone. Ed Quartus, gone. Zeek Welch, gone. Maldie Peeper, gone. Merv Waring, gone, and on down the road I could go. They were there, but they're gone. They're gone. I knew them. I can see them in my mind. I can hear their laugh. These dear men and their wives, but they are gone. Some of them in so many cases, even their place is gone. And so, death is certain.

I heard on the news the other day about this fellow. He was 110 years old. They used to call him one of the strongest men in the world. And he was still at age 110, he was still strong and he used to bend dimes. Now, he could only bend quarters. At 110! But he was crossing the road and a car hit him and he is gone.

I was reading about this fella named Angus McCaskill. It's spelled a little different than the politician, but he grew up in the north of Scotland in the Hebrides. He died around 1900. His mother was a Campbell - probably Duncan Campbell knew him. But they said he was one of the strongest men in the world. He grew to be about eight foot tall. And his shoulders are almost four feet wide. And his chest was 80 inches in circumference. My hand - the breadth of my hand - I had a neighbor. My hand is a little over four inches wide. His hand was eight inches wide. And they said he could throw a horse over a fence. And they said he could pick up an anchor like almost a ton and a half, chest high. He could take two fingers and hold a hundred pound weight out like that for ten minutes. And on the stories go, but he's dead. He's gone. Death is certain. Peter, you're gonna die.

The Timing of Our Death

My second point here is that the timing of our death is foreordained of God. I mean the Lord said, Peter, you're not gonna die young. You're not gonna die now; you're gonna make it old age and you're gonna die then. And so, we're reminded, aren't we brethren, that our times are in the hands of the Lord. Our times are in His hands. Psalm 31. What a consolation that there's no accidents, no perchance, but our times are in His hands. No, we don't want to presume and tempt Lord, but our times are in His hands.

And you know, Peter said up here in verse 17, "Lord, You know all things." And indeed this is coming out. Yes, the Lord knows even the time of our death. Peter was in prison, you know. Acts chapter 4, Acts chapter 12. He was in prison, but you know, he could have been slain with the edge of the sword like James was who was in prison too, but he didn't. He got out of there and went on to live longer and longer and until old age.

And so sometimes the Lord tells us when we're going to die. You know, Peter knew. He said the Lord has made it clear to me that the laying aside of this tabernacle is imminent. Also Paul - the Apostle knew. He said the time of my departure is at hand. Sometimes the Lord tells us people that. He tells us ahead of time that you're soon gonna die.

And sometimes it comes out in prophecy, you know. God reveals it to another. For example, John Brown, who is one of the outstanding Covenanters. He was just a farmer, but he was a godly man. Old Alexander Peden, the prophet of the Covenanters, he said he'd never seen anybody godly like John Brown. And old Peden, he married John and Isabel. And at their wedding, he said Isabel, you've got a good man here, but you better cherish him because you won't have him long. It will be a bloody thing. You better keep your sheets handy. And the prophecy came true. He was martyred for the cause, for the crown rights of King Jesus. And so again, the timing is foreordained by God. And listen, like the old Puritan said, we are invincible until our work is done. The Christian is invincible until his work is done.

The Kind of Death We Will Die

My third point here and that is the kind of death is also foreordained of God. You know, the Lord prophesied what kind of a death - at least in part - what kind of a death that Peter would die. That was foreordained of God too. I mean, maybe not the details, but most people take it that he was crucified, and history says he was crucified even upside down at his request. And so, you know, "This He spoke (v. 19) signifying by what kind of death he would die." Would it be natural? Would it be violent? Would it be easy? Would it be suffering? Would it be sudden? Would it be slow? And for Peter, it was a violent death.

Now, here's John, you know, his good friend John the Apostle. There we find him in the end sitting out there in the Isle of Patmos, apparently a slow death, a natural death for him. We don't know for sure I guess, but for Peter it was not that way. He could have drowned when he was trying to walk on water. He could have been cut down by the edge of the sword. But they say he was crucified. He didn't die in jail or rot there, but rather he was crucified.

And so, just think, don't you don't you sometimes think about it? How am I gonna breathe my last? Where's the end gonna be? How will it be? Yeah, think of the end how it was for Samson, you know, I mean he could have died in those battles. One time, he fought him all off a thousand of them with a jawbone of a donkey. They didn't get him. And so he had various conflicts, but here he ends up, you know, pushing the pillars down in his final act. That was what killed him.

And how about Elijah's end? He really didn't have an end, did he? How about Zachariah whom they slew between the porch and the altar. How about Jonathan and David? You know, you'd think David having all the battles that he had, you would have thought that he would have been the one that was killed in battle violently, but no, he dies an easy death. And his good friend Jonathan is the one that's killed in the battlefield.

There's John Bunyan. You know, he sat in those old damp prisons for like 12 years and didn't die, but he ends up dying catching a cold and that was the thing that brought him down. How about John Payton, the missionary to the South Seas? You know, you would think, you know here he made it. He escaped all these cannibals and ends up dying in old age, an easy death.

There was another man named Alan Gardner. He was a missionary. He went over to China, and then he went to South Africa, and then he finally went to South America, crosses the Andes Mountains, ends up in Papua New Guinea. And then he makes another mission trip to the Falkland Islands on the southeast coast of South Africa and there he dies of starvation.

How about Spencer Johnson? I mean, he was a tree trimmer, you know? All of the trees that he climbed, all the trees that he was up in and that cherry picker - you know, that it's dangerous work. And here Spencer dies picking apples out of an apple tree. We just don't know, do we?

One year, an old man up in the town I grew up in, I mean, he was a pleasant man, lived a peaceful life, and they found him hung, hanging like a scarecrow on the top of a steel post. He was out fixing a fence and there he died that way.

And Avery Rogers, he was one of the first preachers down at the Bentley camp meetings. I remember hearing him a few times in the 70's, and lo and behold, he died making a

u-turn going to a meeting when he was hit crossways by a semi. And so, the Lord knows. That's all you can say. God knows. "Lord, You know all things," verse 17.

The Goal of Our Death

Fourth point, so first, the certainty of death; second, the timing; third, the kind of death; and fourth, the goal of our death. The goal of the death of the believer is what? The glory of God. "...Signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." The glory of God, don't you know, I'm reminding you of something you already know if you're a Christian, and that is the goal of our life is the glory of God. That's the chief end of man. We want our deeds to so shine before men that they may what? Glorify God. In whatever you do in word or thought or deed, do all to the glory of God.

Over and over this comes out in one way or another in the New Testament. 1st Peter 4, "Let him who serves do so by the strength which God supplies that God and all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." This repeated theme comes up and this really in a way is the crisis of conversion. Like Amberly was bringing out. I live my life for self-glory. Now I want to glorify God in everything I do from here on out. That's Christianity. Living for the glory of God.

And the masses of humanity, they die. They die. They die like beasts. Psalm 49, man who dies without understanding and wisdom, like Seth was bringing out, is like the beasts that perish. They just die and are so insignificantly laid aside.

We had a dog when I was growing up, called him Tippy, of course, and I told him over and over, we tried to train him don't chase the cars. And there he was chasing a dump truck and he slipped on the snow, fell into the valley of the tracks on the road, and his head was run over. And it was in raw winter. It was so cold you could not dig a hole and bury him. I drug him off, laid him in the ditch. Man who dies without the knowledge of God is like the beasts that perish.

But this is not so for the Christian. He lives for the glory of God. And think of this, we can die for the glory of God too. Our life, our death, Paul says in Philippians 1, "Whether by life or by death that Christ may be glorified." Our words, our ways, our attitudes - we want to die cheerfully. We want to die usefully before the Lord.

Let me tell you the story about old John Bradford. He lived in the 1500's in England - in London - and was saved powerfully at the age of 37. And he left his law study and began to study theology. Eventually was ordained, little did he realize that he had only seven years to serve the Lord of glory. He was thrown in prison. Mary came into rule and she was an adversary to the truth and they threw John Bradford - dear old John Bradford - they called him "Holy Bradford." I mean, he had a reputation within seven years for being a holy man of God. And so over a little trivial thing, why they threw him in prison, and they brought him before the officials and would he renounce what he said over the regarding the mass (the Catholic Mass.) He would not read out renounce it, and so they led him away along with another fellow named John Leif, a nineteen year old who had made a bold stand for Christ. They led him away to be burned at the stake. There before the fire was lit, he forgave everybody that had ever offended him, and asked forgiveness of everybody, and just exhorted everybody to become a Christian. And he turned aside to this nineteen year old comrade in the Lord, and he says, "Dear brother, be of good cheer, for we shall this night have a merry supper with the Lord Jesus." They died to the glory of God, wouldn't you say?

And let me tell you about Richard Cameron in the 1600's. You know, he was one of the Covenanters in Scotland. And so here's Richard Cameron. He was brought up by godly parents - old Alan Cameron, who incidentally had been put in prison because they, you know, they brought in this Conventicles Act. That is, you couldn't have any meeting unless it was under the approval of the Church of England. And he was preaching in his house. And so because he was doing house church, he got sent to prison. And anyway, here's his son, then, was converted. And Richard, as they say, he was like a meteor that went across the horizon of the history of Scotland. He began to preach fearlessly - even recklessly. And oh yes, when he was being ordained, there was three or four men that put their hands on his head. Then laying their hands on his head commissioning him and they all, when it was over, they took their hands off except one man, old McWard. He left his hand on the head of Richard Cameron, and he said, "Behold all you beholders," he said, "This man - here is the head of a good servant of Jesus Christ. But he won't have long and he won't keep it for the name of Christ." And that prophecy was fulfilled not many years later. They cut his head off and put it up above the old (unintelligible) port and there for everybody to see. And he died to the glory of God, wouldn't you say?

And let me tell you one more thing about his dear old dad. To add insult to injury, they cut his hands off, put them in a bag, and took them to his dad in prison. And they said, "Do you recognize these hands?" He looked into the bag and he took those hands out and kissed them, and then said, "Yes, I know, I know whose hands these are - the hands of my dear son." But he lifted up his voice and blessed God and he said, "God has never done me any wrong. The Lord is good to such a sinner as me." That man died also to the glory of God.

John the Baptist lost his head over reproofing a king for adultery. He died to the glory of God. James died, cut down by the edge of the sword, wouldn't you say, to the glory of God not accepting deliverance.

But how about those that are not martyrs? Even they, yes, who died in faith like Jacob, like Joseph, they died. When they were dying by faith, they prophesied. Joseph made mention of the departing of the sons of Israel from Egypt and gave commandment concerning his bones. He says you're going out of here and my bones are coming out of the grave too on the day of the Lord, and so you take care of my bones and get them out as well. And they died also to the glory of God.

Elijah, Samson, you know, what about Samson? You know, I have to say he died to the glory of God too. I mean, in his last-ever he wanted to die for the Lord and he gave His life for it. How about old Simeon? "Lord, let your servant depart. I have seen Your salvation."

Bunyan - I mentioned him already, but you know, he died because he caught this cold and he was on a journey - a two-day horseback journey - and he got caught in the rain, but he was making this trip to be a peacemaker, to reconcile a father and a son. And when he was dying, he lifted up his voice in praise of God and shouted, "Glory!" And there he departed to the glory of God.

Let me mention this Alan Gardner again. As I say, after his conversion he went to China as a missionary, then to South Africa. The door was closed there eventually amongst the Zulus because there was such war. He had to leave and then his wife died. He remarried, and just four months after they remarried, why he took his family down to South America. As I say, they crossed the continent over Chile and ended up in Papua New Guinea, and it was just kind of

like everything constantly fell apart. And then he had a burden for the Aborigines in South America. And so he organized a team to go down there, five men plus him. And they get down there and this big ship unloads them with two smaller ships and then two little ships, and when they were trying to make it to shore, all but one ship was destroyed. And the worst part of it all: They forgot the gunpowder and they died one-by-one of starvation.

But here is what he says in his diary - they found it about four months later. They found the bodies, they found the diary about four months later. He records about one of his co-workers was converted. He was never a Christian and here on this mission, one of his co-workers found the Lord. And here's another one, he rises up from his sickbed, he said, and sings the song, "Arise, My Soul, Arise." Sings that one verse and breathed his last. He died to the glory of God.

And then Alan Gardner himself writes in his diary to his wife a week before his death. He says, "We are passing through a furnace, but blessed be my heavenly Shepherd. He is with me and I do not want. I have perfect peace. My soul waits on Him. I pray for patience to await His good pleasure for life or for death, that whether I live or die, I may live or die for his glory."

Not one word of complaint from any of those men. Why is this happening? How could this happen? No expression of bitterness toward God. They died Giving praise to the Lord for such loving kindness to sinners like them. They died to the glory of God.

Bakht Singh of India. You know, when he died there was, they estimated, over a quarter million people in the funeral procession. And the earth shook and a rainbow appeared around the sun and the sky filled with pigeons, with doves. That man died for the glory of God. That city of Hyderabad had never seen such a gathering. The name of Jesus was exalted upon the death of Bakht Singh. So, "signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." Don't you want to go down with your boots on? With your heart right? With your mouth open in praise of God?

Death to the Glory of God

My last point is if our death is to be to God's glory, then it must be preceded by a life of following Christ. You know, "by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said, 'Follow me.'" In other words, Peter, forget about what's coming. Just follow Me right now, day by day by day. Walking in the light, you follow Me. Don't worry about that. Don't worry about what other men are doing or what will be done to them. Just you follow Me, right here, right today. Isn't that it?

I remember one time when we were living in Kirksville, there was a fellow I was working with - a brother - and he had fallen into sin. Fallen into sin, and now he was repenting of it - repenting of it in bitter, bitter tears and lost his assurance, and I kept telling him over and over again, the question is what are you gonna do today? Are you gonna follow the Lord Jesus today? Don't worry about tomorrow. Don't worry about yesterday. Will you follow the Lord today?

And so the Lord says, "Follow Me." This is the revealed will of God: follow Me in sufferings, in service, follow Me. If you're gonna die well, you're gonna have to live well by following the Lord day by day. That's what's so glorious about Spencer Johnson's departure. It wasn't how he died exactly, really, but it was how he lived. That's how he died to the glory of God.

Here's John Oxtoby. I read about him. He was just a farmhand over in England in around 1900. A farmhand, you know, I mean, he wasn't a preacher, but that man lived for the glory of God. The Methodist circuit, the Methodist preachers, they gave up on this town called Fife or something like that. They said it's too hard. It's too rough, too wicked. They're too stubborn and we're gonna give up on it. And old John Oxtoby, he says no. He says give it to me. Send me. And he says, I'll go there and I'll live on potatoes and salt if I have to. And so they commissioned him to go. And as he was entering the city, he got off his horse and got over in a thicket. And he got down on his knees and he started crying out to God, trying to get ahold of God. And he said, "Lord, will You be with me? Will You go with me? If You don't, what a fool I'll be." And he got a hold of the Lord and got assurance right there that if the Lord would come to that city, to that town. And he began to labor there and preach such as he could and revival power came to that town. When he died, he died to the glory of God. He says, "Tell my friends that whatever manifest revelations I've seen, nothing compares to this." And he breathed his last.

Well, we ought to be prepared for changes right? I mean, Peter could have thought, well, here I am, you know, I made it through all this stuff. I'm now aged and maybe I'm just gonna - maybe I'm just gonna kind of burn out like a candle. But he thinks in the back of his mind, the Lord said, the Lord told me it's not gonna be this way. They're gonna stomp my candle out before it burns out even though it's right down to the socket.

And so, we must be prepared for changes - changes in our age. You know, I remember my dad, you know, by then he was in the Alzheimer's unit and it was a nice facility. You know, the various facilities were connected by hallways, and I was bringing him out for a little stroll in a wheelchair. And he said, "Bob," he said, "I never imagined that I'd end up living in an old mole hole like this." And he said it, you know, with a bit of humor. I knew what he was saying. I knew he was grateful for the facilities and the mercies of those institutions, but you know, I'm saying changes. We don't know how, we don't know what's ahead. That's all right. We go on with God. We follow the Lord day by day by day. Be prepared for changes.

But the main thing we ought to get here is those last two words and that is, "Follow Me." Follow the Lord. That's the call. That is the call to follow the Lord of glory, worthy of our trust, worthy of our life, our devotion. Follow Him through life, follow Him through death, follow Him all the way to the throne. As Sam was preaching, "Follow Me."