

Once To Die

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Death of a Child

All the world loves a baby. Anything effecting a baby goes directly to our hearts. There is such a pathos to it. We rejoice in the joy of a child. It's possible that even Christmas itself would be just another holiday if it were not for the children. And even Easter, as significant as it is for us Christians, is far more important in our families because of Easter eggs and bunny rabbits and things of that sort. The children make such a difference. We weep with the sorrow of a child. We will risk death to save a child. We will face any threat and endure any hardship to protect a child and all of this may be involved in the pain that we endure when a child is sick, or when a child dies.

II Samuel 12:15 tells about an instance that in many ways is typical of all, indeed classic; because it is so true to life.

"And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David there fore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshiped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Here is guidance for any Christian parent. It is normal for any parent to suffer in the death of a child. You see when the baby is born, we naturally think in terms of all the fine things that could happen, the good potential; we think of all the good that he or she might do or might have done. We'll say what a man he might have been or what a woman she might have become. We ordinarily do not think of the evil he might do or the evil she might do. We forget every misdeed of the child so that when we look at the child we don't have any reservation, and therefore regard the child with joy and affection.

Have you ever wondered why it is that you love your child so much? I think that was brought in my own mind most vividly the time our own little boy died. When I write about the death of a child, I am actually going through in my own mind and memory our experience in the death of our little boy that was called Peter. (I have prepared a little pamphlet called *"Lord, Teach Us to Pray"* and in it I tell about my

experience of prayer at the time that this little child of ours, Peter, died.) Knowing that he would die, and suffering in my own heart such pain that I did not think a person could bear, and trying to relieve the pain in my heart, I asked myself this question: why did I love him so? I felt that if I knew why it was I loved that child so, maybe I would know why it was God loved me.

He was mine, and my own affection had grown. At the time of his death, he was seventeen months old, he had not yet really hurt me. Sometimes when children get older they do things that hurt their parents and that has to be taken into consideration. But the baby has never done anything like that.

And now I bring you back again to this Scripture passage. As long as the child was alive and sick, David engaged in earnest prayer. You'll remember he lay on the earth with his face towards the ground and he would not get up and it would appear that he spent seven days in prayer. But the child died, as God told David it would. As soon as the child died, David relaxed. He got up, washed, shaved, changed his clothing, asked for food, and sat down to eat. The servants were astonished. He told them very simply, the issue is now settled. As long as there was some question, I waited on the Lord, thinking that He might want to change His mind about the course of events, the way they looked, but now he has gone, that part of it is settled. He will never come back here. I will go to him.

And now we ask ourselves in what way can this issue be settled for any Christian parent. You see for the present when the child has died, everything is done. *I will go to him*. You don't have to worry about that. God will take care of that. I would say to all Christian parents who have experienced this matter of the death of a child – *turn to God*. God is the giver of life. He allowed that child to live as long as he did. He knows everything about the future. And God is good. He is benevolent, kind and merciful. So you turn to God and when you do, trust God. I know that the dying of the child doesn't look like God would be good to you, but He is. It doesn't feel as if God was benevolent and kind, but He is. And you call upon your spirit within you to trust Him. You can trust Him about what you don't know. Then praise Him. He's the same God that has blessed you. So read more Scripture and more Scripture that tells about the goodness of God. Read in the Psalms and read through those expressions of praise. Thank Him for what He has done. Whoever you may be, there will be some special providence in your life, recognize it, remember it, and recall it to your mind. Reflect on the wisdom of God. You'll keep in mind He knows best. Then think about your own frailty, how long will you be here?

And then consider the influence that this death and your reaction can have upon other people when they see that in this hour of distress, sorrow and suffering you put your trust in God. I am personally persuaded that our little boy, when he died at seventeen months, affected many people for good because of the effect that his death had upon me, my wife and upon his two sisters and his two brothers, one of whom is in the ministry today. When I think of all these things, it seems so clear now – God doeth all things well. So you keep this in mind, and if God has taken one of the little ones back to Himself, *trust Him*.

Death of a Young Person

When a family or a community has been shocked by the death of a young person there is commonly a great feeling of regret. The heart of the friend is so ready to think: "Isn't it too bad that life was cut short, just when he had so much for which to live."

First of all, so far as life is concerned, we don't know how long we are going to live. It would be far better to just realize that the boy that was taken away, that died when he was fourteen years old, was born to live fourteen years and that boy lived out his life in that fourteen year time. Think about that and turn it over in your mind.

It has been my privilege in the course of my lifetime to be a pastor, and to know about families and their affairs. And I can remember a young college girl getting ready to go to a Christmas party. She

laid down to rest, because she wasn't feeling so well; and she never got up. Her death was so sudden. Her boy friend came with his corsage to take her with him to the party only to find that she had gone to her heavenly home. That was a very shocking thing.

I also remember the case of the young stenographer in my church who was taken sick when she was about nineteen years old and she was treated in a hospital and at home for several years and we knew that she would probably not get well. She lingered, and then she quietly slipped away. I expect everybody had the same feeling. Wasn't it too bad. But was it?

I think then of the only son of a certain family who had just completed medical training, finished his internship, graduated, and received his license to practice as a doctor and died within two weeks. Now that was strange and I was one of those who could have the feeling – well isn't that too bad. And when I think back over it, I wonder. Was it too bad? Or was that the way it was to be?

I think of another case of an only son who had served in the Air Force during war time, serving in Europe and the far East and later the blockade of Britain. Discharged now as a Colonel, he went on a flight just to put in the time with a buddy of his and crashed. He was an only son. That was hard for those people to accept.

Almost every community has its traffic accidents, its drownings, or other tragedies, wherein some one young person is taken away. I don't know of anything that gives you such a feeling of the weakness, and the frailty of human nature as when you see some young person in his prime who is just taken away. I'll tell you one thing about living – you can't prolong it beyond the day. Certainly, so far as a young person is concerned life looks at its best. There have been no tragic disappointments, everything is on the upgrade, and if they should suddenly be cut off, we can feel the tragic loss. Actually you know so far as living is concerned, there's much hazard in living. No one can guarantee the outcome. It is easy enough to look ahead wishfully and think about what could be and then take it that's what is going to be. But the death of a young person seems to accentuate all the good possibilities, emphasizing all the attractiveness of what could have been.

When some young person dies, the Christian can remember. First, God is sovereign, He's in control. And if this certain woman is going to live until she is twenty-one, that's as far as she is going. And if this certain boy is going to be cut off before he is fourteen, that's just exactly the way it is going to happen. God is sovereign. Always when I talk about that I want to say a word to the person who objects. I would sympathize with you if you say you don't like it but I would like to ask you very simply: what are you going to do about it? What can you do about it? This world is the only world you know anything about and in this world God is sovereign. Now right away let me say something else – God doeth all things well. God is good. Over and over again in the Psalms you will hear the refrain "the goodness of God endureth forever." Now I realize that the ways of God are past finding out. And I also know the hidden things belong to God, so that it can be with any of us, as it was that time when the Lord Jesus speaking to Peter particularly said: "What I do thou knowest not now but thou shalt know hereafter." You and I are living in a situation we cannot see what a day will bring forth. God does know. One of the things about God is He knows the end from the beginning. And – *God can be trusted*. Our hopes may not be realized. God may overrule in all these things to bring His own will to pass. But God can be trusted!

This is the best thing I can tell you in the death of a young person. You could say the way Job said when his young people were taken away – he lost all the members of his family – "the Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And with reference to the death of any young person, lift up your eyes, look into God's face, and just keep one thing in mind for sure – God does not make any mistakes. You see life may not be what I think it is. It may not turn out the way I think it should turn out but it's in His hands and that's good and He can be trusted and you and I can believe in God.

Death of a Husband or a Wife

The Bible speaks of the stranger, the fatherless and the widow as needing the special help of God. When a man loses his wife or a woman loses her husband, there can be no greater loss. We realize that there are unhappy marriages in the world, when husband and wife are actually strangers to each other and often they act as if they were enemies, but such cases I think really are abnormal. Of course we get to hear about them because they are so awful and we do not get to hear about the great many who live together in blessing.

In the normal experience of living, where the husband cleaves to his wife and the wife cleaves to her husband and they twain become one flesh; the death of either spouse is a calamity. It would seem that there cannot be a greater loss for a woman than to lose her husband or that there cannot be a greater loss for a man than to lose his wife. This is one sorrow that time does not heal. It is almost astonishing that life must go on for the one who is left. It does not seem possible.

Actually you know this is one reason why it is so useful and helpful in the case of the loss of a husband where the wife is doing her own housework, it is very important for her to just go ahead and do it. When she continues sweeping the floor, washing the dishes, making the bed, and keeping the house clean, she is doing something that brings to her mind that life goes on. Because ordinarily she would just feel like there wasn't anything now to do. Husband and wife ordinarily live together so closely and so intimately that each one really becomes a part of the other. Now the bereaved person, the one who is left behind, can live – yes – but that person lives as one who has had an arm cut off or a leg cut off or both arms cut off. Now such people live too, but they don't live normally. I think of a tree that has been shattered in some hurricane and a strong wind has blown away more than half the tree – twisted it off, torn it off and blown it away. The remaining stump can live, but never the same.

And here is something for the bereaved person to keep in mind. The rest of us can all appreciate that no one else can ever know the loneliness for the bereaved soul – the broken fellowship when the husband is gone – the absence of comfort when the wife is away and no more. In time that pain can be dulled, it's true, but the empty gap remains. What shall the bereaved wife or the bereaved husband do? And the Christian who has just lost a husband or a wife, what can such a person do?

Well the first thing I think is very important to keep in mind is – accept the loss as a loss. Do not try to minimize it. The grief will be real, natural and unavoidable. And I think that we would be very wise if we would just let that grief run its course. Don't try to bottle it up. Mourning for someone who is gone is proper and it's in place.

Paul writes to say, "We sorrow not as others which have no hope." We do sorrow, but we just do not sorrow as those which have no hope. There are things that can be done in the time of such loss. *Turn to God*. If ever it was true, it's true now; He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. The woman who has lost her husband is in trouble. The man who has lost his wife is in trouble. Turn to God. The widow needs help. The man that is left behind needs comfort. Either one of them need God. The widow can call on God. His promises are plain. He promised to comfort her, He will comfort her far beyond human understanding. And yet in addition to that – the comfort from God – there are still other things that can be done in one's mind and heart. You can remember certain things. Even when you are hurting too badly and you are suffering too much to think about anything else, you are going to think about this one who has gone. Remember the frailty of life. We don't know how long we are going to stay here, and we should never assume that we are going to be here permanently. Anything that lives can die. Anybody that lives can die. It was our mistake when we assumed that this would last forever. If a husband and wife have each other and things are being blessed, let us be wise enough to realize, it won't always be that way. I know that so generally people forget but this oversight does not change the actual fact.

If you are a husband and wife one of you is going to go first, the other one will be left behind. Now

you may also remember the blessings. And you've had them. "Count your many blessings, name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done." It will be good for you. And if you have lost a loved one, memories can be sweet. Don't try to put the memories out of your mind. Call them back to mind. The sweet memories of the fellowship that you have had can strengthen you. I know they may cause you to shed tears, those are good tears. Don't mind them, they are proper. Do not try to forget that this was yours – you may actually try to remember all that was yours – even the memory will be a blessing. To be sure you can't now add more but all you had was and is real and you can count your blessings for this. So you've lived together I don't care how long or how short a time, thank God.

Then you may remember the providence of God. God has always been in charge of your affairs. He brought you two together. He enriched your life through each other. God's hand is upon you now. What happened was no accident. I know it's unexpected and it's shocking to anyone of us to have some loved one taken away. You may know that it is not unexpected with God. He knew about it.

In this connection you can remember the benevolence of God, God is good. You may know for sure He will do you no harm. He is touched with all the feelings of our infirmities. "What I do thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter." We can't always see the hand of God but we can always trust His purpose. He doeth all things well. And now we might also remember the grace of God. The Lord will help and that right early. The widow needs strength, God will give it. The widow needs courage, God will give it. The widow needs confidence, He will give it by His grace. This world is not forever. Neither one of you were going to live forever. So the other one went first. You are going too.

Now may I bring something else to your mind – are there any children? Don't think for one moment in some moment of dismay and in your own heart be panic stricken and say to yourself, I wish I had gone too. No! If there are children they need you. Now, more than ever. Are there friends? Well they need your witness, and testimony. They need to see how a person stands up when the loved one is gone. You know they haven't gone forever, separated only for a time. Are there neighbors? They need to see your faith in action. They have heard you talk about believing in God, they know about the Gospel outline, they have heard about the resurrection of the dead – the question in their mind may well be – do you believe it. Well have it in mind, I Corinthians chapter 15 on the resurrection is true. There shall be a resurrection of the dead. And in I Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13-18 we read this: "Comfort one another with these words." In such loss as we have been talking about, no one can help you but God. But God can and God will. God will comfort you in His grace and mercy.

Death of an Aged Parent

Death is a common experience of all men. If there is any one thing we can be sure of in this world it is death. It is the universal expectation of all persons and no one could possibly claim that it should be a surprise to you. And yet it is so difficult to accept when it comes for so many, many people. Just as life is so precious that a person will do anything to prolong life, even so death is so feared and hated that a person will do anything to avoid it. One of the greatest appeals of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is that it has robbed death of its sting and the grave of its victory.

It's so easy for any of us to fall into the common fear of death, whereas for Christians this is unnecessary. Death is an enemy, but we need not fear death. Jesus of Nazareth went through death to open the way for us into the presence of God. Since Christ Jesus died and rose again, for the Christian no longer is the grave a hole in the ground. It still looks that way when the person lowers the body into it, but we can tell each other that the other end is open. It is a tunnel and you go into what looks like a hole but the other end is open and you go through into the presence of God. It is true that the separation is here but it is not permanent. We are not going to stay here. You will remember how it was with David. When they won-

dered how he could be comforted after the death of his child he told them, "He's not coming back here but I'm going there." The separation is not permanent. Now how can I possibly know this for sure. Suppose as a Christian I think about this and I hear about this and I wonder in my heart if it is absolutely true. Can I be sure of this? Let me quote to you the words of the Lord Jesus.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:1-3.

I have the word of Jesus Christ. He told me that if it had been different He would have explained it. And because of this, the Apostle Paul could write in I Thessalonians 4:13: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." I feel that even Christian people need to realize and appreciate the victory over death that we have in Jesus Christ. It is to be sure that we believe these things as it were in our heart and in our minds, but we don't always bring them right out to live by them.

When an older person goes, such as a parent or grandparent, I know that it is a heavy experience. And my heart is touched by the pathos in such a plea, as when someone writes – "Please pray for my grandmother that she may recover. She is ninety-one years old. She can't see very well and she is practically deaf. But I can't stand to think of losing her, of her leaving me." Listen beloved, your devotion and your affection for your grandmother is wonderful but really and truly for your grandmother the sands of life are nearly run. Let such in peace depart. It is time your grandmother went home.

My father died when he was just about ninety years of age. And I remember that when he went my brother, who had been taking care of him for the latter years of his life, could feel such an emptiness because he went. And I am talking about that when I talk to you. Now you who are facing the loss of your grandmother, I know the caring for her in all these days when she has been so dependent has made her very dear to you. That's one of the strange things about love. You don't really get tired taking care of a loved one. They become dear to you and her aged dependence upon you in her helplessness drew you closer and closer to herself. But keeping her here now would be for your sake and not for her's. So let me tell you something – you can afford to be thankful you had her so long. Don't underestimate what God has already done. Call to your mind the past blessing that you have had. Call to your mind the blessed memories that you have. And thank God for His long mercy in letting her live until now. And even now trust God about this. Don't let that poor aged person linger and linger and linger. Oh no. No more lingering. And when she is gone, thank God that she went home.

Now if you are not a Christian I am sorry. Whenever I think about the people who are not Christians I have to just say to myself – Did they have a chance? Did they hear it? Well, if they heard it, how can I be sorry for them? They didn't even turn to God. But for those of you who actually do turn to God, you may yet be very much attached to this aged person. Turn them over to God. You will miss her, of course. You'll miss your grandfather, I know. But think of that aged person. And listen, think very honestly about living.

Don't you realize for that old person friends are all gone. Sometimes we forget that. Do you think that in the hours that they have to just sit and wait that their minds do not go back to think about their boyhood and their girlhood days. Don't you think they think about the young people they used to be with. Don't you think they think about the people who were with them in the days of their work and their service, those friends are practically all gone. And now this older person's strength is gone. They don't feel able any more. They are so uncertain about things and they feel so helpless – and responsibility is gone. They don't really have to be here and they don't have to take care of anything. And listen that old soul is tired and normally speaking want to rest. If God has spared that dear soul so long, I can tell you one thing – they have gotten to be ripe and it is time now. And do you know what you could do if you are a loved person – if you are one of the people belonging to that aged person – help them go home with joy. Help

that grandmother of yours to rest in peace. Help that grandfather of yours to leave everything with God and to go home, quietly and confidently into the presence of her Lord, his Lord, and Savior. Trust God. Thank Him and trust Him now, for His name sake.

Sudden Death

Have you ever wondered why sudden death comes or seems so hard? Death is always abrupt. No matter how lingering the illness may have been, how long you may have known that that person was going to die, the end of living, the day or the hour or the moment that that life stops is always a shock.

Generally we mean by sudden death something that was unexpected such as a person in good health and in no special danger to be involved suddenly in a traffic collision or an accidental shooting or perhaps they are out on a pleasure boat or they are fishing and they are drowned. Now how should a Christian feel about sudden death? You may have in mind at once that this death is not sudden to God.

Of course many of us live without any thought about our constant peril. Only in recent years have we learned about seat belts. On every side there are signs and mottos to remind us and to encourage us to use our seat belts. There could be an accident. You might be better off if you were tied in your place.

For years now my wife has gotten my promise that I will not go out in a boat alone fishing unless I put on a life preserver. I strap it on my back. The life preserver I have is old and faded and it is beginning to tear, but I put it on just because I remember her and I know she's counting on me doing this. The more I think about it, the more sensible it becomes. Such precautions all make sense. But we can so easily forget the constant danger. It isn't only about death, it is about so many things.

For instance my car has four tires. Anyone of them could go flat. You know when one does, I'm surprised. Why should I be surprised? Sometimes they even blowout. But you know I'm just this way – I'll ride along on them as if they were going to last forever.

My car has an ignition system, it is dependent on a battery. When I put my foot on the starter and it won't work, I'm surprised. Does it make sense? Any time anyone of those wires would be broken, it would not go.

In our house we use electric lights and sometimes they go out. Surprise. Someone will say a fuse is blown. You know that probably is it. But sometimes you have these experiences and they strike you as so sudden.

I'm being realistic. This is something you and I ought to have sense enough to face. So far as death is concerned, this will come. You and I know it will come. Any person alive will die and you and I know it. There is nothing peculiar about it really. It is only the manner of death and the time that is unknown. Death is fearful, it can be awful for the non-Christian who is limited to this world because this is all he has. But for the Christian, death has lost its sting. And the grave has lost its victory. You and I remember the passage that says, "Lord teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." So I'm asking you just now, in the face of this sudden death of some person you know, let us be realistic and intelligent about death. Nobody knows when. And nobody knows how. I know if you happen to stand there on the highway and you see that smashed car and you hear that three persons were killed or only one person was killed, I know that's sudden. I know that's shocking, it's hard to grasp. But you and I knew all the time when they were riding in that car it could happen.

The Scriptures tell us that in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man will come. Also, "Be ye also ready for at such an hour as you think not. the Son of Man cometh." Christian people look ahead. There's nothing hidden from the consciousness of a Christian – "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." All the way along in life I can see His hand upon me for good. No man knoweth what a day will bring forth. I don't have any idea what is going to happen tomorrow, but He knows. One of the things about God that

you and I can keep in mind is that He knows the end from the beginning. God knows and so far as our days on this earth are concerned, it need not be unexpected. You and I know we are going to leave. Now actually so far as this world is concerned death is final.

But for the Christian, this is not true. Really and truly for a Christian it is not true that death is the end of everything. Paul spoke about this in I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. 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."

You can never comfort yourself by wishing this world were different. It will be no comfort to wish it hadn't happened. We would all of us be wise to remember no one knows what a day will bring forth. I know that sometimes we blame ourselves and we say, "Well if I had done differently. If I had gone this way instead of that way. If I had just turned over here instead of turning over there." But listen, all of that is idle thinking. God is watching over us and for each of us we do not count on tomorrow. I'll tell you, in view of the fact that any day could be the last one, why not be kind today. For our loved one, be kind today. You may not get another chance. "Be ye also ready."

A Christian Faces Death

Do you realize that a believer in Jesus Christ need not fear death? So often as we think of the Gospel and of life as a whole, we seem to forget that the name Christ Jesus brings heaven into view. One couldn't make a bigger mistake than to just leave the name of Jesus Christ in this world. It is true that Jesus of Nazareth lived in this world and it is true that He dealt with people in this world and He showed a perfect life in this world, but now He is not in this world, He Himself, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, glorified in the presence of His Father, is at the right hand of God.

If you think in terms of the name Christ Jesus it is essential that you think in terms of heaven. Not simply thinking of heaven as a sweet destiny for good people and for children to go to as they leave here, but to think of heaven as the place in which God is now. In other words, earth and heaven are both true now. The person who turns to Jesus Christ does so by looking up into heaven where He is. Jesus of Nazareth taught while He was here on earth that He was the Son of Man and said that He came down from heaven and would return to heaven and even now was in heaven. He taught: "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." And He brings this life from the Giver of life; from God Himself.

The one great threat to life of course is death. We will remember that in the Scriptures the very fact of the Lord Jesus Christ coming had to do with death over and over again. In Hebrews 2:14-15 we read:

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

As far as Jesus of Nazareth was concerned, He understood that He had come into this world to deliver man from the threat of death. Now for the natural man death is an enemy. There's no use in trying to change that. Every man is appointed once to die.

Poets have tried to paint a different picture of death and have tried in their own language to paint it in pale colors. But despite what any poet can do, in speaking of the "warm loveliness of death," no one misses the aspect. I'll tell you right now, death is not nice. True there are those in insufferable circumstances to whom life is awful, who welcome death. There are the hopeless for whom death is a release. And the weary for whom death is a rest. There are the exhausted ones who are ready to die. But these are the exceptions.

Generally speaking, it would be recognized that self-preservation is the first law of nature. If there is anyone thing true about every living thing you see it is that they want to stay living. Now one of the basic drives in all living things is to avoid death.

Death is not difficult. If any of you have been present when someone has died you will know that it can be done very simply, it is as easy as falling asleep. Why is it that we don't want to die? Well, death ends any possibility of improvement. We say that where there is life, there is hope and as long as a person is alive, you keep hoping that things will be better. But whatever may have been dreamed for improvement, death is the end of hope. Believe me when once a person is dead, it is over.

Then again death breaks up all relationships. As you live along in this world, you will have some relationships that are helpful and that are pleasant and are precious. The relationship between parent and child – no parent can possibly stand to think of the child dying. And no normal child can possibly stand to think of the parent dying. But death breaks this relationship. Death breaks the relationship of friend to friend. Some who read this now, very probably, have recently had to admit that some friend of yours is gone. One can almost feel as though a thing like that couldn't happen – but it does. And it is something that any one of us actually dread.

Then again death separates loved ones. And I mean by now that when death occurs the house is now empty. The chair is now vacant and there isn't a single one of you who have had an occasion where some loved one has gone, when someone has died, but what will know that when you have gone back into your home it just isn't the same. I can remember even so far as our home was concerned, those of you who have heard me give my testimony (*Lord, Teach Us To Pray*) will remember that we lost one of our children. Our fifth child was a little boy and he lived to be seventeen months old. The others were all in high school and he was just a baby. And yet I can remember so well how we drove back from the cemetery on the day of the funeral and we came back to the apartment where we lived. It just looked to be so empty. The whole building that we lived in looked so drab. I can remember yet that even the lawn didn't look like much. And the trees were not the same. Everything about the whole place had suddenly lost importance.

That is the way it is. And when I think about that with reference to a little child, I can think what it would be like if you lost a loved one that is older, and one that is closer to you – say the husband or the wife. When you think about that we always have to face the fact there is no possible way that you can ever tell a husband who has lost his wife or a wife who has lost her husband to just get over it. You don't get over it. No this is a major thing that happens. And this happens when death occurs. It cuts off all plans. You know as long as the other person is alive, maybe things will work out. Maybe it will be better. But when once death has occurred no more "maybe," it's over. Once there is death, the word is "no."

Also, death brings us, in fact it thrusts us, into the very presence of God. Not only is it true that the person who died has gone into the presence of God, but all of us, everyone of us. It has been my privilege to be present and take part in many funeral services – sharing with families who lost loved ones, and with friends who gathered together in the memory of someone who is gone. Of all the fellowship that I have with human beings, there is no other time that it seems so natural to think about God. It brings us all into the very presence of God. It is almost as though the door that opened that let the spirit of the deceased person go away, stayed open while the presence of God came in.

In a final way in thinking about death, many people fear death, for after death comes judgment. You know it is a strange thing we are in the presence of God all the time. Actually we are being judged by

Him all the time, but somehow it doesn't seem the same, as long as you are living. If I am being judged by God today – and I am sure I have tomorrow and I am sure I have the next day and I take it for granted I am going to have the next month and I'm just thinking in terms of having the next year, the more I think in terms of being able to stay down here, the less the prospect of judgment stands in my mind. It gets smaller. I've got time and, I might straighten things out. But, when I face the fact that this could be my last day, this might be my last night, immediately there comes to mind, Oh, I'm to come into the very presence of God. And there is no one who is normal, and thinking of coming into the presence of God, that isn't aware at once of the things he has done and the things he hasn't done. We call them sins. The sins of commission (where I have done things I really shouldn't have done) and the sins of omission (when I did not get done what I wanted to do). Many times in dealing with myself, I have tried to face this issue. It is frightening to think what would happen if I didn't have another day. But, in Psalms we read: "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

The Christian need not fear death, he is the only person in the world who can actually face death without being afraid. For we have Christ, you see He died and rose again. He faced death and went through it and rose from the dead. He actually takes away from us the fear of death. This is the one characteristic of Jesus of Nazareth that makes Him different from any other person, any other being, that ever lived in this world. He died and rose from the dead. When you think in terms of Him facing death, you and I need immediately to open our eyes and lift up our hearts as we look at it. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of God. One of the greatest statements ever made was made by the angels who in speaking to the disciples said, "*He is not here. He is risen.*" And this becomes the triumphant shout of the believer. I think we Christian people can help other people by facing these things. We don't like death. Nobody likes death. But you and I can walk with a firm footing right into the face of death. Christ Jesus came to defeat death.

Jesus of Nazareth did not come into this world to prolong this life, not to improve this life. He came into this world to bring the believer, the saved person, into the life of God called eternal life. Eternal life is different, it's marked by rest. It's marked by peace, with no conflict. And it is marked by fellowship. Never alone. Never, never alone. It is marked by joy, there will be no sadness. There will be no tears. And it's marked by having an inheritance. Believe me when we go on out into the presence of God we are not going out, as it were, poor. We are the heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. And someone might say, Well, I don't understand all about that. That's quite possible. But I'm saying these things to you because you and I in them can find relief from the fear of death. The Christian can face death because Jesus Christ went through with it, into the very presence of God.

In James 4:14-15, James is very anxious that we should not be counting for sure on tomorrow. In speaking about life he has this to say:

"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that he ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

And so when the Christian is facing death, the Christian will remember "this world is temporary." Listen folks, it is not going to stay. Nothing down here is going to stay. Oh I know it can be beautiful. Flowers are beautiful. Roses are beautiful. They don't last. This world is blemished and uncertain. We in many many ways over-estimate this world. You'd think the way we fight for it, that it would be something big if we got it. What a disappointment it is when we get what we want in this world. And then again we are so inclined to under-estimate the importance of eternal life. We under-estimate the importance of being in the presence of God. So while we are thinking about this, just have in mind that to be here in this world is an uncertain favor. I know that even as you read this, some will say, "Well I want to stay here." That's natural. But I want to tell you, you can't be real sure tomorrow will be nice. You can't be real sure that the day after tomorrow will be good. For a Christian this is something to remember. And because the

Scriptures say so – present with the Lord is far better.

The promises of God are intended to be a comfort to us.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." John 14:1-2.

So you and I can trust. His providence will care for everything and the mansions in glory are prepared for those who believe. Don't ever forget when you are thinking about death, when you are thinking about all those promises, He said, "if it were not so, I would have told you." But He told us to put our trust in Him.