

Appointed once to die

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Preacher: Rev Alex Murdo Macleod

[0 : 00] Hebrews 9, verse 27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, that after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered, to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin, and to salvation.

But the words I want to think on, especially are in verse 27, that it is appointed unto men once to die.

Because God, it seems to us at any rate, is calling all of us during these days to consider our latter end by calling from amongst ourselves time after time our acquaintances and friends and sometimes our relations.

This particular area has been solemnly visited, as everyone here is very well aware of in the course of the year, now drawing to an end.

In the calling away, suddenly, and as we say, tragically, people at an unusually early age, and we are not to let such solemn events pass by without paying special heed to them.

[2 : 08] and apart from these altogether, we see people at all stages of life, middle-aged as well as the young and elderly also, sometimes suddenly removed from our midst.

Yesterday, I had to go up early to a funeral in Stornoway. I came back to be in time to conduct a funeral service in this church.

When I went into the house after that funeral, I discovered that there had been a phone call informing me of another and a more sudden and a more unexpected death in my own home village.

And at times like these, one feels as if God were meeting one at every turn and as it were arresting one and warning one to pay heed himself and to be the means of sounding forth warnings to others, whether they hear or whether they forbear, whether they enjoy listening to such messages or whether they don't, there is no question that God's intention is that I pay heed to them and that you pay heed to them.

And when one looks upon death, one looks upon something that has a tremendous finality about it.

[4 : 03] I do not expect to say anything here this evening that you haven't heard before and that you do not realize at times yourselves, but these things need repeated.

It is very clear that our hearts and minds need to be recalled to these things so that we shall fix our attention upon these things and not be as people who in one way or another deafen our own ears against the voice of God when he sounds for his voice loudly to us as a community and as individuals.

Now it doesn't matter at what stage of life we are. There are a few here tonight that are very early age in life and are very early teens.

and they are of course tempted as most of us were at that stage of life and even older tempted to look on these things as interruptions to our progress and as interfering with our pleasure and our ability to enjoy life to some extent and things therefore that we ought to banish from our thoughts rather than things upon which to fix our attention.

So for that reason I would call upon the young people the boys and girls present here this evening to try and listen to what I have to say and first of all notwithstanding the fact that there is this finality about death and a uniqueness about death we have to remember that death is the culmination of many troubles that people experience in this life.

[6 : 49]

Now I would point that out very especially to the young people. to the children that however awful death in itself seems to us and you in particular maybe that you have to remember that it is the culmination the ending of many afflictions in this world.

God says in his word that man is born unto trouble as whose parts lie upward. if you read your Bible as you ought to do frequently and regularly you will find the saints of God people who were blessed people who had the favor of God in this world as surely as they have it now in another world you find that they had to complain about afflictions that docked their path while they lived here.

Lord how are they increased which trouble me many are they which rise up against me our soul is exceedingly filled with the goring of those that are at ease and with the contempt of the crowd when I would comfort myself against sorrow my heart is faint in me woe it me Jeremiah says my mother that thou hast borne me man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth you know Jeremiah was one of the saintlyest men who has ever walked to death but on that occasion because of his suffering he cried woe upon the day that he was born because the reason of the nature of the world he came into he proved to be a man of contention and of strife because the world did not want the kind of man

Jeremiah was the kind of principles that he lived by and especially the kind of godliness that he wanted to live out in his daily life remember Christ said to his disciples the word that I said unto you the servant is not greater than his Lord and you know what happened to the Lord the master of these servants how he ended upon a cross of shame because the world would not have him we will not have this man the world said then and the world says now we will not have this man to rule over us and so if there are any in the world who have affliction to experience the children of God who are blessed must have their share of it for that reason that the world does not want them any more than the world wants it him but we also discover that death is something that follows prosperity as well as adversity you remember how the psalmist in psalm 73 makes a very strange confession as as for me he says near the beginning of that psalm my steps near slipped my feet were almost gone for

I envious was and grudged the foolish folk to see when I perceived the wicked thought enjoy prosperity and you may remember how he goes on to describe his dilemma as he beheld on the one hand the righteous suffering and the wicked prospering but then a point comes when he feels rebuked and corrected for his envy of the wicked when I this thought to know it was too hard a thing for me till to God's sanctuary I went then I thereand did see assuredly thou didst them say a slippery place upon then suddenly thou cast its down into destruction death came upon the prosperous as surely as it was the experience of the righteous and then as you look upon someone who has died you are looking upon someone who has a common experience with all others it comes to all now that is a very simple aspect of the truth that all of us have to take to heart you are not looking upon something that is limited in its extent the living look upon the dead but there is a very real sense in which they are looking upon themselves because as surely as night follows day they themselves not some of ourselves but all of ourselves are to be in the very same position lying under the power of death and that before very long now you can apply that truth to every living soul in the world tonight before long they are going to be in the exact same position as those upon whom you gazed recently or long since under death power every one of them and you are one of the many

[14 : 09] I am one of the many and you look upon a power when you behold the power of death that is irresistible there is no means of resisting death no I believe the main explanation for that is in the verse we have before us here that it is appointed unto all men once to die it is appointed as surely as it is true of any and every individual that it was appointed for him and her to come into existence to have been it is just as surely true of each that it is appointed unto each and every one of us that we shall die and the author as it were of that appointment is the same one and his authority is such that there is no avoiding what he has determined upon whatever he has set as the experience or lot of anyone whether it be in this world or in another world we can all rest assured that there is no escaping it and it is written here it is appointed unto men who want to die it is a divine appointment it is not something left to the choice of any man or woman or boy or girl they are not asked whether they agree that this should be so they are not asked to determine whether it is a pleasing experience to them or an unpleasant experience for them that they would wish to avoid it is appointed unto them to die now as that will come home who with due weight and solemnity upon your own spirit it is appointed unto me that I die death comes so irresistibly that we can assume from the beginning that there is no power first of all there is no power that can resist it you know

I think that in especially in a natural sinful state one factor in sin's deceiving power is this false that may be almost secret obscure impression that lies within our spirit as it were at the back of all our thinking that something or other will delay our dying and there's no knowing how long the delay might prove to be and that false view within our spirit because of the deceitfulness of sin and the hypocrisy of our own sinful hearts its refusal to submit to the truth of

God as it is revealed to us makes even our own portion of time our own short lives to appear to us like eternity as if it were endless and is so long in the dark and vision of our minds that eternity is shortened to the point where insofar as any practical influence upon our thinking and lives is concerned it is as if eternity were non-existent as if it were not there at all when in actual fact it is already with us in a very real sense in the sense that we are marked out as beings who shall soon enter into an eternal state and marked out in that sense because we are marked out in this other sense that we have with us that the very seat of our personality is in our soul which is in itself immortal

God did not make my soul or your soul for annihilation to go out of existence shortly or after a long process he gave us a soul that is immortal that in its very nature is enduring whatever changes we may experience in terms of the brevity of time and the changes that occur in our life's experience there is one thing just as sure as any of these and that is that we have in ourselves that which is immortal that shall continue in existence in one place or state or in another as surely as we know exist there is no point in the future where we shall not exist you can look over the whole of time to the last moment of time in your mind's eye and think of yourself as someone who shall exist then and you can go go beyond time and beyond the judgment day and all that are involved by way of revelations of glory and power and majesty and experiences of heaven and of hell and there's one thing that you can do assuredly tonight and every other night you can visualize yourself as continuing in existence beyond the last day into eternity never to cease a living being and then living in a conscious state to which now you are a stranger because as perhaps we will see later your consciousness rather than become that it become diminished weakened or thinner in any sense your consciousness is going to develop and grow more strong and powerful and sensitive from the moment you enter eternity than it ever has been in the course of your life here

I regard as one of the most foolish ideas that has taken hold upon the minds of men from the beginning the idea that a man ends his life here like the brute beasts that perish who have no enduring existence beyond the moment of their death in this world man is not a beast man is a man and the nature of man is indefinable to anyone except to God who made him and the God who made you and me if he makes anything plain to both of us he makes plain that we shall never cease to exist any more than he shall cease to exist himself you will not and I will not there is no power that can ward off death there is great power as all of us know in creation and as you grow older and observe life and learn something of the history of man you will realize this that if power is exerted for any purpose in this world it is exerted with the purpose of prolonging life here not for prolonging life in the beyond there is little one can do above that but there is much people can do about prolonging life in this present world and in our own kingdom for generations know a fair share of the wealth of the country annually is being expended with this sole purpose in view to preserve the health of everyone of the subjects of our government and improvements be made day after day as far as learned men are able to offer improvements to health care and welfare in the nation and never to the end of time shall people be satisfied that enough has been expended that enough has been done in the way of research and study and provision every day and every year there shall continue a clamor for more and more power to be used for the sole purpose of prolonging men's lives and preserving them in heaven for that particular end why should people be so concerned about preserving health if it is not in order to preserve life but nothing can either defeat death or forestall death no power supporting all the

[26 : 05] power that is in operation by creatures everywhere in the visible or in the invisible world we're aiming at the prevention of death not one soul shall be preserved in life for one moment beyond the time appointed divinely for their passing from this world into the next and there is no bribing of death some have more wealth than others so that when they begin to fear death they put to use the wealth they possess to secure their own safety as it were from death but there is no way in which men can compel death even to delay for a moment however much they must try as it were to bribe death in any way men's attachment to life does not in the slightest weaken the power of death and there is no greater power as it were confronting death than the attachment that men have to life here every person normally clings to life here they have so many attachments in this present world they have so many relations or friends or so many interests of business concerns that engage their mind and all of our being as it were is adjusted to the state of life we are in and we feel so bound up with things in that life that our whole being as it were from that viewpoint seems to stand out in defiance as it were of the power of death but our strongest attachment when the time appointed for us has come can no longer retain us here when we see death we see the departure of someone from all their attachments from all that they have held dear from all their privileges all of their comforts as well as from all their past trials and sorrows and what are the privileges that we enjoy the most precious privileges that we enjoy in life and I think it is wise to be reminded of the answer to that question what are the most precious privileges from which I and you shall be remold when the time of death has come well I shall name at least some of them there is the word of God there is the Sabbath day now are you surprised to hear that these are the answers to the question which are the most precious privileges

that you know enjoy from which death shall renew you the word of God well if you are honest I'm sure you will think to yourself well in the lack of death and eternity and the preciousness of the time at my disposal I certainly have not regarded the word of God as the most precious of my privileges I can think of many other things I can think of many other things that I have in view in the future ambitions that I want to attain which seem to me far more precious than the word of God well I tell you that at the moment of your death whether you have ever done so or not prior to that moment you will realize that the word of

God was far more precious than any of these that held your interest so strongly if you die in the frame of mind in which you are now the word of God and then there is the throne of grace and do you know what I mean by the throne of grace do you say I don't know of any throne that is precious to me except the throne of the kingdom in which I live well there's a far more important throne for you than the throne on which the queen of Britain sits there is the throne on which God sits the throne on which Christ sits a throne of grace because to it you as a sinner are invited not once but always there is no moment when you have not an invitation to come to the throne of grace and it is a very precious privilege privilege you would be to come to visit her in

Buckingham Palace well I remind you again that you have a far more wonderful invitation than that you have had an invitation all your life from the king of glory to come and visit himself and address himself and attend to what he has to answer you at his throne of grace perhaps you are asking but where can I go to the throne of grace well there is no place where you cannot turn your heart and your thoughts to the throne of grace you can be doing it here sitting in your pew you can be doing it in your home you can be doing it while lying in your bed you can be doing it at your work or in your classroom or as you walk the road or as you engage in some recreation you can turn your heart to God in Christ and meet with the father and the son at the throne of grace and that is a most precious privilege and the

Sabbath day is a most precious privilege a Sabbath day in which God again commands you to come to himself to refrain from the labor and the recreation that are lawful on other days except works of necessity and mercy for what reason to devote the day by giving your heart and mind and body to the worship and service of God privately and publicly and for that reason it gives joy to my heart to see you in this house tonight because in seeing you here tonight I see you in the way of obedience to God's command and I see you therefore in the enjoyment of one of the most precious privileges that you can have in this life when you die you will no longer come to the house of God as you are now yesterday there was lying in the porch at that end of the church the body of someone whom I had seen more frequently sitting in a pew in this church than I had seen her in any other place in the world but that's the fact

[35 : 22] I don't say that likely or unsure as to whether it is truth or not to impress you I tell it to you as a fact that I saw her oftener sitting listening to the gospel than I had seen her anywhere else in this world yesterday I was seeing and handling her coffin in order to be consigned to the dust of earth by us for the last time now that shall happen to you too you will be removed from the privilege of enjoying the Sabbath day both in private and in public ordinances that God has given to you as a privilege to prepare for death and eternity you will be removed from the gospel you shall no longer be hearing the preaching of the gospel and what do you understand by the gospel glad tidings and to all men all who hear the gospel in other words are hearing glad tidings and you ask how glad are these tidings well the answer is that in a true sense they are the only tidings worth the description in this world there might be many other glad tidings or news in the world at the end of the day the real nature of their gladness will depend upon the place you have given to the gospel if you have received the tidings contained in the gospel into your heart then all other tidings will turn to your advantage not only the glad ones but the sad ones too if you have rejected the gospel tidings from your heart no other tidings will prove to be very joyful to you the gladdest ones will prove as sad at the end of the day as the saddest ones and do you not agree with me if that is true then in fact the gospel tidings are the only ones really worthy of the name of the description as far as you are concerned well at your death you will be removed from the place where these tidings are told you will be removed from the company of those who worship

God of those in whose hearts there is the love of God those who in their hearts there is love for you a real and an active love for you that is a love that desires what is truly best for you hearts that pray to God who alone can grant to you what is best for you people who in a spiritual sense although they do not do it physically embrace you it is as if their arms were always embracing you the arms of that love are always around about you and it is a solemn experience to be removed from the presence of such you know when you look upon somebody who is dead you have to remember as I have already pointed out that they have not in an absolute sense come to an end you have to remember as you gaze upon a coffin or as you think back upon someone who is no dead that when they died their death was the departure from their body of their soul and you have to remember that no one was able to put their soul into a coffin nobody could bury their soul in a grave their soul or their spirit invisible and intangible unseen by anyone's eye beyond the power of any hand to touch their soul is still living their soul again as I already pointed out is living you might say more consciously than it was when you regarded them as living they are far more conscious of whatever is about them now than they were then as some of them may have come to a point then before they died where they had no consciousness at all they may have been unconscious as you know some are in that condition for long before they died in a state of unconsciousness but even regarding such people those strange things too that when they actually died they suddenly became very conscious they suddenly became far more conscious than they ever were before even when they were in their very prime how have you ever thought of that when you have looked upon someone who is no dead but thought of them their spirit is in a state of consciousness that they never ever is born away out of sight

consigned to the earth buried under fruit of men words can be used in describing truthfully what happens to our bodies after death which to some delicate hearts and minds and sensitivities can sound terribly offensive but we have we ought I think all of us for all our sensitivities and delicacy we ought to know facts and we ought to think about facts when you look at someone's body you look at something upon which much time has been spent in order as I have already said to preserve it in life and in health love it and abilities to preserve its beauty all the amount of time and money spent in the world for both these purposes preserving men's health of body and preserving and enhancing the beauty of a body upon which men and women especially pride themselves so much well perhaps everyone except the very young ones here have seen the power of death perhaps you have been made to realize that now all efforts at beautifying are in vain as surely as all efforts at strengthening are in vain and if you let your thoughts go farther along the way of decay and deterioration you are forced to visualize that body as being unrecognizable and further steps along the way of visualizing that body perhaps as being unrecognizable for what it is a human body in the first case I was thinking of it as unrecognizable as the passion it was in life but now I am seeing that it can have become unrecognizable as a human body and then you have to believe a human body in the first case I was thinking of it in the first case I was thinking of it as unrecognizable as the passion it was in life but now I am seeing that it can have become unrecognizable as a human body in the Roman Catholic Church it is said that there are three in the word of God it is said that there are two the Roman Catholic Church bases its view of purgatory upon views held in the church by men and they have one particular version of scripture that they use to justify that view

whereas there are numerous texts of scripture that belie their view and show it up to be one of the worst deceptions perpetrated upon mankind from the beginning the idea that a man's soul even a righteous man's soul at death must enter purgatory into the finish of purgatory it is a place of fire whose purpose is to sanctify that soul because that soul has to undergo more suffering in order to satisfy God for sins committed after baptism not only is there no mention of the place nor must purgatory in the Bible there is no mention of the doctrine that claims that by their penitential works men will satisfy the justice of God for even one of their sins nor is there any hint in the Bible nor is there any hint in the Bible that by payments to the church or by the sacrifice of the mass the length of time that men must suffer in purgatory can be shortened nor is there any hint anywhere in the Bible that any official of the church of Christ in this world has power over eternity in order to deliver any soul from one place in order that they enter into another the spirit of every man must either enter heaven or enter hell now as the time has passed

I will bring to your notice at this juncture some things that have been said by living men about death and about the place that they were about to enter first of all one or two unbelievers there was an infidel a famous infidel for whom those in school perhaps come across from time to time especially in their history books it was one of the minds powerfully involved in the French Revolution that resulted in so much bloodshed and destruction

[50 : 01] Voltaire the atheistic French philosopher it is said that as he came near to death he declared I am abandoned he said by God and men I shall go to hell there was a king of France Charles IX who is said to have spoken these words as he approached death what blood he asked what murder what evil counsels I have followed I am lost I know it well there was a man by the name of Thomas

God in the high position in the British Parliament long ago who spoke these words until this moment he said I thought there was neither God nor hell now I know and feel that there are both and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty Isaiah writes these words in the 33rd chapter of his prophecy the sinners in Zion are afraid fearfulness have surprised the hypocrites who he asks among us shall dwell with a devouring fire who among us shall dwell with everlasting burdens on the other hand listen to words spoken by men of God men who had come to know

Christ and therefore men who faced death and eternity in a very different frame of mind from the ones I have quoted the famous minister in Edinburgh 17th century Robert Bruce the morning before he died at breakfast he had eaten an egg and he said to his daughter I think he said I'm hungry you may bring me another but then he thought it is said for a while and said to her hold daughter he said hold my master calls me and with these words it is said that his sight failed and he called for the Bible and he said to her to turn to

Romans chapter 8 and to set his finger on certain words in that chapter the words were I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor power nor things present nor to come nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord he turned to his family and he said know God be with you my dear children I have breakfasted with you and I shall sup with my Lord Jesus Christ this night and he then expired listen to these words they are based upon sentiments expressed by

Samuel Rutherford one of the most famous of Scottish preachers and divines he did not compose the song but it was composed on the basis of thoughts that he had expressed before he passed away soon shall the cup of glory wash down earth's bitterest woes soon shall the desert briar break into Eden's rose the curse shall change to blessing the name on earth that's banned be graven on the white stone in Emmanuel's land Lord oh I am my beloved and my beloved's mine he brings a poor vile sinner into his house of wine

[55 : 45] I stand upon his merit I know no other stand not even where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land I shall sleep sound in Jesus filled with his lightness rise to love and to adore him to see him with these eyes when me and resurrection that paradise doth stand then then for glory dwelling in Emmanuel's land no I had intended going beyond the experience of souls at the point of their deaths to say a little about their experience at the point of judgment because it is written here that it is appointed for men once to die and after that the judgment after judgment both soul and body shall appear again together because on that day another event shall have transpired leading to the judgment the souls of men women and children who have gone to heaven they shall return to their bodies the souls of those who have been in hell shall return to their bodies and all of them shall arise to appear before the great white soul on that day and

I leave you with this question what kind of welcome do you think shall the souls of the damned give to their bodies what kind of welcome shall the bodies give to their souls when both are to meet again and to condemn one another for the kind of life that they lived while they were together before on earth but on the other hand can you conceive of the kind of reception that the bodies of the just shall give to their souls on that day and their souls give to their bodies who together here on this side of death sought the

Lord and served the Lord and loved the Lord until the moment when they had to part one from another surely it'll be a meeting full of joy a meeting in which both shall mutually welcome the other for they are to rise those bodies as glorious bodies in order to dwell in heaven with Christ throughout eternity well I ask you and I plead with you and I pray you in Christ stead be reconciled to God and you shall live happily blessed and you shall die happily and blessed and you shall be eternally happy and blessed without any question or doubt but always remember there is only the one other choice just the one other choice may

God bless the