

God of the Living

by Richard E. Bieber

Richard E. Bieber's sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in overcoming the fear of death and understanding God as the God of the living.

Scripture: Exodus 3:1, Matthew 6:19, Mark 12:18, Luke 12:32, Hebrews 2:14, Hebrews 11:13, Hebrews 11:35, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Faith And Works"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the fear of death and the importance of living a life of faith, knowing that God is the God of the living. He emphasizes the need to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, as our actions in this life determine our eternal destiny. By following the examples of those who lived by faith, endured suffering, and looked beyond the grave, we can overcome the fear of death and walk confidently towards the life God has prepared for us.

Transcript

If the Lord delays his coming a bit longer there will come a moment in each of our lives when the fragile cord which holds us to this world of flesh and blood will snap ... and we will say to ourselves with complete certainty,

"Now I'm going to die."

For some it will be a moment of great peace. For some it will seem like an eternity of terror. It will be terror if all our treasure ... everything we hold dear... lies on this side of death and we have to leave it all behind and pass into a yawning emptiness. It will be peace if we have nothing to let go of on this side ... if our treasure is waiting for us over there.

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release,
that they might rise again to a better life. Others
suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains
and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were
sawn in two, they were killed with the sword;

they went about in skins of sheep and goats,
destitute, afflicted, ill-treated---of whom the world
was not worthy---wandering over deserts and
mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

How could they live like that?

Because they knew that they were on their way to something better. They were free from the fear of death because they had come to know the God of the living.

And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the wife and raise up children for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no children; and the second took her, and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; and the seven left no children. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." Jesus said to them, "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong."

Mark 12:18-27

At least the Sadducees were consistent. They said that there is no resurrection ... nothing beyond death ... and they lived that way. We claim to believe that there is a resurrection, yet we live as if this side of the grave were all there is.

We talk about the coming kingdom, but the shallowness of our faith is revealed by the way we clutch the things of this life. The treasure we are laying up for ourselves here may not even be material. Materially, we may be living like Spartans... sleeping on boards, eating nothing but health foods. We may be collecting our dividends in ego satisfaction, or the "body beautiful".... or some other trip.

And life which is arranged in such a way that our goal is on this side of the grave ... even if we mouth all the right doctrines about the lordship of Christ ... is not a life of faith---it is the life of the Sadducees.

What happens when we try to get all the gusto we can this side of death? Then death becomes our god, a tyrannical god, a god that keeps us in constant fear even when we're doing well and having fun and going places.

The purpose of Jesus' coming and dying on the cross and rising again was to break this curse of death ... to set us free from its tyranny.

Since, therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long bondage. Hebrews 2:14-15

If Jesus' death on the cross was to deliver us from our lifelong bondage to the fear of death,

- Why is it that, so much of the time, in most

of us, that fear of death is still there?

- Why are we so nervous about getting it all

in before the bell rings?

- Why are we so worried that death is going to

come for us before we've accomplished some

great thing?

- Why are we so in the habit of thinking of the

dead as really dead ... gone ... wiped out of

existence?

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight; why the bush is not burnt." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look

at God. Exodus 3:1-6

He is not the God of three dead men who no longer exist. He is the God of three men who still live in him ... the God who rules worlds beyond our comprehension, and who comes and speaks to Moses from the Beyond.

When Elijah and Moses appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration, this was a window on a reality beyond any reality Peter, James and John had ever seen. Hundreds of years have passed since these men were seen on earth...but there they are...still alive.

Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Lazarus dies and goes to Abraham's bosom in

Paradise. The rich man dies and goes to Hades,

the region of the dead.

They weren't corpses in that other world, they were

alive,

conscious, for better or for worse. And the catalogue of people who had faith, in Hebrews 11, is a list of people who looked beyond their graves.

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Hebrews 11:13

"All these died in faith....."

We need to have faith that God answers prayer.

We need to have faith that God will provide,

that God heals,

that God protects,

guides,

raises up laborers for the harvest, redeems the lost. But above all, we need to have faith that God waits for us on the other side of the valley of the shadow. We need to have a faith that throws off the fear of death and keeps throwing

it off until the fear of death is gone from our lives.

1. To have faith is to know God as the God of the living.

"And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about

the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?

He is not God of the dead, but of the living;...."

Mark 12:26-27a

- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still living in God.

- The rich man is still living to God whether he wants to or not. Lazarus is still living to God.

- Our loved ones who have died are still living to God.

And the life that we will live to God on the other side

of death is not disconnected from this life. That life is the fruit of this life.

- The rich man who lived without mercy here found no mercy there.

- The thief on the Cross who cried for mercy here received mercy there.

- Those who are faithful to God here find God faithful there.

- Those who are faithless here will find themselves denied there.

- Those who confess Jesus with their lives here will be acknowledged there.

- Those who deny Jesus with their lives here ... even if they cast out demons and do many mighty works in his name ... will be denied there. "Depart from me I never knew you..."

2. To live by faith is to walk with increasing vision of the world beyond the grave.

We will receive increased vision of the world beyond death when we quit laying up treasure on earth and start laying up treasure in heaven.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:19-21

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide your

selves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Luke 12:32-34

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.

Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated---

of whom the world was not worthy---wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Hebrews 11:35b-38

The more our hearts are taken up with God and with Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and the doing of his mercy, the less we'll feel any need to hoard things or to make a name for ourselves. What need is there to hoard or to shine when we can walk through this world with the God of the living ... when the only treasure that survives the grave is mercy?

3. To live by faith is, following the footsteps of Jesus, to defy our fear of death.

...looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

He didn't turn away from his cross but went straight for it ... got up from his knees at Gethsemane and went right for his goal.

So we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow even if we're scared, even if we don't feel as if we have the strength. Instead of aiming away from death and pretending it doesn't exist, we aim for it ... not with suicidal despair but with burning confidence that on the other side of our final cross, which is death itself, the Father waits.

"And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'..... "

Marl; 12:26-27a

In the days to come it is likely that we will see a lot more of death than we've ever seen. May God help us to walk by faith following Jesus in the very shadow of our own death rejoicing in his cross...and in our cross absolutely confident in the life he has prepared for us on the other side.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/god-of-the-living/>

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