

## **“Eternity: What Awaits After Death”**

### **Sermon #1**

## **“Eternity: What Does the Bible Say About Death?”**

### **Hebrews 9:27-28**

*Begin sermon with video clip - “Ever Think About Dying?” (www.sermonspice.com)*

*“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, (28) so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”*

The reason for this series has been the growing awareness that over the years some of the most confusing preaching I have ever heard has been at funerals. I felt that if the preaching reflected a poor understanding of eternity on the part of the preachers involved then it must be even worse among the general population. I have solicited from you (the congregation) your questions concerning what happens after we die, and these have already proven helpful. Don't hesitate to pick up one of the forms on the information desk in the foyer, you can still include your questions. These questions, demonstrated that there is still confusion even among good Christians concerning the subject. For that reason this morning we are starting a new series that I have entitled; *“Eternity: What Awaits After Death.”*

*The lineup for this will be;*

*“Eternity: What Does the Bible Say About Death.”*

*“Absent From the Body Present With the Lord.”*

*“Heaven Is Better Than You Think.”*

*“Hell is Forever and It's Not Funny.”*

This series is important enough that I don't want you to miss any of it. In addition perhaps there is someone who you know who also needs to hear what God says on the subject, so why don't you invite someone to come to the services as your guest during the series.

This morning we are going to consider *“Eternity: What Does the Bible Say About Death.”*

You've probably heard the old saying - “The only things guaranteed in life are death and taxes.” I'm not so sure that statement is absolutely true, though. I'm guessing that with enough deductions, loopholes, and “creative” accounting, some people avoid paying most, if not all, of

their taxes. So, there's no guarantee there, about taxes. But that still leaves us with death to deal with.

People have used and continue to use some unusual methods to attempt to peer past the portal of death, into the afterlife. People who say they have had "Near Death Experiences" write books to tell what they say eternity will be like. Books like Betty Eadie's book *"Embraced by the Light"* which tells of her supposed "death" and her visit to heaven. Unfortunately, the book not in line with the teaching of the Bible and is in fact closer to Mormon theology than it is to the New Testament. That is hardly a trustworthy source.

Others attempt to find out about the afterlife by so called "*psychic research*" – attempts to contact the dead through séances and mediums. The Bible explains these experiences as not truly communication with the dead but rather with devious evil spirits impersonating the dead. Once again I would hardly consider that a trustworthy source.

The only sure word concerning life after death is the Word of God. In 1 Thess 4:15 the Apostle Paul says, *"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope."* Now obviously the term "fallen asleep" is a softened term to refer to those believers who have already died. Paul is concerned that the church at Thessalonica not be misinformed about what happens after death.

So perhaps I should begin by dispelling some misconceptions about death.

- Some folks say that death is the end of existence.

As is evident from the video clip that we began the sermon with, some people think that when you die, you simply cease to exist. But that isn't true according to the Bible. The Bible says in Genesis 2:7 *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* (KJV). This implies an existence after death. So death is NOT the end of existence.

Yet that this body is a temporary dwelling place is a universal truth, instinctively understood by all until as Ray Stedman says, *"they are educated beyond their intelligence and they start denying it."* He tells of an incident when his children were small, *"years ago, when one of my daughters crawled into bed with me one morning. I kept my eyes shut and, as children will, she tried to wake me up by poking and punching me and trying to get me to open my eyes. Finally, she crawled up and sat right on my chest and, reaching down, pried open my eyelid. Then she leaned over and said, "Are you in there, Daddy?"* [Ray Stedman. "Life Beyond Death. – [www.pbc.org/dp/Stedman/misc/0295.html](http://www.pbc.org/dp/Stedman/misc/0295.html)]

Even a child can understand that we are more than this temporary body.

The story is told of a preacher who was *"...conducting a funeral and he wanted to say something memorable and profound, but he ended up with a laugh line. Comparing the human*

*body to an external shell, he gestured down at the dearly departed in the casket in the front of the church, "Here we have the shell," he said solemnly, "but the nut is gone." He didn't mean for it come out quite that way! But there was nothing wrong with his theology."* [Greg Laurie. "The Best Is Yet To Come." (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Pub, 2005) p. 112]

- Some folks say that when a person dies, they are "reincarnated" into something or someone else.

If you ever see reincarnation in its rawest form such as in India where Hinduism has a firm hold, you will understand that they see reincarnation as a hopeless cycle of endless misery. Reincarnation as it is presented today has been "Americanized" – that means changed to suit the needs of the American culture. When you hear someone talk about reincarnation in our country, it is always talk about coming back in another human form. It is interesting that it seems that they almost always were some important or famous historical figure in a previous life. But Indians understand reincarnation to be an endless cycle whose only hope is to finally enter into Nirvana – the place of nothingness. Now isn't that encouraging.

But as we will see from our text today (Heb. 9:27) you get just one run in life and that's it.

- Some folks think they will "get their live together before they die" or somehow there is a "second chance" after death.

Although it may sound feasible to "*get our life together before we die*" – wouldn't it be grand if we were given a 30 minute warning buzzer, but unfortunately we are not. Death almost always catches us by surprise. Sometimes death comes when it's generally expected – after we have lived a long and full life. But at other times death comes abruptly – far too soon in our way of viewing things.

And by the same token, the person who says, "No" to Jesus in this life, thinking that they'll be given another chance in the life to come, is banking on nothing more than wishful thinking. One day we will die and unless we have accepted Christ as our personal savior we are going to face the judgment of God after we die. The only opportunity we will ever have to get right with God is the opportunity God gives us in this life. There is NO second chance after death.

Now that we have dealt with a few of the misconceptions about death, now let's talk about what WILL happen when we die. Let's talk about . . .

First, Death Is A Certainty.

Medical science has done wonders in extending our lives. New medical procedures bypass clogged arteries, as I personally found out a few years ago. New procedures are available to filter impurities from our blood, to fight cancer cells and to replace worn out joints. Vaccines have nearly eliminated diseases such as polio and other dreaded diseases of the past.

But no one has discovered a cure for death. Despite all the advances of that have been made in medical science, it is still true that the death rate remains exactly as it has always been: a flat 100%. Every one will die.

Death Is No Respector Of Persons.

Death is no respecter of persons. It marches into the mansions of the rich and squalor of the slums. It doesn't matter how well you feel or how in shape you are. No one escapes the certainty of death.

There is a statement that I have made many times in funeral services, *"We are not given a choice about whether to meet death or even when to meet death, only HOW to meet death."*

In Hebrews 9:27 we are told, *"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."* In Eccles 7:2 Solomon wrote, *"for death is the destiny of every man."* (NIV) The question is not how can we remain but what awaits us when we die.

Death is Permanent

There was an item printed in Newsweek magazine a few years ago. It was a letter from the Greenville County, South Carolina, Department of Social Services. The letter was written to a dead person. It said: *"To whom it may concern: Your food stamps will be stopped effective immediately, because we have received notice that you passed away. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances."* But the fact is that Death when it come is irreversible. When you cross over, there is no coming back.

*Not only is death a certainty but ...*

Second, Judgment Is A Reality.

The word of God tells us that after death each of us will certainly face judgment. God's word speaks of two vastly different judgments.

The first judgment is for believers - Judgment Seat Of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10)

*"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*

This judgment does not concern salvation, this judgment is for believers and that has already been settled. This judgment is to determine rewards for service given to the Lord.

The second judgment is for Unbelievers - Great White Throne Judgment.

(Rev. 20:11-15) *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (12) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God,<sup>[a]</sup> and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. (14) Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."*

Obviously no one would wish to be part of that judgment, but all those who have rejected Christ in this life, will face Him as judge in the next life. It will a horror beyond description to stand before Him and hear him say, *"... Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matt 25:41) But on the day it will be too late. The time for decision is past. So the time to make a decision for Christ is now!!!

*Not only is Judgment real but thank the Lord ...*

Third, Salvation Is A Possibility. (v. 28)

*"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation."*

The death of Christ according to this verse is applied to the "many." Underline the word "many." You see Christ death doesn't take away the sins of everyone. Not everyone receives the salvation that is available through Christ's death on the cross. Not everyone believes and receives, that why eternal salvation is only a possibility.

But if have never done so, there is still time. Today can be the day of salvation.

Conclusion

*The pastor received a telephone call from a lady named Martha who was not only one of the oldest members but also one of the most faithful. They set up a time and when the pastor arrived it did not take long to discover the reason for the visit.*

*Martha shared the news that her doctor had told her that because of a previously undiagnosed problem she probably had six months to live. The pastor expressed his sorrow at the news but Martha's reassured him that she had lived long life and was ready to be with the Lord. Martha went on to say, "But I do want to talk with you about my funeral. I have been thinking about it, and there are things that I know I want."*

*The two talked quietly for a long time. They talked about her favorite hymns, the passages of Scripture that had meant so much to her through the years, and the many memories they shared from the church.*

*When it seemed that they had covered just about everything, she paused, looked up at pastor with a twinkle in her eye, and then added, "One more thing, preacher. When they bury me, I want my old Bible in one hand and a fork in the other"*

*"A fork?" the pastor was sure he had heard right. "Why do you want to be buried with a fork?" "I have been thinking about all great dinners I have been to down through the years one thing sticks in my mind."*

*"At those really nice get-togethers, when the meal was almost finished, the hostess would come by and take your plate. I can hear the words now. Sometimes, at the best ones, somebody would lean over my shoulder and whisper, 'You can keep your fork.' And do you know what that meant? Dessert was coming! "It didn't mean a cup of Jell-O or some kind of pudding. You don't need a fork for that. It meant the good stuff, like chocolate cake or cherry pie! When they told me I could keep my fork, I knew the best was yet to come!"*

*"That's exactly what I want people to talk about at my funeral. Oh, they can talk about all the good times we had together. That would be nice. "But when they walk by my casket and see the fork, I want them to turn to one another and say, 'Why the fork'? That's when I want you to say, I want you to tell them, that I kept my fork because the best is yet to come!"* [Tidbits DAILY Devotional tidbits-request@mlists.net - [www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon1a/keepthe.htm](http://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon1a/keepthe.htm)]

Death is not end. Death is but the beginning for those who believe in Christ. What I want to remember throughout this series is the truth that for those who believe in Jesus, the best is yet to come.