

## DEATH

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Helen Rice Steiner wrote this poem. She said:

There is no night without a dawning  
No winter without a spring.  
And beyond the dark horizon  
Our hearts will once more sing.  
For those who leave us for a while  
Have only gone away,  
Our of a restless, care worn world  
Into a brighter day.

### Psalm 39:4

*Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be;  
Remind me that my days are numbered – how fleeting my life is.  
You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.  
My entire lifetime is just a moment to you;  
At best, each of us is but a breath.*

In these last couple of months, many of you have experienced loss, the going away of a loved one. And I have spent many moments speaking to you on the phone, trying to bring God's comfort and consolation to you. Yet nothing can, in a sense, prepare one or assuage the feelings that arise when a loved one goes to be with God. No words can really suffice at that moment. But I want us today to be able to look at some scriptures and be able to have some thoughts about what and how to prepare for a day when death can suddenly come upon us.

When there has been a prolonged illness, if somebody has been in the hospital a long time, or death has been imminent for some them, then we get the chance to prepare. But, when death comes suddenly, then there is no time to deal with it or prepare for it. So I wanted to place some thoughts in front of us this morning that will be present as we look at the reality of this fact, that all of us have a certain length of days unknown to us, but known to our heavenly Father. And when that span of time is over, He takes us home. But I place before you just a few points that I believe will help us as we look at our own mortality and the finality of death from a worldly perspective. We know that for those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, death is but a doorway into God's presence, into eternity with Him.

### **1. Know that our comfort comes from Him.**

When we grieve a loved one, when we sense the vacuum that comes from missing them, know that our comfort is from Him. God brings to bear upon us heavenly comfort. The shortest verse in the bible is John 11:35 – *Jesus wept*. He wept because a dear friend of His, Lazarus, had died. Now we know the end of that story is that Jesus brought him out of the grave. But Jesus also understood from our perspective what it meant for a loved one to leave. In terms of what God wanted to accomplish, it was a different thing, but from an entirely human perspective, Jesus understood what that loss could mean to Him and to the sisters; and He wept.

The hymn is so beautiful, and hymns have a way of ministering to us during times like this. Wonderful hymn writers have spent many moments receiving from the Lord wonderful lines that have come to bring comfort to us. One such line is this:

Can we find a friend so faithful,  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness.  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Beloved, I would say to you: Take the sorrows to Him. Take your sadness to Him, for He understands exactly where you are and what you are going through.

2 Corinthians 1:4 says that He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God, from the One who walked upon the earth and went through every emotion that we too go through because of His humanity. Take it to Him in prayer and let Him bring comfort to your soul.

## **2. Know this with certainty that we will meet again.**

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*Beloved brothers and sisters, we want you to be quite certain about the truth concerning those who have passed away, so that you won't be overwhelmed with grief like many others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that God will bring with Jesus those who died while believing in Him. This is the word of the Lord: we who are alive in him and remain on earth when the Lord appears will by no means have an advantage over those who have already died, for both will rise together.*

*For the Lord himself will appear with the declaration of victory, the shout of an archangel, and the trumpet blast of God. He will descend from the heavenly realm and command those who are dead in Christ to rise first. Then we who are alive will join them, transported together in clouds to have an encounter with the Lord in the air, and we will be forever joined with the Lord. So encourage one another with these truths.*

Encourage one another with these truths that we will meet again. Death is not the end, beloved. If you and I know the Lord today, and have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, then we know that we will spend eternity with Him. Our loved ones who have trusted, we will meet again. This parting is brief, but in eternity we will all be together. So the bible says don't be overwhelmed with your grief, for this is only temporary. We will meet again.

In February of this year, I was present at a RZIM conference at Colombo, Sri Lanka, and amongst many speakers of course, Ravi Zacharias was there. As he walked up to the platform to speak, everyone noticed that he had a perceptible limp. He said, "I seem to have a deep pain in my back, and they tell me that I could have wrenched my back when I took my bag off the carousel when I flew in. I am in a lot of pain." Many prayed for him at that time. Yet, a short time after that, to the amazement and shock of everybody, he went home to be with the Lord.

In 2003, I think it was, I'd been involved for arranging for a financial seminar here in Mumbai. At the end of this, I travelled to Bangalore to do something with this, and I was standing to one side when a man came up to me, his face wreathed in smiles. He said, "Pastor, I have a bone to pick with you." I looked at him and said, "Tell me." He told me what the issue had been, and we laughed about it. That was my first encounter with Isaac Manoharan. Over the years I got to know him well. you all know him as the one who brought the Gaither music to us here in India – Sitara Music. He did

phenomenal in that area. Just a while back I was talking to a dear friend of his, and she said, “One moment I was talking and joking with him; then next moment he was talking to me from the ICU; and then I heard that he was on the ventilator; and then he was gone.

### **3. Are you ready for death?**

Death sometimes comes upon us swiftly and suddenly. As I thought about these two, and others who I have heard from some of you who have mentioned how death has visited your homes and your families, I felt like asking this question: are you and I ready for death? Let’s move away from those who have passed away and ask ourselves this question. I know these are hard questions that I am asking you, and yet I ask: Are we ready for death if it were to suddenly come to us?

I remember watching the Cathedral Quartet; I think it was their farewell concert – after 50 years they were disbanding. George Younce and Glen Payne, the two founding members of that quartet, came and sat down on the steps, talking to the whole audience. George Younce said this: “I know that most of my life has been lived, and what I have in front of me is very short. But I want you to know this, that if the Lord were to call me home today, my bags are packed. I’m ready to go.”

And I wonder whether that’s something that you and I can say: Not a problem! If the Lord were to call me home today, my bags are packed. I’m ready to go. I’m ready to go and be with Him in eternity.

### **4. Do you know your destination?**

If death were to come upon you, do you know where you’re going? Do you know with certainty that you will spend eternity with God? Have you appropriated the death of Jesus as the penalty for your sins? Because the bible says: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Are you saved today, so that you will know that you will spend eternity with Him?

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever (you can put your name) and believes in Him will not perish but will have life everlasting.* Are you sure that your destination is heaven? Do you know Jesus today? Have you made that transaction with Him, appropriated the sacrifice that He gave for you for the penalty of your sins? Have you accepted His transaction and appropriated His death for yourself? Do you know your destination, beloved?

### **5. Are we fulfilling His purpose?**

Are we fulfilling God’s purpose, the work that He has given to you and to me? God has placed us here for a purpose. Are we fulfilling that purpose every moment of every day?

Dwight L. Moody was once asked that if he knew that today was the last day that he had on earth, what would he do? And he said, “I’d do exactly what I’m doing right now. I don’t have to do catch up. I don’t have to run and make things right. I’m doing what God wants me to do every moment of every day.” Can you say that as well, beloved? Sometimes we postpone things. We say: I’ll do what I think I need to do when I retire, or I’ll start this when the lockdown ends, or when we have a cure for COVID and I can move around. Yet the truth is that God has a purpose for you and me even during these days, even during this pandemic. That’s why you and I have been placed in the world during these days. God has a purpose for our lives during this time.

John 9:4

*We must work the works of Him who sent me as long as it is day, night is coming when no one can work.*

Maybe you're looking at your life and saying, "I have no time for anything. I'm just caught up with work; I've no time for anything else." Maybe you're saying, "I'm at home and just churning out meals and taking care of the family, and I have no time to do anything." Or maybe you're retired and just spend the day on the internet catching up on things, watching stuff. Maybe you're a primary care person spending long hours taking care of people, and you're saying, "That's my life. I have no time for anything else." Maybe you're a social worker looking after the disenfranchised – those who have lost their jobs, the down-trodden, displaced persons – trying to help them eke out a living; and you're saying, "There is no place for God. I'm just doing my work."

Chuck Swindoll, at a seminar many, many years ago, told a group of people to take a piece of paper and write down in order of importance the things in their life: work, God, family, community, whatever. So they started writing and almost all of them put #1 as God, then #2 for some was work, for some it was family; #3 was community, friends or relatives – and they made the list 4,5,6,7, and so on. But God was at the top. Here's what Chuck Swindoll said, "The fact that you got God as #1 is beautiful and right. But all your #2s, 3s, 4s, 5s and so on are wrong. God has to be integral to every moment of every day. So it is God at work, God in family, God in community, God in my relationships, God in everything. Beloved, we cannot do something to the exclusion of that work excluding God. We can't put God on hold while we do other things.

So I ask you again: Are you doing everything that God wants you to do every day? What is it that you sense a little bit of discomfort in your heart that you should be doing something but just can't manage the time? I would say to you that if that is what God is saying to you, go with that. Take the decision to do what God is asking, and God will help you carve out the time to do it. Trust Him. All of us, beloved, have a reason for being here during this pandemic, in these uncertain times. All of us have a reason as we face uncertain days and how to face them. But we have a purpose in the midst of everything.

#### 1 Peter 2:9

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. So that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.*

All of that beloved, a chosen people, royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. Why? So that you can proclaim His name and the beauty of His name, the wonderful things that He has done in bringing you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

#### Acts 13:36

*When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.*

Are we serving God's purpose in this generation?

#### Ecclesiastes 3:1

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.*

#### Proverbs 19:21

*Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*

#### Ephesians 2:10

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

God prepared it, beloved. Even before we came on this earth, God said, “This is My plan” for you and for me.

Micah 6:8

*The Lord has told you what is good. And this is what He requires of you – to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before your God.*

Philippians 2:15

*So that no one can criticize you, live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked perverse.*

Matthew 5:16

*In the same way, let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Purpose, beloved! We cannot live our lives either caught up with the things of death or the loss of a life, or just waiting and saying that when this situation eases, I will then begin to do what I think God wants me to do. In the midst of every situation that you and I are in, and I say this as gently as I can to those of you who may be grieving, have lost loved ones, are without a job, there is still a divine purpose to your life in the midst of these prevailing circumstances. And it is incumbent on you and me to find that purpose and pursue it under the power and the anointing of His Holy Spirit. We live in a state of preparedness that God is entwined and integral to every aspect of our lives, and that He is reflected in our actions, our words, our demeanor, everything that we may portray to people. God as a purpose for you and for me. Let’s pursue it.

Shall we pray together?

Almighty God, You who are the resurrection and the life, have called us into this world to live life, not without purpose, but with a clear sense of direction. Help us Lord, that in the midst of all that we may be going through, these difficult times, to not lose sight of who You are and what Your expectations are for each one of us. Help us to pursue You through our brokenness, through hearts that need to be mended, through difficult circumstances and trying situations. Help us to keep our eyes upon You and to follow You. For we ask this Lord Jesus, in Your beautiful majestic name. Amen.