

Where a Tree Falls It Shall Lay

by E.A. Johnston

The fate of man is fixed at death, and the doctrine of regeneration is essential for salvation, as a person's character at the time of death determines their final destiny.

Duration: 36:46

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, Matthew 11:28-30, John 3:14-16, John 7:37-39, Acts 2:38, Romans 1:16, Revelation 22:11

Topics: "Regeneration"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of remembering God in our youth before the challenges of old age come. He describes the physical and mental decline that comes with aging, using vivid imagery to illustrate the frailty of life. The preacher also shares a personal experience of a near-death incident to highlight the fact that God has the power to take our lives at any moment. He then discusses the brevity of life and the inevitability of death and judgment. The sermon concludes with a story of a pastor who changed his message to focus on the cross and the blood of Jesus, leading to a powerful revival in his church.

Transcript

King Solomon was the wealthiest man who ever lived. In fact, he had so much money he could have stuffed Donald Trump in a shirt pocket. King Solomon was also the wisest king who ever lived, and he wrote an entire book of the Bible, Proverbs, which is chock full of wisdom for us today.

But the book of the Bible that stirs me the most from his pen is the book of Ecclesiastes. It is written from the perspective of an older man looking back on his life and how he lived it, and reflecting on what was significant or foolish in it. For when I read the book of Ecclesiastes, it makes me reflect on my own life and how much of it I wasted in sin and in the foolishness of this world.

King Solomon looked back on his large life and saw how he had sought the pleasures this world had to offer, but he found no pleasure in them. He chased after wealth and discovered there was no pleasure in wealth. In fact, he ended the man who worked with his hands who had nothing but who could sleep well at night because he didn't have to toss and turn and worry over losing his wealth.

In his reflections on life, King Solomon came to the conclusion that there is one fate for every man, and that is death. Death comes to the rich and poor alike. It is no respecter of persons.

He sums up his thoughts in the last two chapters of this book, and he ends it with a vivid description of a funeral procession. This is found in chapter 12. Remember now, thy creator, in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, not the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them, while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low, also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail, because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets, or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, then shall as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

King Solomon saw that the very best this world can offer is but utility and sand, that no matter how much we achieve in this world on human terms, it is all but dust that will blow away, and the memory of our life will soon be forgotten. The Bible tells us that our life is but a vapor that appears for a little while, and then disappears as the morning mist, and wise old King Solomon saw he spent much of his life as a fool. He saw that he began well, but he ended poorly.

Oh, he had vast wealth, but he ended up poor in the things which matter for God. He saw the futility of pleasure and wealth, and the brevity of life, and the stark reality that all men will have to face death, and after that the judgment. For it has been said, as soon as we leave the cradle, we commence our funeral march to the grave, for eventually we all die, and every man's spirit returns to the God who gave it, and it returns to God for judgment.

For man's spirit returns to the God who gave it, and I repeat, it returns to God for judgment. But the verse in the book of Ecclesiastes, which cries out to me the loudest, and stands the blackest on the white pages of my Bible, is verse 11-3. Let me read it to you.

And if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. And that, friends, is the title of my message today, Where the Tree Falls, There it Shall Lie. And our sermon today is on the doctrine of regeneration.

And you are like that tree, when it falls, for the fate of man is fixed at death. You will either die in your sins, and drop into hell and its torments, or you will rest in the merits of Christ, and be under his blood, and enjoy the benefits of his presence and glory. But, I repeat, the fate of man is fixed at death, for where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

Death may shortly come to you, friend, and suddenly cut you off without warning, as it often does, and you will fall to the ground in death like that tree. And whatever your position is, whether in Christ or outside of Christ, where the tree falls, there it shall lie. You may believe you have many good years left on earth, but the very breath in your lungs is put there by God, and he can remove it at any instant.

A car accident, a heart attack, a sudden tragedy can cut you off and send you into another world, either a place of joy and peace, or a place of misery and flames. I repeat, God is the giver and sustainer of life, and he can snatch it from you at any moment. I was in a hotel in Edinburgh, Scotland, and I stepped into the shower, and the next thing I knew, I was laying on a concrete floor, almost unconscious, with my wrist broken and my head injured.

God could have removed me easily that day. I no sooner stepped into that slippery bathtub, which was a death trap, that I was pinched right out of it on my head. Listen to the word of God.

Surely thou didst set them in slippery places. Thou cast them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment? I slept suddenly that morning, and without warning.

Listen again to the word of God, which declares, To me belongeth vengeance and recompense. Their foot shall slide in due time, for the day their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. King Solomon speaks in Ecclesiastes of how death can suddenly come upon a man.

For a man also knoweth not his time, as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. America, friends, has become one of the most dangerous nations to live in. Sudden death is everywhere.

You can be sitting in a movie theater and be murdered. You can be sitting on an airplane and be blown up. Something noxious could be in your very next meal and kill you.

No matter how healthy and active you may be now, a sudden calamity can end your life without warning, and if you were to die today, your fate is fixed at death. Death will eventually come to you, friend, and cut you down, and you will be like that tree in an unchangeable state for all eternity, for a man's character is unchangeable at death, for where a tree falls, it shall lie. Allow me to present to you two godly Bible commentators who wrote wisely on this text of where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

Both these men are on the opposite theological poles, but they both come out at the same place on their commentary on this text. To whom I speak are John Wesley and John Gill. One was an Arminian, the other a Calvinist, but whatever side your theology falls, if you die and you are not the subject of regeneration, you will be cast into hell.

Whether you are a Calvinist or an Arminian, you must be born again. Where a tree falls, there it shall lie. Listen to the words first of John Wesley, taken from his commentary on Ecclesiastes chapter 11 and verse 3. Wesley comments, therefore, let us just not bring forth the fruits of righteousness, because death will shortly cut us down, and we shall then be determined to unchangeable happiness or misery, according as our works have been.

Now listen friends to the words of John Gill on the same verse of scripture. Dr. Gill writes, as when a tree is cut down, let it fall where it will, there it abides, it is no more fruitful. So when a man is cut off by death, as he was then, so he remains.

If a gracious and good man, and done good, he is like a tree that falls to the south, he enters into the paradise of God, the joys of heaven. And if not a good man, and has not done good, he is like a tree that falls to the north, he goes into a state of darkness, misery, and distress. Well both these bible scholars, Wesley and Gill, though they disagreed on their theology, both came out of the same place here on this verse from Ecclesiastes, because both men believed in the doctrine of regeneration.

When John Wesley was finally converted after living a life on a false foundation as an ordained minister with the Church of England, his heart, he said, was strangely warmed. Listen to what he wrote in his diary, dated May 14, 1738. In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. Well Wesley knew right then he hadn't experienced the change which God gives in regeneration, and both these men understood the doctrine of regeneration, even though they differed on their theology.

They both knew the heart had to be changed, and they both state in their commentaries on Ecclesiastes 11.3 that when we die, we die in that state, and it's unchangeable, for as he was, so he remains. The book of Revelation speaks of this in chapter 22 and verse 11. Listen friends.

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still. And he which is filthy, let him be filthy still. And he that is righteous, let him be righteous still.

And he that is holy, let him be holy still. In other words, where a tree falls, there it shall lie. Jesus said that a follower of his was one who does the will of God, and here in Revelation verses 14 and 15, we have more on this thought.

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. You see, friends, you can't predict when a violent storm will hit your neighborhood and knock down one of your trees, and you can't boast of tomorrow, for you may die tonight.

And when death comes to you and uproots you, whatever spiritual state you are in when you die will determine where you spend eternity. For where a tree falls, it shall lie. There is no imaginary place called purgatory where the good Catholics go to twiddle their thumbs until they can be prayed out or bought out by those here below.

No, sir, in eternity it is either heaven or hell. And if you are truly regenerated and born again, you will go to heaven. But if you have never been the subject of a work of grace upon your heart, you will die in your sins, no matter how good a church member you have been all your life.

Your record of church service won't help you then. It won't matter how much you tithed, how often you prayed. Your unregenerated heart will reveal your true state.

Jesus said the fruit of a man's life reveals the condition of his heart. Jesus compared men to a tree which produces either good or bad fruit, and by their fruits you shall know them. Jesus said this, either make the tree good and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt.

For the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.

This use of the imagery of a tree, by the word of God, to speak of a man's life is striking. A tree is true to its character. It will not produce what it is not.

An apple tree cannot produce figs, and a fig tree cannot produce oranges. The fruit of a tree is a product of its nature, and the fruit of your life is a product of your nature. Whether you are a servant of sin and

unchanged, or you are a subject of grace and regenerated, you are what you are, friends, and if you are cut off tragically and suddenly today, you will die as you are.

For where a tree falls, it shall lie. I have often seen death in my life. My two childhood pals were both, both of them experienced sudden death while they were in their twenties.

One died on a motorcycle. He got into an argument with his wife and jumped on his motorcycle and turned the corner and split his head open on the curb. My other friend was on his way to work in a snowstorm and his automobile was hit head on and he died instantly.

Neither one of them thought that that day was to be their last. They were both young and in good health. They had their whole lives before them, but sudden death cut them off, and where a tree falls, it shall lie.

My mother lay a dying in the nursing home. My mother, who made me quit going to church when I was a teenager, she made fun of those Christians and made me quit attending their services. She lived to be an old woman of 97 and she lay a dying in the nursing home.

The staff in that nursing home had to dope her up at night to keep her quiet because her shrieks and screams kept the other patients awake at night. My mother faced death and it terrified her. She resisted God right up to the very end.

I would visit her and ask her if she wanted me to pray for her or if she wanted a chaplain to come and pray with her and she'd say, no it doesn't work. I would read her a get well card from a friend and I would say to my mother, here is a card from your friend and she is praying for you. Here is her prayer.

And my mother would interrupt me and cut me off with the harsh remark, don't tell me about that. And she would cuss and say, just tell me who the card is from. Like I said, they had to dope her up at night so she wouldn't wake up the other patients with her shrieks and cries.

My mother eventually died and where a tree falls it shall lie. My father was an agnostic all his life. He seldom darkened the door of a church.

He was a selfish, self-centered man who lived only for himself. When he died he didn't leave me or my mother any life insurance or any money. All he left me was the change on his dresser and I took that change to McDonald's and it wasn't even enough to buy me lunch.

When it came time for him to die he was alone in the hospital with the doctor beside him. The doctor called me to tell me my father had died and the doctor's voice trembled and she told me how horribly he had died. Where a tree falls it shall lie.

I have been to many a funeral and I have heard many a minister say nice words over the deceased. I have yet to hear a funeral service where the minister says old Joe is now in hell. No, it's always he's in a better place now.

He's not suffering anymore. He's at rest. But if old Joe died in his sins, even if he was the chairman of the deacons, he is going to suffer the torments of an everlasting hell.

For when we die, we die as who we are. And if our character is outside of Christ, our long church record of service won't be any help to us then. It won't matter how many mission trips we went on, how many doors we knocked on to share the gospel, how many gospel tracts we handed out, how many prayer meetings

we attended, how many Sunday school classes we taught, and how many choir rehearsals we sat in on.

If our hearts are not regenerated when we die, we die in our sins. For where a tree falls it shall lie. Listen, friends, a truly born again person is Christlike.

Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. A true Christian has a holy disposition in him, planted there by God, and a regenerated heart through a work of grace. A person who God has worked a change in the heart has a principle of holiness in his life.

That principle of life is within. The Holy Spirit resides in the life of a real Christian, and it is that power of a holy life which marks out a true follower of the Lamb. For without holiness no one shall see the Lord.

Listen, friends, if you can sleep at night with known sin in your heart, you are apart from Christ and will die in your sins. Only those who are born again from above and washed in the blood of the Lamb are truly saved. This is the demarcation line between heaven and hell.

If you are not living a holy life under God, you are not in the Lamb's book of life. If you claim to be a Christian and Jesus is not your Lord, if you still sit on the throne of your life and you have not enthroned Jesus there as the Lord of your life, you are a rebel against the Holy God, and no rebels are allowed in heaven. Your hope of heaven is a hole in the wall, and you might as well try to climb to heaven on a rope of sand.

You can buck that, resist that, and fight that, but you cannot fight God when He will be your Lord and complete Master, or He will damn you to hell for eternity. He will have no rebels in heaven. If you have not the power within to live a holy and righteous life, you are unrighteous still, and if you die tonight, you will remain in that condition for all eternity.

If you have not surrendered your all to the Christ who gave His all for you, then you are deceived and sit upon a false foundation. If you are a long church member and your heart is not regenerated, you will die and be cast into hell even if you are the church. For where a tree falls, it shall lie.

O friends, do not be deceived. I know of which I speak, for I was a lost church member for years. I rested my salvation on the fact that I walked an aisle as a teenager and made a public profession of Christ.

For years I faithfully served my church in many capacities. I conducted door-to-door evangelism. I taught Sunday school.

I witnessed. I handed out tracts on a regular basis. I prayed.

I read my Bible, and I was lost, lost, lost. I sat on the throne of my life and not Christ. Christ was not my complete Master, although I was a church member in good standing.

I had a point of rebellion in my life, and God will have no rebels in His kingdom. I had yet to throw down my shotgun of rebellion and submit to the claims of Christ on my life. I still wanted to maintain control in a certain area of my life, and I struck a stake in the ground with a sign on my heart which said, Keep off, God.

It was a keep off the grass sign. I told God to keep off this area of my life that I would take Him every other way and have Him accept this way, and God will always cross us at our point of rebellion if we are to be saved, and He crossed me and saved me. He almost had to kill me to do it, but He saved me, and we live

in a day where they say you can be saved and still hang on to your sins and still go to heaven, and many have swallowed that hook, line, and sinker, and we are sunk.

We still sit on the throne of our lives and tell God that He can touch what He can touch and what He may not and call that salvation. Heaven help us. Listen friends, hell is populated hourly with decent church members who died with an area of their life in rebellion to God, and where a tree falls, it shall lie.

But listen friend, if you have an area of your life where you have put a stake in the ground and a sign that reads keep off, where you have told God to keep His hands off this area of your life, it is hell for you, and if you die this instant, your character will determine your final destiny forever and ever. You can be the pastor of a church, and if you have a point of rebellion in your life where you've told God to keep His hands off, then face the fact pastor that all is not well with your soul. Your ministry license won't do you any good in hell, for where a tree falls, it shall lie.

No one knows the hour that death will visit them. There will be a day when your name will be in the obituary page of the paper. There will come a time when your name is written on a death certificate.

There will come the day where a slab of stone covers your grave with your name upon it with the date of your death. There is no escaping death when it comes, for it comes to all men, rich and poor, all alike, as King Solomon said. There will come a day when your spirit goes back to the God who gave it, and it will go to Him to face judgment, and you will be held up against the utter severity of God's holy law, which requires perfection from all men, and you are a sinner because of the condition you are in.

From the fall of Adam, you were born with a rude nature, and you drink iniquity like water, because that's the kind of people we are. You sin because you are a big sinner, and as you are held up against the holy law of God, you will fail the test and be sent to hell and its torments. For if we cannot lay hold of the righteousness of Christ through His shed blood, where He is our sin substitute, then we will stand before God on our own merit, and God's holy law will kill us, and we will be sent to hell like that tree whose character determines the fruit it produces.

So too, your character will determine your destiny as to how it falls to the north or south. For to be truly saved means you have a vital union with a living Lord and are born from above and washed in His blood. Oh friend, don't rest your hope of heaven on a past experience, but on a present relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are not saved by merely believing on the fact of the death of Christ, but believing on the Christ who died. Listen friends, many of you have heard preach in all your lives. You have been in church for much of your life, but please listen to the following story very carefully.

There is a big Baptist church in Memphis, Tennessee, and one of the former pastors of this church was R.G. Lee. He is known for preaching one of the most famous sermons of all time. It's called Payday Someday.

Well, there was a point in Dr. Lee's ministry early on, and there was a member in Dr. Lee's congregation, an attorney, and this attorney had to be out of town a lot on business, but no matter where this lawyer went, he made sure to catch a train back to Memphis on Saturday night so he could hear R.G. Lee preach the next morning. Well, he loved to hear Dr. Lee preach, and this lawyer one day got cancer, and he was in the hospital dying, and he called for his pastor to come to his bedside. Dr. Lee entered the hospital room

whose window looked out on the Mississippi River, and the lawyer told R.G. Lee this.

He said, I want you to know how much I've enjoyed your preaching through the years, and I never missed a Sunday if I could help it. I lie here dying with only a few weeks left to live, and I want to chastise you for never telling me how to be saved. You never preached the cross to where I could see it.

You never put the blood out there where I could reach it. I am dying, and I will die of my sins, and I chastise you, sir, for you lack of preaching the real gospel. R.G. Lee left that man's hospital room like somebody just kicked him in the stomach.

His head was hung down low, and he felt berated, and he also felt guilty as charged. It was now dark outside as he walked down to the banks of the Mississippi River. There, he got down on his knees in the mud and dipped his hands in that muddy river, getting his white suit pants dirty in the process, and right there and then he promised God from that point forward he would preach the cross and the blood, and he changed his message that night, and in three weeks time there was a move of grace at that church in three blocks of downtown Memphis was shaken with revival.

Listen, friend, you may be sitting under a pastor who doesn't preach the cross and the blood and the need for repentance to be saved. You may have come into the church under that kind of weak preaching. Someone may have spoken peace to you when there was no real peace within.

Deep down, if you are honest with yourself, you know all is not well with your soul. When the devil crooks his finger at you, it is like a magnet that draws you, for he has a hold on you, for you are still in his kingdom, although your name is on the church roll. You have never experienced a new birth.

You are not a subject of grace. You do not possess a regenerated heart. You are sick of your sins.

You are tired of your up and down life, but you are hungry for God. You feel a great need for Christ. You know you are a sinner and that your good works won't save you.

You may have been resting on a past experience and a record of service instead of a real faith in Christ. You sense that the roots of your tree are rotten and bad. If you were to topple over in death right now, your character is as rotten as that tree falling toward the north and to hell.

The Bible declares that when a man comes to Christ through an exercise of repentance towards God and faith in Christ, he is saved, and you now want what you presently haven't possessed, and that is Christ. You thirst, but you have yet to be satisfied. I have good news for you, friend.

The promises of the gospel are for the weary, the hungry, and the thirsty. Listen now to the following invitations of the gospel. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.

And he that hath no money, come ye buy, and eat. Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found.

Call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord. And he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is none else. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the water, he lifted up the serpent, and he lifted up the serpent, and he lifted up the serpent.

If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come.

And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water alive freely.

Listen friends, Jesus invites those weary ones to come to him. Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.

For I am meek and lonely in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Listen to this last verse, friend, for it speaks of what we've gone over today in this message on the doctrine of regeneration. Your heart has to be regenerated, friend, if you're going to spend eternity with Christ forever.

Listen. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Where a tree falls, it shall lie.

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