

“Understanding Death”

(Knowing God Through Suffering Lesson 4)

Greetings/Prayer

Our stated goal in this study of “Knowing God Through Suffering and Persecution” is to develop a solid theological framework that will aid us with stability and Biblical perspective when we face inevitable seasons of suffering and potentially physical persecution as Christ’s disciples!!

We have not spent much time on specific events of suffering but on the reality of it in general along with Biblical teaching as to God’s relationship to it. [1. Intro, 2. What happened to our world, 3. The suffering people of God {categories}]

Our focus today will be somewhat different in that we will give attention to a specific event that each of us will face without exception.

It is an ominous event that carries with it a dimension of mystery and fear. It has been and continues to be first among the categories of suffering. We might establish from the Bible and from our own experience:

- * It is an event that is given this name by Bildad (Job 18:14), “The king of terrors.”
- * It is an event that is used by our enemy the devil to “enslave us through fear.” (Heb 2:15)
- * An event that has caused untold amounts of anxiety/grief/pain/suffering to the individuals involved in it and to family and friends affected by it.
- * This event is described by one famous secular intellectual as an “obscene mystery.”
- * Some of you have suffered as a result of this event in your recent experience. Suffering that continues at some level to this day.

Of what do I speak??

** Death, the end of all things with which we are familiar. The beginning of an experience that remains somewhat mysterious.

* What can we learn from our Bibles that will help us develop a solid theological perspective from which to view this approaching event (for some of us, impending event).

Now I must confess there are a myriad of issues revolving around death that could occupy our thoughts, sufferings that are involved in illness or incidents that lead to death. Suffering and pain involved in the wake of death. [not our mission – will touch on some of those matters in future lessons]

Our mission is to gain understanding of the event itself, which may not strike you as something exciting or particularly attractive for study.

Probably never heard it addressed in any systematic way, and although our study will be far from comprehensive, we will seek to shed some light on it as we examine several lines of Biblical thought. First of which is this:

I. A Biblical Understanding of Death

All of the troubles that plague mankind (including death) are inextricably connected to the fall (established in earlier lessons).

But it is important for us to be more precise in our understanding.

Now, I must confess, I am going to tell you some things concerning death in a way that may sound brutal and unfeeling, but I trust you will appreciate what I tell you, because you will know it to be true. And truth that is clearly stated in the Scriptures is what we desperately need to form that theological framework we already mentioned.

Three observations:

First: We must view death for what it is. God's well-planned/sovereign/foreordained sentence for the high crime of human sin and rebellion.

Turn (Ps 90) {Read 1-2}

Note Moses' bold proclamation concerning man {Read 3-6}

Then (7-11) God's judgement in light of man's sin.

Moses is restating in poetic form what he recorded previously.

(Gen 2:17) "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

We see that sentence of death carried out in the recording of Adam's descendants in Ch. 5, "Adam lived 930 years and he died."

Mainstay of the Apostle Paul (who understood clearly what Moses recorded) as he pens (Rom 6:23), "the wages of sin is death."

The sobering truth we must come to grips with is this. We are responsible participants in our own death. It is not the "cycle of life" that just happens in the natural order of things. NO, it happens for a reason. Death is the result of sin. I am a sinner, and in that sense I have caused my own death.

Now, I am not suggesting that this reality is going to bring comfort to you in the grip of deep pain/grief/loss. As you grapple with death, your own or your loved one. But what this truth will do is help you to see the horror/ugliness of what sin has done to the human race.

Rather than being aggravated at the providence of God that has brought you into its realm. Furthermore this consideration does not address the type/time/age of death. It is not the answer to all of our questions. It is designed to focus our minds on the origin of death.

Human sin! (yours/mine)

One brief word or encouragement to get you out of the “slough of despond.” Death in Christian thought also points to our redemption. (1 Cor 15:55, Rom 6:23)

Second:

The Scriptures make clear that death (along with sickness/disease) is, at times, and immediate act of divine judgement against a particular sin or pattern of sinful conduct.

(Lev 10:1-2) Nadab and Abihu (Aaron’s sons).

(Num 12:1) Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses.

(2 Sam 6:6-7)

(Acts 5) Annanias and Saphira

(Acts 12:19-23) Herod

(1 Cor 11:22-32) read

What conclusions should we draw from these sobering/surprising outbursts of God’s judgement, some of which may well leave us scratching our heads in amazement. (Uzzah in particular)

The proper theological conclusion is this, sin (all sin/any sin) merits punishment by death. (Ez 18:4)

Your sin/my sin cries out for judgement and it is only because of mercy that we are not all consumed in an instant upon the commitment of any sin, which, said truth should magnify the grace of God which is ours in Jesus Christ and all he has accomplished for us by his spotless life and atoning death.

Third:

Truth we derive from the Scriptures is this: illness and death are not necessarily linked to some specific transgression. To be sure, all sickness and death is linked to our fallen state but not necessarily linked to a particular sin or pattern of sinful conduct. (critical distinction) A distinction that Job’s friends failed to make.

We see in the Bible that death is often brought to pass by the natural outworking of God’s providence. (Eccl 3:2) “A time to give birth and a time to die.”

(1 Kings 2:1) “When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, “I am about to go the way of all the earth.” Then his change is recorded in (vs 3-9) and then in (vs 10) “Then David slept with his fathers.”

(1 Kings 20)

We all, in the outworking of providence, as a result of sin, have an appointment with death.

(Gen. 3:19) "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

And this is the ordinary pattern we see in the Scriptures.

Also we should remember that sickness or some debilitating chronic disability may have various purposes, some of which we may never have an answer for.

(Jn 9) Man born blind.

(2 Cor 12) Thorn in the flesh.

Now to close out our first main point of Biblical understanding of death, let me say this:

Our three observations:

1. Death is God's sentence.
2. Death can be immediate.
3. Death ordinarily the unfolding of providence.

If nothing else, should serve to inoculate us from the dangers of the health/wealth gospel, just have to believe it.

II. Must Learn to Embrace Death!!

The natural human reaction to death is predominantly one of not wanting to talk about/think about it, much less embrace it/accept it for what it is and to learn from it.

Let's be honest, that prospect is not particularly comforting, but by embracing and accepting, it will help us to look it in the eye/plan for it/expect it/live in light of it. And I think Moses can help us here.

Turn to (Ps 90).

Moses recognizes death as an expression of God's righteous and just anger against human sin. That being so, death becomes God's message to us that a limit has been set upon our days. {reread 7-11}

Now in light of that message from God notice Moses' response {Read vs. 12}

He does not deny the reality nor try to avoid its sobering impact, he desires to understand it (with all its implications) and the wisdom to order our lives in light of it for as many days that God has ordained. (perhaps 70, but not guaranteed)

Carson, "Moses wants us 'to number our days,' that is, to recognize the limit that is imposed on us, and to live with the limit in full view! ... Only in that way can we grow a heart of wisdom."

As we accept/embrace/anticipate the inevitability of death in our own experience our thoughts and responses will be varied as we seek to gain that (Ps 90) "heart of wisdom."

One such line of thought would be this, "Lord Jesus, I long to finish well." {Fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith}

There are some things worse than death.

{Words to O Sacred Head Now Wounded}

III. Must Learn to Embrace God's Comforting Truth About Death!!

The deep numbing/shocking/excruciating pain of bereavement grips the heart of a Christian too!! We are not exempt from grief!!

As we contemplate death, as we experience the pain of it, there should be for us elements of trust/confidence in what God has revealed to us about Himself and our relationship to Him. Here again Moses can help us.

(Ps 90:12f)

Moses instinctively turns to God upon consideration of the truth about death. His confidence, his comfort is found in the truth about God's covenant love and faithfulness in His relationship to His people.

The reality of sin and death does not/cannot break those bonds. Moses knew it. Paul knew it.

(Rom 8:35f)

Now there are many more comforting aspects of truth concerning death that we do not have time to trace out.

My burden for you is this...

The key to having this instinctive embrace of God's comforting truth in the face of death as we see with Moses and Paul is to cultivate and develop an intimate, ever deepening knowledge of God before that day arrives.

{Our minds and hearts need to be saturated with truth about God. Know God now. Will serve you well when that day arrives, as with David, "your time to die."}

IV. Learn to Live in the Light of the Future

If we are to live in hope, if we are to know any sense of encouragement, if we are to have any sense of joyful anticipation in the midst of our sufferings, and ultimately our death, we must learn to live in the light of the future. The resurrection/the new heavens and new earth wherein righteousness dwells.

We live out our days in the tension between the ages. This age and the age to come. The kingdom of God has been ushered in by the coming of Jesus Christ already. If you are part of it now, but we are not yet part of it in all its fullness (that lies in the future).

The ultimate answer to our present sufferings, persecution, lie in the future. When God rights all the wrongs/settles all the scores/wipes away all the tears/death is no more.

You know that {but you must learn to discipline your mind in these Biblical concepts}.

I'm going to close our lesson by giving you three texts that will help you.

(Rom 8:28)

(1 Cor 15:50-58)

(Jn 11:25)