

Spiritual Truths About Death.

Hebrews 2

Life is a lot like a sports game. It begins and ends. We know statistically how long we may live, but then tragedy occurs or we get an illness that even with a good medical result – still takes a few years off our life expectancy. I suspect as we get older, and with the current climate of various changes and fears around the world, the reality of death becomes more of a concern. And we have a growing awareness over time that death does not just happen to the other person.

But it takes time and a process to move from rationally admitting to emotionally admitting, everyone dies. George Bernard Shaw, the Irish playwright, has these three quotes to offer us: “Do not try to live forever, you will not succeed.” “Statistics show that of those who contract the habit of eating, very few survive.” And, “The statistics about death are very impressive. One out of every person dies.”

A young farm boy asked his dad, "Dad, where did I come from?"

Dad replied, "You came from dust."

The boy asked, "Dad, where did you come from?"

Dad responded, "I came from dust."

The son then asked, "Dad, where did Grampa come from?"

The father answered, "He came from dust."

You can just see the young boy processing this information as he asked another question.

"Where am I going back to?"

Dad told him, "You're going back to dust."

The young son was curious so he asked, "Well, Dad, where are you going back to?"

Dad said again, "I'm going back to dust."

The next question was,

"Where is Grampa going back to?"

Dad patiently answered & then retorted. "He's going back to dust. Now will you stop asking so many questions and go out and do what I told you - hoe the tomatoes in the garden."

So the boy went out to hoe the tomatoes. It had been a very dry year so at the first strike he made with the hoe, some dust came up from the ground. He ran in to his dad and in all honesty, sincerity & naivety said with excitement, "Dad, you had better get out here fast. Somebody is either coming or going, right in our garden."

So the first truth is, let's **admit that death is real**. And then we need to understand, is that for many of us, death comes sooner than we expect, and in a way we do not anticipate.

Jim Fixx was an American who started running at age 35 in 1967, when he was over weight and smoked. He wrote the 1977 best-selling book [*The Complete Book of Running*](#). He is credited with helping start America's fitness revolution, popularizing the sport of running and demonstrating the health benefits of regular [jogging](#). But he is also famous for dying of a heart attack while jogging at age 52. The autopsy revealed that [atherosclerosis](#) had blocked one coronary artery 95%, a second 85%, & a third 70%. Then there was research that discovered his genetic predisposition for heart problems as well as his previous lifestyle factors that may have caused his heart attack.

Death for many of us comes a lot sooner than we ever expect. So a **second truth, we need to prepare**. For our own death and for others also. We spend a lot of time, energy and money on learning how to live, but we don't spend much attention to how to die. We simply avoid talking and thinking about it.

Here is a story that hopefully causes us to reflect – and not with a critical spirit. A girl was critically injured in an automobile accident and she was in her dying moments. These were her last words to her mother. She said, "Mom, you taught me everything I had to know to get through university. You taught me how

to party, how to have sex and how to drink. But you never taught me how to die. Now will you teach me fast because, Mom, I'm dying."

Today we have recognized that MAID, Medically Assisted in Dying – is now legal. About 7,000 Canadians have chosen this option – for a whole variety of reasons. This amounts to roughly 1 % of all deaths in Canada. This takes us in directions that are very dangerous.

The flip side of this option is what has been going on for a long time – which is Medically Assisted Prolonging of Life. This also has its difficulties and dangers. So I think it's even more important now to talk about preparing for death, and learning how to die. We need to be aware of the medical and legal issues, and the spiritual, emotional and relational ones as well. We did some of this when we invited Justin Neufeld from CMU to come for a weekend in January, 2018. And in January 2019, Dan Epp Tiessen came for a weekend from CMU to talk about Surviving Cancer.

This is such a controversial, challenging and heavy topic that we are not sure how to talk about it. We are all different, have our own stories, histories, fears and hang ups about this topic. But listening and reflecting on people's stories is one of the better ways for us to learn. As one web site says, "We don't endorse every point of view in these stories, but respect them and offer them in the spirit of reclaiming death as a rich, challenging, rewarding, exhausting, heart-breaking, heart-filling, integral part of our human journey."

I think it's important to reflect together on a variety of stories about death and dying – even when they make us uncomfortable. Probably, especially when they make us uncomfortable. That discomfort is a signal that we need to pay attention to and discern what's going on in us.

The Bible is a book that tells us how to live and how to die as well as some facts about death. Our scripture offers important information. It tells us in verses 2 to 4, **pay attention because**

it announces salvation. Furthermore God witnesses to us by ongoing signs, wonders, miracles, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is a **third truth** about death and dying.

And then **fourth**, verses 5-9 tell us that **Jesus was made fully human.** He was made lower than the angels for a little while – to identify with us. But now he is crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so he could taste death, experience it, for every one of us. Jesus did this by dying, plus taking on our sins.

Next, in verses 10 and 11, we find a **fifth truth** about death. Jesus is called the pioneer of salvation, so that he can bring with him many daughters & sons to glory as we are made holy. **Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.** This allows us to call Jesus our brother because he is our Savior sent to us from God.

All this sets up verses 14 and 15. God wants all of us to understand about death and dying in light of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. We are told, "Jesus shared our humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – the devil." This is a **sixth truth** about death. We need to recognize that **death is from Satan.** Death was not our Creator's plan for you and me.

Did you hear about the little girl whose mother said to her, "Why in the world did you let Satan put it in your head to kick your little brother and pull his hair." The girl replied, "Mom, kicking him was Satan's idea, but pulling his hair I thought of that all by myself."

When Satan entered that garden in the form of a serpent, and tempted human kind to sin, death came with sin. This is why Jesus taught us, "The devil was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. He speaks his native language, when he lies, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (Jo. 8:44) Jesus says to us: Satan influences us to sin; we need to take responsibility for our own actions; sin causes death; death is of the devil.

We know Jesus was talking about more than physical death. If all the Bible talked about was physical death, it would not be so bad. But the Bible also talks about eternal and spiritual death in which we are separated from God forever in what the Bible calls hell. That's why the Bible says, "It is appointed unto us once to die, but after this the judgment." (Heb 9:27) Paul said, "The wages of sin is death." But Jesus came to break up Satan's power.

The **seventh truth** is, the text says, "Jesus frees those who all their lives were **held in slavery** by their fear of death." Fear of death reduces us to slavery. Because of the fear of death, some people will never step on an airplane. Some people resist seeing a doctor. Because of the fear of death, some people when they are sick, the doctor is the first person they want to see. Hypochondriacs love doctors.

Some people are superstitious, sometimes in really crazy ways. Did you hear about the man who was honest enough to confess, "There is a superstitious saying that says, 'If you break a mirror you will have 7 years of hard luck.' I am so afraid of death that I try to break a mirror just to make sure I live seven more years even if it has to be hard luck."

Another man was honest enough to say, "Every morning when I get up the first thing I do is to check the death column in the paper and if my name is not there I say to myself, 'Congratulations! You made it another day.'"

The fear of death reduces us to slaves. In fact, we are so captured by the fear of death, some people feel there are only two ways to get away from it. One is, we have to laugh about it which is a reason this sermon has a few humorous illustrations. We have to laugh to keep from being depressed and to get more perspective.

The second way people feel the only way we can get away from death is become completely naive as to how quickly it can happen. So we work overtime to be in denial by avoiding.

We can laugh or deny, but, we are going to die. The Bible says is, the fear of death reduces us to slavery. It subjects us to bondage; dictates everything we do, every place we go, much of what we eat and most of whom we talk to. Death is of the devil and the fear of death reducing us to slaves, is not good news.

The eighth truth is, the power of the devil is broken. Notice what else our holy scripture says. "Since we, God's children, are human beings, made of flesh and blood, Jesus became flesh and blood too by being born in human form; for only as a human being could he die and in dying, **break the power of the devil** who had the power of death." Jesus Christ solved our problem of death. But He knew in order to help us He had to become like us.

When the punishment for our sin fell, it fell on Christ and He saved us by dying for us. He was nailed to a cross where we should be nailed. Jesus died in our place and rose again the third day. When there is a tragedy, people ask, "How do we know God loves us?" I don't fully know why God allows bad things to occur

But I do know, the cross says in the loudest way it can be said, "I love you, I love you, I love you." Jesus died where we should have died. He took punishment we deserved. Jesus defeated the devil's power of sin and death. Jesus offers us a way out of the slavery of the fear of death. Jesus liberates us from sin, death and the devil. He solved our greatest problem. May each of us recognize this, accept it, and reach out for it.

One of the stories out of Haiti when one of the earthquakes hit the city of Port-Au-Prince years ago, is a woman with a baby. As soon as she saw the ceiling start to crack, the walls start to shake, she took that baby, placed it on the floor and stretched her body over it. When the ceiling came down and the walls fell in, it fell on the woman first. She died in that baby's place. What a heroic act!

But with Jesus, he rose from the dead. He was victorious over the devil. So we do not have to slavishly fear death. Jesus made the devil powerless to forever control all the areas of your life and especially in the area of death. This is good news. But there is more!

Notice verse 15, another truth, "Jesus releases those, **frees those**, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage, stuck in slavery." Jesus has set us free from the power of death. The question is, how do we get that freedom?

The Bible here does not use the 2 words "be baptized." It does not use the 3 words "go to church." It does not use the 4 words "live a good life." It does not use the 5 words, "take all of the sacraments." It does not use the 6 words "Keep all of the 10 commandments." Those values and actions are important for followers of Jesus.

But Jesus uses one word - **believe**. To get free, believe. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25) Believe means "to trust, depend, rely on, have faith." And then live it, show it. Believe is the **tenth truth** about death and dying.

The chapter ends with Jesus as our merciful and faithful high priest who intercedes for you and me. Jesus became like us to help us believe his salvation from the slavery and fear of death. Jesus frees us from the devil because he is simply more powerful. We don't need to fear.

Larry Moyer was on a speaking engagement in Louisiana and met a man who loved to fish. He said, "Larry, before you go back home, please just spend a few hours fishing with me."

Larry replied, "Well, there are two problems." The man asked, "What are they?"

Larry said, "One, I am a hunter, not a fisherman. I don't know anything about fishing." The man, "That's okay, I'll teach you all you need to know."

Larry then said, "There's a second problem. I have never learned how to swim."

The response: "That's no problem, there are life jackets in the boat."

So Larry, a bit reluctantly got into the boat and as soon as he did, he noticed 2 things. First of all, the life jackets were in the front of the boat and he was in the back. He thought, "What if I hit the water before I hit the life jackets?"

Then secondly, they got about 100 yards from shore and the first thing Larry saw was a genuine, authentic, Louisiana alligator. And he thought to himself, "Now for crying out loud, what good is a life jacket going to do with alligators around? All it will do is hold me in place so the alligators can tear me apart."

Then it dawned on Larry, that if he was going to fish, learn and enjoy it, and get out there and back, he had to trust a person to do it. He had to believe in the fisherman. That is Jesus' invitation to us about death.

Let's close with another story. Years ago there was a pastor by the name of Dr. Campbell Morgan. A woman in his church had just given birth. But because of complications, the baby was alive, but the mother was dying.

Dr. Morgan received a call asking him to come because the woman was only expected to live a matter of moments. So he went to the hospital room. The doctor walked in right behind him. So Pastor Morgan stepped to the corner of the room and let the doctor take care of his patient.

All of a sudden, the woman started to scream. "I want my baby. I want my baby. I want to take my baby with me."

The doctor looked at her and said, "Ma'am, your baby is in the most loving arms. The people you want to have it have it. But there is no way you can take that baby with you. The gate through which you must pass, you must pass through alone."

At that point, Dr. Morgan, unable to control his emotion, walked up to the doctor, put his arm on his shoulder, pulled him away from that woman and he said, "Don't you dare tell that woman that. That woman is a believer in Jesus Christ. So if you speak to her tell her the truth. The gate through which she must pass is wide enough for two - both she and her Savior. And the one who has led her all through life will not desert her now."

There is a gate. Sooner or later all of us have to pass through it. It may be expected or unexpected. But when we trust Christ Jesus, that gate will be wide enough for two - you and your Savior. And the One who has led you all through life will not desert you then, and where He is now, there you will be also.