

Death

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Preacher: Rev David Paterson

[0 : 00] This time I want to speak with you in Luke's Gospel, chapter 16, among the other parts, and at verse 22.

And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Abraham's bosom was the Jewish concept of heaven. And the rich man also died and was buried, and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment.

Now this evening I want to speak to you about death. It's a subject that we don't like, basically, to think about.

It's basically a subject that most of us try to put out of our minds. And in the chapters that we've read, and it's strange in the New Testament, that much of the stories of death apply to young people.

[1 : 21] Now as many of you know, a few weeks ago I went north to an old congregation of mine to bury a girl, a dear girl of 15 years of age.

She was going home one night in a car. The car hit the curb. She was thrown through the window, and the car went over her.

And within 24 hours, she was dead. She never expected it. She never even thought of it, I'm sure. It was the last thing she thought of when she dressed herself that evening to go out.

She fully expected to come home, go to bed, begin her work next morning. The dear girl made her appearance before God within 24 hours.

And again, I've made mention sometime a good bit of the past. But when I look back over the boys that I mixed with and played with, there were about a dozen of us.

[2 : 43] Nine out of that 12 died before there were 40. Nine out of that 12. Nine out of that 12. I'm sure they didn't expect it any more than I did.

And yet, it came their way. It was true of them all, just as well of the beggar and of the rich man. And he died.

And he died. And yet, it will one day, it will be said of you, it will be said of me, he's dead.

And yet, that's not altogether true in a biblical sense. Most of us think of death as something that blots us out for keep.

We're dead. That's the end. But the Bible never speaks of death as an end. It speaks of death as an entrance.

[3 : 57] An entrance into a state from which there is no end. So death is not an end, but it's an entrance.

And when the beggar died, he entered into Abram's bosom. When the rich man died, he entered into hell.

He didn't go out of existence. He just left the particular form of existence that he was in. He left the realm of time to exist in eternity.

Now, in the story, three different stories we've read. The story of the young man, the only son of his widow.

He was a young man, we know that from the Greek form of the word. Jairus' daughter, she was only 12. I suppose Lazarus would be in his 30s.

[5 : 05] That's what one would think. Now, they were all comparatively young. And the Bible says they all died.

So this is what I want to begin at. The point that age is not relevant when we think of death.

I've often mentioned the young man that went to the meeting in Ireland, a man about 20. How the evangelist told me that he sung the closing hymn.

And instead of singing, I will believe, he sang, I won't believe. How the evangelist wanted to get his hand on him going out the door, but a wee girl asked for help.

And he said, go through to the room. And the other man passed. When he'd finished speaking to the girl, the elder came in and he said, Did you see a young man in the front row? He said, yes. Well, he went straight out of the campaign hall.

[6 : 10] And he walked in front of a double-dickled bus. And he's gone. And he went crying, I won't believe. And so death is not relevant to age.

And in the scriptures in the New Testament and the purpose of God, we find that these three stories were all of younger people. And we see there that death is really the tragedy of a life that's lost.

Death is a reality. We may seek to forget it. To put it to the back of our mind and pull up curtains and say, It's not going to happen to me. I'm not really going to die.

Not yet anyway. Maybe when I'm older. And I haven't met an old person yet who's got a measure of health who doesn't think he's going to be a lot older before he dies. We might seek to forget it.

We might come to church and that minister is beginning to speak on it again. So we might decide that we'll not only forget it, but we'll ignore it. We'll put it into a compartment of our minds.

[7 : 17] We'll shut the door and we'll ignore it. If it comes, it's going to come good and well. And who cares? When it comes, we'll meet it. That's another way of facing death. But some people will do more than that.

Some people even joke about it. Well, they'll say, when my number's up, it's up. Whether I'm young or whether I'm old, if, if, if, if. And they will use a derogatory mark of God.

I've heard it. They'll say, well, if he gives me my number, it's up. And even in unbelief, they're believing that he will tell them the time. It's a strange thing.

That people who will not believe in God or obey God will say, when you speak to them, when he says the time is up, it's up, no matter what we do. So they believe in something. Most of us are like that.

And particularly when we're young, we seek to forget death. We seek to ignore it. We seek to joke about it. But none of us expect it.

[8 : 21] When we're young, death is like a stranger. Little thought of by youth. Because life has to be lived and to be enjoyed.

Life is to be conquered. And who's going to be morbid enough to think of death? So says the young person. Death is a stranger. Someone we will meet in the future.

But a stranger. Little thought of. But all the time, with every hour that passes, death is like a stalker.

Have you ever gone down the road in the dark, when there's no light from? We used to do that in the blackout, and particularly in the war years. Sometimes in some of the older villages for a while, you can go out and there's no lights.

And there may come a night, when you go out for a walk, and the lights are off. And you're walking down the street. And all of a sudden, you get that queer feeling that somebody's following you.

[9 : 28] You stop and you listen. There's nothing. You go on. And you go on. You stop and listen again. You quicken your step.

You feel that there's someone stalking you. Well, death's like that. Death is a stalker. He's the shadow in the background. He becomes then the interloper in the thoughts.

He comes unbidden. The thought of death comes unbidden into your thinking. Soon, he's the enemy to be faced. Soon, he's the terror to be experienced.

Death is the stalker. He was once a stranger. He's now the stalker. How do you know in human terms? Well, let me tell you.

There may be a young girl in the congregation tonight, or a young man. All of a sudden, the young girl goes for a test to the hospital. In that test, although the girl or the woman has felt nothing, it's positive.

[10 : 36] The X-rays have shown cancer. Death then becomes not the stranger. It comes nearer.

He's the stalker. Somebody has a heart attack. Oh, it's a fierce pain. He gets over it. And death no longer is the stranger.

It's the stalker. Coming up behind you now. Almost waiting to put his hands upon you. And then finally death begins to strike.

Sometimes he's very quiet in his approach. There's no pain. He comes. He's sudden in his touch.

Yes. He's real in his power. Awful in his strength. And in the chapters that we have read, with three young people, one of twelve, one's age is not given, but a young man, and the other by Lazarus, we find that youth had no power when death came.

[11 : 47] And then with the beggar, we find that poverty didn't prevent death coming.

And riches couldn't stop him. So we've got the whole sort of panorama of life there in these five people. And it's said of them all, they died.

Now when we come, first of all, we come to the funeral of the young man. The first one who was conquered by death. And we must ask two questions.

One, did he expect it? Two, was he prepared for it? Who knows? We meet him with the mourners around his coffin.

We meet Jairus' daughter in the room, a wealthy man's room, lying dead on the bed. And we meet Lazarus, stinking, his body having tasted corruption, smelling with the heat of an eastern sun.

[13 : 05] In each case, they all seem lost. There seems no hope. They're all dead. And one thing is certain, if death is going to be conquered in their experience, there's the need of a miracle.

It will take a miracle now to put life into the dead. I want to suggest to you that among the mourners that were around the young man's coffin, carrying it, among the mourners, and we read they mocked Jesus and laughed him to scorn, that were around the young girl's house.

And even the mourners that were at the grave of Lazarus, including Mary and Martha, who were among his loved supporters, there was no doubt in anyone's minds that they were all dead.

You see, there were no unbelievers at the funerals. There were no unbelievers in the death room. There were no unbelievers in the graveyard. There was not one unbeliever there.

There were no unbelievers there. They all knew he was dead. And they all knew it would take nothing more than a miracle to bring them to life, to give life to the dead.

[14 : 32] It would take the power of the creator who first gave life, it would take him alone.

No surgeon can do it. And in Lazarus and in the others we see the evidence of death, the smell of death, and the power of death.

It will take a miracle. Where do miracles come from? That's the question. Now into each of these three situations comes Jesus at the funeral, the edge of the city, at the home of Jairus, and at the grave of Lazarus.

The situation is real. The situation is tragic. The situation is powerful. If you look at the three people who are assembled, you'll see the three different receptions to death.

One, there was weeping and numbness at the widow's son's funeral. At Jairus' daughter there was antagonism. Do you ever hear people say to God when a young person dies, why did he take her away?

[15 : 57] I can't believe that there's a God who would do this. You've heard it. Well, that antagonism is there at the house of Jairus' daughter. They left him to scorn.

And then, the typical reaction at Lazarus was this. Why did Jesus let it happen?

He didn't need to. Lazarus loved him. Lazarus was good to him. Lazarus was kind to him. Lazarus was a good man. Why did Jesus not do something for Lazarus?

three typical reactions to death. But there, on these three occasions, we see the touch of the all-powerful.

We do. We see the touch of the all-powerful. Jesus touched a beard a coffin do you know what he really did in these three occasions he challenged death's power he conquered death's power and he deprived death of his power the young man arrived he says and the young man rose Talitha Kumi arrived and the young girl arose Lazarus come forth and the man whose body was smelling all the atoms came together again the flesh became pure flesh rather than decayed the spirit came back from whence it had gone and re-entered the body death had been conquered and those who had died were brought back into the state that they left from the state that they went to that's what the bible tells us here about death and the reaction to the miracle was just as you would expect some people feared some people glorified God some people were astonished and some people were filled with joy it was the touch of the master's hand that's three deaths when you speak of death though you must come to the fourth death that we find off in the scriptures it was a different death it was the death that took place on the cross of Calvary death there was real and it was terrible because it was a different death you see you see with every other person who died life was taken from them they were powerless to do anything about it but when Jesus the conqueror of death was put on a cross life wasn't taken from him it was presented to God by him it was presented to God by a deliberate act of one who was himself a priest and he offered his soul his life to God first of all to be punished and to be paid and then to be accepted on behalf of his people we read in the scriptures that his death was in reality the death of death itself the place was Calvary it was death multiplied by the death of his people

[20 : 09] Bible says he endured he endured the cross he despised the shame he accepted the sin he suffered the punishment he endured the hell and at Calvary when they took him down from the cross day after he had suffered the innocent in the place in the place of the guilty they took him down from the cross they took the eastern bandages in ointment they bandaged his feet and his whole body then they bandaged his head he was immersed in ointment and in bandages and he was laid in the tomb they blocked the tomb with a stone they put sentries outside the door now we see Jesus facing his greatest challenge his own death he once claimed

I have power to lay down my life I have power to take it up again but had he here was the test his disciples they wept at the tragedy would they have wept had they believed that he was going to change the tragedy into a triumph I don't sure he wouldn't he hangs there first of all dead on the cross has he got the power to rise from death he's bandaged has he got this power he's blocked in a tomb has he got the power he's guarded by the sentries has he got the power three days later he comes forth as the conqueror he comes forth alive and we know that his sacrifice on the cross was accepted by God as the price of the salvation of everyone who believes death has now in its real death been experienced by one who had no need to die and death was the culmination of the punishment of the punishment that the innocent one endured on the cross but he said only for three days and after three days his soul came back into his body and by a miracle of God that soul the real being of Christ did something to the body that we know not about it did something to the atoms of the body that enabled the body to walk through the walls to appear and to disappear its own leisure we have after the resurrection after the death of Christ the soul in a body that has been treated by God and made different the death the death the death in the scriptures is always in three stages one came at the beginning it was spiritual death then comes what we know as physical death and finally we have then what the Bible tells us is the experience of eternal death now let me say this that death is seen in the scriptures in three states and yet in these three states the soul continues to exist in the state of spiritual death it loses its union with God it loses its fellowship with God it loses its love for God it loses the way to God and so the soul because of spiritual death is in rebellion against God but it's still a soul a soul and a body united in rebellion and waywardness against God that's the first death the second stage of death is the death that separates the soul from the body it doesn't put the soul out of existence it puts the body out of order

it puts the body back to where it came from to the death that's the second state of death now the third state of death is told us by Lazarus and the rich man and what I would suggest now before we close is that we look at the third stage of death because it's going to be your death and my death it's either or we're either going to be like Lazarus whom we read here and a certain beggar named Lazarus died okay he reached the second stage of death he died as we see it and he was carried by the angels into Abram's bosom he was transmitted from one area of experience into a new area but it was the same person and then we read the rich man died and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torment he's still the same man he's still alive his body is now in the grave but he is alive the real man he has now moved into stage three of death that's what

Jesus tells us in the scriptures and when we look at these two things we don't so much described in this chapter of the state of Lazarus only we're told it's Abram's bosom and as you know the Abram was the covenant head of all believers Abram was the man of faith Abram was one who looked for a city that had foundations as builder and maker as God when he was here on earth he never reached the city he went out from all that he had on a pilgrimage for God and he ultimately we read in Hebrews he found the city that hath foundations as builder and maker as God that's not the evidence of a man who's out of existence it's a man who's passed through death and Abram's bosom is in the very holy presence of God well that's where this

Lazarus went to but the other man died that's true he had the experience of death he left his body he moved into another area of living we call we find in the bible it's called hell and I want to suggest to you tonight my young friends my old friends and bearing in mind what I said at the beginning that nine out of my own twelve friends died before there were forty I want you to remember this tonight and never forget it there is a place called hell in spite of the laughing scoff there'll be some folks at new year time you know what they'll do they'll get a little bit oil first they'll pick up the glass they'll be well filled you know what someone will say they'll clink it together and they'll say we'll meet you in hell you know

[29 : 02] I've seen we'll meet you in hell you will and then they'll say we'll have a great time there together well there is a place called hell in spite of the laughing scoff in spite of the atheistic sneer you know a friend of mine who's a minister he went through to Glasgow with three or four other ministers through to Edinburgh and these other three or four ministers they weren't converted men you know they said to him you mister so and so you're one of those who believe in hell aren't you he says yes Bernie Bernie Bernie Bernie that's what they said to him oh my friends in spite of the atheistic sneer that you'll find very often on the television picture today that you find among the intellectuals many of the young there's a place called hell in spite of the hopeful doubt of some people some people hope that there won't be a hell they doubt if they're going to heaven but they hope that they're not going to hell in spite of the hopeful doubt

Jesus said in hell he lifted up his eyes in spite of all the hateful challenges to God put me there if you want I'll not serve you I'll live my life I don't care in spite of rebellion and in spite of all the teaching of the