

A CHRISTIAN LOOKS AT DEATH II PETER 1:11-15

INTRODUCTION:

Death has become a word that you do not use in polite society. It is one of the unmentionables of our day. As our culture has drifted away from the influence of the Bible, its view of death has been tragically changed.

The prevailing view of death in our culture as a whole is one of hopelessness and despair. John Fowles has a character in one of his novels that reflect this temporary view of death. The character has just learned of the death of his girlfriend. He describes his response in these words: “Staring out to sea I finally forced myself to stop thinking of her as someone still somewhere – but as a shovel full of ashes already scattered, as broken link, a biological dead end, an eternal withdrawal from reality, a once complex object that now dwindled, left nothing behind except a smudge like a ball and speck of soot on a black sheet of paper – I did not cry for her – but I sat in the silence of that night, that infinitely hostility to man, to permanence, to love, remembering her, remembering her.” Is this the view that you have of death – a tragic end?

This tragic view of death stands in sharp contrast to the view of death reflected in these words from Simon Peter. As Simon Peter considered his own death, not the death of some beloved family member or friend, he saw his approaching death as something of a victory. This different view of death reflected in these words of Peter is possible because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Because Peter has been privileged to be an eye witness of both of the death and the resurrection of Jesus, he would never see death through the same eyes.

This was especially true as he thought about his own death. His view of death had a profound impact upon the way he lived his life day by day.

One sign of spiritual maturity is that you have come to grips with the possibility of your own death. Those persons who refuse to consider the eventuality of their own death are reflecting a basic immaturity and spiritual unpreparedness. The mature Christian has taken an intense look at the certainty of his own death but has chosen to view that death through the death and resurrection of Jesus. I want us to take a careful look at these words used by Simon Peter and then to be able to adopt them as our own vocabulary by which we will testify to our approaching death.

I. DEATH IS AN EXODUS FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

Our newer version translates it with the word “departure.” The Greek word used by Peter is transliterated in the English as “exodus.” There are a couple of interesting things about this particular word. It is the official word for what God did for His people Israel when He brought them out of the land of Egypt after their 430 years of slavery. That event is called in the Bible “the exodus.” This is the word that Peter chooses to use to describe what he understands of his approaching death. It will be an exodus.

It is also the word that the gospel of Luke uses to describe the conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke reports that Elijah and Moses had this meeting with Jesus in the glory on the Mount to talk with Him concerning His “exodus.” It, too, is translated in the newer version “departure.” But, it is still precisely the same word translated

“exodus” in other parts of scripture. So, the death of a Christian is an exodus. It is a departure. It is a going out.

1. It is an exodus from the body.

Peter describes his body as “a tent” or a tabernacle. The word used in this passage is the word for a tent in which one would live temporarily. It stood in contrast to a house that would become a permanent dwelling place. Since he never found a permanent dwelling place in the land of Canaan, Abraham lived in a tent all of his years. It was an outward symbol of the reality that Abraham was still a sojourner in the land. The human body is a tent. It was never created to be nor intended to be the permanent dwelling place of man. It is something out of which a man can move and still exist. This is what Peter is saying concerning his own death. This outward tent, the body in which he lives will be laid aside.

Actually, Peter refers to the body and the death of the body as putting aside. “I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.” So, the first aspect of the exodus of death is that it is an exodus from the body.

The clear implication is that just as the children of Israel moved out of the land of slavery into a better land in the exodus, so the child of God moves out of the body into a higher and better level of existence in death. The death of a Christian is an exodus from the body. The great pastor, C. H. Spurgeon, tells of a child who once found some beautiful eggs in a nest. A week later he visited the nest again, only to return home crying, “Mother, I had some beautiful eggs in this nest and now they are destroyed! There’s nothing left but a few pieces of broken shell!” His

mother's reply was comforting, "The eggs weren't destroyed. There were little birds inside those eggs and they have flown away and are singing in the branches of the tree."

"And" said Spurgeon, "so it is that when we look at our departed loved ones, we are apt to say, "Is this all you have left, rootless spoiler? But faith whispers "No, the shell is broken. But among the birds of paradise singing amid unwithering bowers, you will find the spirits of your loved ones; their true manhood is not here, but has ascended to its father, God. You see, it is not a loss to die; it is a gain, a lasting, a perpetual and unlimited gain!" Death is an exodus from the body.

Our earthly tent is being torn down. I remember reading that when someone asked John Quincy Adams how he was doing, Adams replied something to the effect of, "John Quincy Adams is well, sir, very well. The house in which he has been living is dilapidated and old, and he has received word from its Maker that he must vacate soon. But John Quincy Adams is well, sir, very well."

2. Death is an exodus from this world.

The other dimension of this exodus is that it is a departure from this world. There is not only a leaving out from the body, there is also a leaving out from the world. This world of time and pain has been the home of the Christian for the years of their sojourn, just as Egypt was the home of the Israelites for 430 years. But in the moment of death the Christian moves out of this world just as the children of Israel left out of the land of Egypt. Just as God brought Israel out of Egypt into exodus, so He brings His child out of this world of sin and darkness in death. So, in the Christian's view death is an exodus. It is a departure. It is a going out.

II. DEATH IS AN ENTRANCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

In his encouraging words to the growing Christian, Peter uses this other word for death. He says, “And you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” The older version translates the word, “For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” The idea in the word is that of an entrance. It was used of the entrance that would be made by a conquering general as he led his troops back into the city of Rome. While on one side death is an exodus, on the other side it is an entrance. There is a going out, but there is also an entering in.

1. Death is an entrance into the presence of Christ.

It is into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that we go at death. It is an entrance into his blessed and glorious presence.

When the Apostle Paul spoke of his own death to the Philippians Christians this was the kind of language he used. He spoke of death as being a departure, “to be with Christ” which is far better. He indicated that since death is an entrance into the presence of Christ it is surely a gain over anything that we have known in this world. He wrote to the Corinthian Christians that death is an absence from the body and a presence with the Lord. The dimensions and the glory of this defies our human imagination.

Can you imagine for just a moment what it will be like! One moment you are here on earth in the presence of loved ones and friends on a bed of sickness in the midst of great pain, and the next moment you are standing in the glorious unspeakable presence of the risen Christ Himself. Around you are all the glories of heaven itself. Instead of the sounds of a hospital room, or the

crash of an automobile in an accident, you hear the sounds of the angels singing. Around you is unblemished beauty on every side. It is an entrance into the presence of the living Christ.

It will be the same glorified Presence that John beheld in Revelation 1. When John saw Him in his heavenly glory, he fell at his feet as dead.

It worth noting that there is no way-station between earth and His presence for the child of God.

There is no purgatory from which your family and friends must lift you through their gifts and prayers. There is no place to suffer for your shortcomings and sins. Rather you enter the presence of our Risen Lord and Savior immediately.

2. Death is an entrance into the realm of the rule of Christ.

It is into “the kingdom” that we are escorted. When we arrive in that kingdom, there is only one throne. Every will in heaven is to do His will. Every voice speaks His praise. Every person serves His purposes. Everything in heaven centers in Him. There are no rivals to his rule in that land. There are no discordant voices. There are no rebellious movements. There are no antagonistic press releases. There are no scandals against His rule. He rules in righteousness and in peace. Can you imagine for a moment what it must be like to be in such a kingdom? Death is an entrance into that kingdom.

Is it not a commentary on the world in which we live that they had to call out all kinds of security forces to protect the crowd while they conducted the funeral for the Pope. Thank God death will bring us into the land where there will be no more funerals, no more armies, no wars, no murders, and no suicides, none of the things that bring pain and misery to human life.

III. DEATH IS AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

This is really the burden of this context in Peter's second letter. He is sharing with the reader his purpose in writing this letter. He writes this letter with an awareness of his imminent death, so there is a special concern and urgency that comes to him because of his imminent death. Death has become an encouragement to the Apostle.

1. The Christian understanding of death encourages us to develop in Christian character.

This is the immediate context of this passage. Peter has just concluded an important word of instruction about the importance of growing as a Christian, then he adds an admonition to make your calling and election sure. If you do this, you will not fall—and you will enter the presence of the Lord in glory..

Peter was blessed in one way that most of us are not blessed. Before Jesus left the earth he indicated to Simon Peter how He would die but not when He would die. He indicated to Peter in symbolic language that he would die a violent death, even like his death upon the cross.

According to the Apostle John Peter lived out his days anticipating that his life would end in a violent death. None of us know specifically how we will die nor do we know when we will die but this does not lessen the certainty of our death. The only thing that could prevent our death would be the welcomed second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Consideration of the certainty of your death gives you strong encouragement to treat life as a limited commodity. Life in this world has its limits. There will be a morning in which your life in this world will be over. Wise men learn how to number their days and to anticipate the end of their life in this world.

2. The Christian's understanding of death encourages us to use our time here to benefit others.

This is the intention and commitment of Simon Peter. He knows that he has a limited time to be with those to whom he writes so he wants to do everything he can to benefit them before his death. He wants to make the most of this opportunity to do good.

Scholars have speculated about the particular burden that Simon Peter felt. Many have felt that the thing that he really was compelled to do was to make sure that his memory concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was recorded. They believe that the gospel of Mark is actually a product of Peter's concern. It was his knowledge that he would soon die that prompted him to share with Mark his Holy Spirit guided memories that come to us as the gospel of Mark. We cannot know for sure that this was the concern of Peter but there was something he felt he must do before death came to him.

Since you and I will die, it is urgent that we maximize our investment in the lives of others for good and for eternity. One of the old leaders of the past often urged preachers to share the gospel as a dying man to dying men. Every teacher ought to teach their class with an urgency that a certain death can give to you. This could be the last lesson you will ever teach. This could be the last song you will ever sing. This could be the last sermon I'll ever preach. The awareness of my approaching death encourages me to maximize my effort in the moment for the glory of God and for the good of my fellowman.

Only a fool ignores the approach of death. An old story tells of a king and his court jester. One day when the king was highly pleased with his jester, he gave him a wand saying, "You are the greatest fool in the world; if you ever find a greater one, give him this wand."

One day the king was very sick and he said to his jester, "I am going on a long journey." "When are you coming back?" "I will never come back." "Have you made any preparation for this journey?" "No," said the king, "absolutely none."

"Here is your wand" said the jester. "You are a greater fool than I am." Since every one of us can be taken without warning by death, the wise thing to do is to be prepared. To be prepared requires a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. To be prepared through life well lived. To be prepared through service rendered to the living Christ. To be prepared by a gospel shared with those for whom we care. To be prepared by work that is well done and a job that is finished.

This is the way the Christian views death: it is an exodus, an entrance, an encouragement. I trust that you will be able to look at life from the Christian point of view and respond accordingly.

(New Introduction)

Our nation has taken a fresh look at life and death over the last few weeks. The saga surrounding the young woman in Florida has forced us to consider death. A less than honorable husband and parents have been locked in a legal struggle over who would make decisions for her. Her parents want her to be sustained, but the husband has decreed that it is time for her to die. She has no

living will, so her husband is legally responsible for making the decision. It is all a complicated mess.

Unfortunately for her she had no warning about her situation. She evidently suffered a heart attack which did the damage to her brain and mental capacity. Things were different with Simon Peter. He did not know when he would die, but he knew how he would die. Our Lord Jesus had given him a word about his death in one of the last meetings with his disciples after his resurrection. He said to Peter, “When thou was young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst wither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry whither thou wouldst not.” The Apostle John explains this statement from Jesus to us. He declares, “This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoke this, he saith unto him, Follow me.” So Peter walked around every day after knowing that he would live to be an old man, but in the end he would die a violent death for the Lord. Tradition says that he was crucified in Rome, upside down, because of loyalty to the Gospel.

In this last letter that we have from his hand, he makes reference to his death. It provides us some helpful insight into the Christian view of death. There are three words that I think will summarize it for us.

I. DEATH IS AN EXODUS.

Peter refers to his body as a tabernacle, a tent for temporary dwelling. “Yea, I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle.” (v. 13)

1. It is an exodus out of the body.

“Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things in remembrance.” Our word exodus is a transliteration of the word translated “decease” in our text.

Death is moving out of the temporary tent into the presence of the Lord to await the resurrection of the body.

2. It is an exodus out of the world.

This world is strange territory to the child of God. He knows himself to be an alien and a pilgrim in this world. This world was never meant to be home—by this I mean the present world system that is still under the sway of the prince of this world. In death we move out of this world.

II. DEATH IS AN ENTRANCE.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

1. It is an entrance into the presence of Christ.

“For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” (Phil. 1:23) This is what makes death such a great gain—it is entrance into the presence of Christ. It is entrance into the presence of Lord and our Savior.

2. It is an entrance into the kingdom of Christ.

The kingdom is what you have been seeking and praying for ever since you became His disciple. You have known a good measure of His rule through the Holy Spirit already, but you will enter into the fullness of the kingdom. You will stand before the throne, which is the only throne in the whole realm. There will only be one King and one Lord. It will be your continuing joy to serve in the kingdom.

III. DEATH IS AN ENCOURAGEMENT.

1. It is an encouragement to growth in Christian character.

This is the first concern of the Apostle Peter—“Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly love charity.” “Make your calling and election sure.”

Some of us worry more about the growth of our garden than we do the growth of our Christian character. We sure worry more about the growth of money than we do the growth of our character.

Character is one of the few earthly commodities that we take with us in our Exodus. We leave behind all of the assets that we have accumulated across the years. The sure knowledge that death is just ahead surely encourages giving serious attention to sanctification, our growth in the likeness of the Lord Jesus.

2. It is an encouragement to diligence in Christian service.

Our service to God and others is another of the commodities that we take with us in the exodus and the entrance. Peter expresses concern that he might finish his assignments before his death. We are not told the exact nature of his assignment, but it involved stirring up the memory of the recipients of this letter. He declares, “I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.” What things? Since he proceeds to make reference to the transfiguration of Jesus, it may well be the memories he has of his days with the Lord Jesus. It could be providing Mark what he would need to put together the second Gospel that bears his name.

Peter feels an urgency concerning the task before him. It may have been giving to Mark the memories that would make up his Gospel. He must not die with this task unfinished. What task must you finish before you die? What is it that you have the capacity to do that will make a

lasting difference in the lives of others? Whatever it is, the approach of death says that you need to be busy about getting it done?

Both of them will influence the nature of our entrance. Not every one will have the same entrance.

(Use the story of the king, the scepter and the court jester at this point.)

I read some time ago an interesting account of an interview with a famous Christian leader of the past. Russell Conwell was an effective servant of Christ in the business world in his generation. He gave a speech on Acres of Diamonds hundreds of times. In this speech he challenged people to be their best for God.

God blessed him so that he was able to give millions of dollars to different Christian causes.

Bruce Barton was sent by his editor to interview the again Conwell toward the end of his life. He wanted to know his thoughts as he approach the end of his life. Bruce was a little intimidated by the famous man, and was reluctant to raise the question about the approach of his death. But finally he got up enough nerve to ask the old man, “What are your thoughts as you come to end of long and fruitful life?”

Conwell thought a while before he offered an answer. Then he told Barton a story.

“Bruce, when I was about 12 years old, my Dad gave me an assignment one evening. He said to me, “Russell, I must go to town early in the morning, but there three things that need to be done tomorrow. There is a break in the fence around the pasture, and some of the cows have gotten out. I need for you to repair the fence, and get the cows back into the pasture. The conditions are about right for the plowing of the field over in the bottom. I would like for you to plow that field. Also we must take some grain to the mill the next day, and the wagon sure does need to be

greased before we take that trip. I know this is more than you can get done, but do the best you can, Son.”

Bruce, I gave it my best effort the next morning, and the end of the day, just as my Dad was returning from town, I finished the last of the assignments. I was bone tired, but finished. When Dad arrived, he asked me, “Russ, how did it go? Did you get the assignments done?”

I said, “Dad, they are all done. I repaired the fence, and got the cows back into the pasture. I plowed the bottom field, and I also greased the wagon.”

My Dad smiled at me, reached out and put an arm around my shoulder and said, “Russ, that’s a good day’s work. Son, you have done a good days work.”

“Bruce, when I stand before the Lord, I expect Him to say to me, “Russ, you did a good days work.”

Barton said, “I felt like I was standing on holy ground. I just quietly tiptoed out of his office without any further comment.”

Knowing that death is certain, if the Lord tarries His coming, encourages such service for the Lord.