

You Had Better Get Ready!

by Fred Barlow

The sermon emphasizes the inevitability, unpredictability, and terribleness of death, and the importance of preparing oneself for eternity by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Topics: "Eternal Destiny", "Preparation For Death"

Description

Fred Barlow delivers a powerful sermon on the inevitability, unpredictability, and terribleness of death, emphasizing the need for preparation to face the final separation it brings. Drawing from the story of King Hezekiah and various biblical examples, Barlow warns that death is a reality that cannot be escaped, urging listeners to consider their eternal destiny. He highlights the importance of being ready to meet God, as death can come suddenly and without warning, leading to either eternal life with Christ or eternal separation in Hell.

Transcript

"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live."--II Kings 20:1.

Little did Jack Clauson realize as he was digging a grave in Clairton, Iowa that he was digging his own grave.

This sixty-year-old Evergreen Cemetery worker was shoveling dirt out of a grave into a box to be hauled away, when the side of the box collapsed. The dirt crashed back into the grave, burying Clauson. Before he could be rescued, he died of suffocation. He literally had dug his own grave.

This fatal accident reemphasizes the warning of our text, "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." This was the warning of God to King Hezekiah.

Hezekiah had ruled his people long and well. Under God's miraculous intervention, he had led them to a great victory over Assyria in one of Israel's bloodiest wars. He had made great alliances with mighty foreign powers of his day. This great king had administered one of the richest kingdoms in Israel's history.

But there came to him the inevitable, inescapable call from God, "Thou shalt die." Although death was postponed, it was inevitable, and preparation was commanded.

God has given us the same warning.

I. Death Is Inevitable

You shall die! You had better get ready! Death is inevitable in its reach.

In America today (1960) over four thousand people will die! Over one hundred will be slaughtered on the highways. Fifty will commit suicide. Nearly one thousand will die of heart trouble. Over eight hundred will die of malignant diseases. Hypertension, tuberculosis, murder, other diseases and accidents will usher others into eternity. Even as you read this sermon, over one hundred people will die.

The history of the human race is the history of a dying race. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

Thus God in one sweep of Scripture gives us the whys and wherefores of death--Adam's disobedience to God's Word brought the seeds of sin and death into the bloodstream of the whole human race.

Well did Moses sum up the history of the human race in the fifth chapter of Genesis: "...and he died." Yes, Adam lived 930 years, "and he DIED." His son Seth lived 912 years, "and he DIED." Enos lived 905 years, "and he DIED." Methuselah lived 969 years (longer than any other of these, and longer than anyone since), "and he DIED."

When the Holy Spirit penned the biographies of the kings of Israel and Judah, He vividly used these or similar words in nearly every account: "And he slept with his fathers, and his son reigned in his stead."

Americans today say, "Two things are sure--death and taxes."

The Arabs have a proverb, "Death is a black camel that, soon or late, will come to kneel at every gate."

The Word of God preaches powerfully that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Death is inevitable! You cannot, you will not, escape it.

You may be like Harry Cove, a Lansing, Michigan businessman, who could boast that he had cheated death 172 times. Harry Cove had earned the title of "the world's most revived man," because the Lansing fire department's inhalator squad had raced to his home and revived him 172 times following that number of heart attacks. But no longer will the fire department's dispatcher sing out the familiar refrain, "It's Harry again!" Mr. Cove is dead!

Yes, you may brush your teeth twice a day with a nationally known toothpaste; you may see your doctor twice a year; you may wear rubber boots when it rains; you may get eight hours of sleep every night; you may never smoke, drink or lose your temper; you may be set to live to be one hundred; but "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death" (Eccles. 8:8).

God's Word warns that you have an inevitable appointment with death, so you had better get ready.

II. Death Is Unpredictable

You shall die! Get ready, for death is unpredictable in its time!

"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" were the wise words of the king in Proverbs 27:1. Who does know?

What men have learned in our generation is little short of miraculous. We have seen, either on television, in newspapers or magazines, what men of all the centuries had wished to see--the other side of the moon.

We know now how to stay the crippling, killing plague of polio.

We know now how to photograph a program on one coast of our nation and show it in an instant on the other coast.

We know now how to transplant organs of the dead into the living.

But we know no more than Job did centuries ago when, speaking of man, he cried out, "His days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5).

Like Job, we do not know the number of months, days or hours until God will summon us into death and eternity. But Job knew that you had better get ready: "Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke" (Job 36:18).

There is just the stroke of the clock between you and death. No man knows that hour. Surely Raymond Eastman didn't.

This young Des Moines advertising man wrote a widely quoted article, "Ten Seconds to Live," an imaginary study of the thoughts of a motorist about to be killed in an accident.

Ironically, Eastman died in his car as it careened into a bridge, after "clipping" another car in an attempt to pass it. We can be sure he did not know when he stepped into his automobile that day that he was stepping into a hearse that would ride him into death and eternity.

No one knows what Mr. Eastman's thoughts were in the last ten seconds of this life; but we would assume that, after writing such an article for motorists, he would have been prepared for violent and lurking death on the highways.

But what about you? Whether on the highway, in the office, at school, on your bed--who knows if you have ten conscious seconds left to get ready to die and meet God?

Not only is there just a stroke between life and death, there is just a step between life and death.

David, the anointed king (but a fugitive from the relentless, tireless, murdering King Saul), knew this and reminded his good friend, Jonathan, "...but truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death" (I Sam. 20:3).

David knew that death was lurking everywhere. On the starless night, in the darkened caverns, in the stillness of the forest, death was just a step away. Any step might bring him into the view of a keen-eyed archer, into the range of a skilled swordsman, or into the enemy camp or trap, a snare of no escape.

Death is just a step away from you too. It may not be the same step David feared. And it may not be the step of a Flint, Michigan factory worker who was driven to work by his wife. As he alighted from the car, he

reached through the open car window to give his wife a good-bye kiss, and then stepped back one step into the path of a careening car--and death. But you are just a step away from death and eternity.

You could step toward life and Heaven by saying yes to Christ's call: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). By saying yes to Christ's plea, "...him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37), you can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Heaven.

But if you continue in your steps into the haunts of sin and away from the calling Saviour's love, your steps will take you to death and Hell.

"For the lips of a strange woman [a type or picture of sin] drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell."--Prov. 5:3-5.

You had better get ready, don't you see?

III. Death Is Terrible

You shall die! You had better get ready because death is terrible in its visitation.

"Thou fool!" These were the midnight, silence-breaking words of the Lord to a man who was visited by death. This man had an overflowing harvest and bursting barns. He had mused to himself, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

Fools! This is Bible language. Fools recorded in the Bible were not ignoramuses nor people with "upstairs apartments to rent," but individuals who did not exercise their God-given sense in the light of eternal issues.

God charges the so-called atheist with being a fool: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

God declares you to be fools who mock (or laugh) at sin (Prov. 14:9).

Again we see the folly of fools--individuals who are "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25).

We call the "Scripture slashers" and the "penknife preachers" and teachers and leaders who cannot believe God's Word and cut out everything that is not "logical" and "reasonable" in their eyes, modernists. God calls them fools.

This man in Luke 12:16-21 was a fool. He had made plans to retire, rest and relax. He had worked hard. He had endured burning sun and drenching rains. He had made his fortune. He, no doubt, had insured his barns, his livestock, his home, his life and his family. But he had not insured his soul. He had gotten ready to live, but he had not made preparations to die. Now it was time to rest, he told his soul. But God said, "No, it is time to die."

That night the Angel of Death knocked at his door. That night the skirts of Death swished through the room. That night the icy fingers of Death cast a soul into eternity. The next morning the family found their

loved one dead.

I trust this will not be your biography too. I have seen so many friends in my ministry visited by death this way. I pray you will give earnest heed to the things you have heard, and not let them slip. Oh, I pray that at some midnight hour, or on some blood-splattered highway, or in some hospital ward; or that in rejection of Christ, which well may be your very last, final and fatal rejection, you will not have to cry out with another death-doomed and Hell-bound soul, "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (1 Sam. 26:21).

IV. Death to the Unsaved Means Final Separation

You shall die! You had better get ready because death to an unsaved soul is final in its separation. Death separates the unsaved from their loved ones forever.

In 1945 a distinguished woman died in Washington, D.C. She had been an authority on genealogy and had written books to trace the lineage of well-known persons through the centuries. She belonged to many exclusive groups, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames, Dames of Magna Charta, the Society of Mayflower Descendants, the Woman's National Press Club, and others.

When the undertaker arrived at her home, twenty cats trailed him about the place, until, to his horror, he came upon a hidden niche with a casket in which reposed the remains of the distinguished woman's dead mother. For thirty-three years this social figure had evaded a law which requires burial of dead bodies, and had spent long hours gazing at the mummified remains of her mother through a small window in the hermetically sealed mahogany coffin, which had on the nameplate a death date--March 13, 1912. This socialite clubwoman, authoress and authority on genealogy was afraid of death's separation.

How different is the story of F. B. Meyer, who just before his death wrote these words to his wife:

Dear, I have just learned, to my surprise, that I have only a few days to live. It may be that before this reaches you, I will have entered into the Palace. Don't trouble to write. We shall meet in the morning.

At his funeral in Christ Church Cathedral, Scriptures were read which spoke of the Christian's hope of immortality, and Easter songs were sung. As the organ began to play the hymn at the conclusion of the service, to the surprise of the bowed-head congregation, instead of the funeral march, the organist swung into the triumphant notes of the "Hallelujah Chorus."

What could have been more fitting! A Christian with hope in Christ had gone Home to his Saviour.

Death's separation to the Christian is only for a little season, for God's Word promises us:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."--1 Thess. 4:16-18.

What a day that will be!

Oh, you had better get ready, that you may have the same hope F. B. Meyer had, because without Christ, you face the mournful, baneful and eternal loss of loved ones, even as this Washington, D.C. celebrity.

Not only does death separate sinners from loved ones forever, but it separates sinners from God, in Hell forever. Sinners who die in their sins must go to Hell. Jesus said so in John 8:21,24:

"Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come....I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

Jesus warned it is either Heaven with Him or Hell without Him. You can't ever go to Heaven if you die in your sins.

Again, God's Word declares in Psalm 9:17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell."

And again, God warns you through the lips of the Son of God:

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."--Matt. 25:41,46.

In Revelation 20:14,15 we are warned of God's "payday" to sinners when He says:

"Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Yes, when you die in your sins, it is Hell for you, and it is Hell forever.

There is not a more detailed and graphic picture of a sinner's death and doom in Hell than the message Jesus preached in Luke 16:19-31.

A dead man in Hell--oh, what a scene! Here is a man who cries, "I am tormented in this flame."

Here is a man who realizes he has an unforgettable memory of spurned invitations of a pleading Saviour. Here is a man who sees his wicked life's influence is bringing brothers, loved ones, to this land of torments. Here is a man who hopes no more.

Proverbs 11:7 warns, "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth."

Here is a man who found death to a sinner meant everlasting doom, everlasting death, everlasting Hell.

Well did Charles Spurgeon preach of Hell when he cried out:

On every chain is written: "Forever." Up above their heads they read, "Forever." Their eyes are galled, their hearts are pained with the thought that it is "forever." Oh, if I could tell you tonight that Hell one day would be burned out and that those there might be saved, there would be a jubilee in Hell at the very thought of it! But it cannot be: it is "forever." They are cast into outer darkness. Hell is the graveyard where all hope is buried, never to be resurrected.

V. Hell Cannot Be Avoided Without Preparation

You shall die! You had better get ready, because death in Hell is avoidable only with the right preparation.

Our text warns us to get ready: "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." Get ready!

This was the theme of a soldier's last letter. Dated June 21, 1953, Company Commander John R. Wasson wrote this letter to his men of Company "I" 65th Infantry Regiment:

MEN OF "I" COMPANY:

In the midst of this situation, we are concerned about having trenches, bunkers, weapons; but I have something that I want to share with you that is more important than all of these and any others. As thinking men, I challenge you to consider these facts seriously:

(1) Life here on earth is very uncertain and short. We have seen this to be true many times.

(2) Death seems to have no explanation or solution when we face it so vividly and brutally.

God has shown me the solution to these two puzzles in the promises of the Bible. I must share them with you, for they must be personally understood and claimed to be yours.

First, God promises that we may have everlasting life by believing that Jesus is the Son of God and receiving Him as our Saviour from sin (John 3:16; 1:12).

Second, God assures us that Christ Jesus has won the victory over death and the grave once and for all (I Cor. 15:54-57; Rom. 8:38,39).

Now God does not lie. His Word is true. I simply want to challenge you to seek to know Christ, for with Him there is eternal life and joy, but without Him there is uncertainty and sorrow....

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

If you know Him already, I challenge you to live for Him daily.

This last letter of the company commander to his men on the eve of a great battle warned them to get ready. It instructed them how to get ready to die. How many laughed it off; how many shrugged it off; how many believed it and prepared--only eternity will reveal.

God has a last message for you too--not that God will die and never speak again, but because this may well be your last opportunity to hear His message. God pleads with you:

"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"--Ezek. 33:11.

God so loved you that He sent His Son, allowed Him to be maligned, hated without a cause, jeered, mocked, tried and sentenced unjustly and crucified that you might turn from your sins, confess them to Him and be saved and have everlasting life. Yes, I plead with you in God's stead: get ready, get prepared to meet God, get saved.

God the Father does not want you to die in your sins and go to Hell. Neither does Jesus. No one can possibly know the suffering, the shame, the sum total of all the world's sins He bore on that awful rugged tree. He bore them for you. He bore yours. He calls you now to get ready, get saved, get right with God.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."--John 5:24.

The Holy Spirit loves you too. He does not want you to perish in sin and go to Hell. Even now He convicts you of the truth of this message; now He pleads with you to get saved; now He warns you, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).

Now He woos you with His last call in the very last chapter of the Bible to dying, Hell-bound sinners:

"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 of the water of life freely."--Rev. 22:17.

Are you ready?

How do you choose--Heaven or Hell? Life or death?

In the light of inevitable death, unpredictable death, terrible death, final death, but avoidable death, surely you will choose Christ who stands at your heart's door and knocks, saying:

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."--Rev. 3:20.

In the silent midnight watches,

List, thy bosom door!

How it knocketh--knocketh--knocketh--

Knocketh evermore!

Say not 'tis thy pulse is beating;

'Tis thy heart of sin;

'Tis thy Saviour knocks and crieth,

"Rise and let Me in."

Death comes on with reckless footsteps,

To the hall and to the hut,

Think you, Death will tarry knocking

Where the door is shut?

Jesus waiteth--waiteth--waiteth--

But the door is going fast;

Grieved, away the Saviour goeth;

Death breaks in at last.

--Author Unknown

This Editor Begs You: Get Ready Now!

After reading this strong, earnest and important message by Dr. Fred Barlow, please let this editor urge you to decide at once for Jesus Christ. Here is how you do it:

1. Admit to God that you are a poor, lost sinner who needs forgiveness, needs saving.
2. Turn now, immediately, in your heart to the Lord Jesus, asking Him and trusting Him to forgive your sins and save your soul! In a second, the heart that is penitent over sin and honestly turning to trust Jesus and depending upon Him for salvation will have everlasting life. Honestly face your sins, face the fact of death, face the need for forgiveness and salvation, and turn this moment to Jesus Christ!

If you will here and now take Christ as your own personal Saviour, say a positive yes to Christ in your heart. I have some free literature I want to send that will help you as you set out to live the Christian life.

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