

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

SOUL-SAVING LESSONS **“Are You Ready to Die?”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

Are you ready to die? God forbid that this should happen, but if you were in a car accident and your life was taken, would you be ready to leave this life and stand before the judgment bar of God? Have you lived your life in such a way that you can know with certainty that if your life ended right now, you are ready to be with the Father? Or, are there things in your life that you know you have not taken care of—things that you know would keep you from spending eternity with God? Today we are going to look at the question, “Are you ready to die?” We are going to investigate what the Bible has to say about death. We are going to see how we can be ready to die, and how that death does not have to be a black and dark thing. Rather, it can be a blessing for the Christian who lives his or her life properly.

One of the things we note about death from the Bible is that it is inevitable. Death is not something we can escape. Every one of us will have to face death at some point in our life. The psalmist reminded us in Psalm 90:10-12 that we might live to be 70 or 80 years old. Anything beyond that is “borrowed time.” I am reminded of a man in Luke 12:15-21 who definitely was not ready to die. This man had reaped a great crop. He therefore said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool, this night will your soul be required of you. Then whose will those things be which you have provided?” Then the Bible says, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Here was a man who was ready for life. He had an abundance of things for the here and now. But he was foolish in regard to the fact that he was not ready to die. He omitted the most important preparations—the preparations for eternity. Hebrews 9 reminds us of the brevity of life and how that we all will die. In Hebrews 9:27 we are told that “it is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment.” The writer of Hebrews illustrates two things for us. First, we **are** going to die. And second, we **are** going to stand before God in judgment after we die. Those are things we cannot avoid. We have a “reservation” for both of those things. I suspect that many of us are like Woody Allen who once remarked, “It’s not that I am afraid of dying. It’s just that I don’t want to be there when it happens.” But we all **will** be there when it happens. Death is inevitable. We all have a divine appointment with death.

As we think about the inevitability of death, we need to remember that our life here is very, very brief. It is fleeting. It is not something that is going to last forever. Sometimes we (especially when we are young) live our lives as if they will go on forever. But that is not at all the case. Life is very brief compared to how long eternity will be. In James 4:14, James asked the question, “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” The idea in the Greek word for “vapor” is like a mist. It is comparable to the morning dew or a vapor that you smell but that quickly is gone. That is what our lives are like. It is fast and fleeting. At times, we may think that we are going to live forever. But that is not the case at all. Job was reminded of the brevity of life. In Job 14:1, Job said, “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.” In Job 7:6 and 9:25,

Job used two illustrations to describe how fast life passes. In one illustration he compares life to a weaver's shuttle—a part of a sewing mechanism that moves very, very quickly. In another illustration he describes life as a runner who is running a race. Imagine a sprinter who is running a 100-yard race, and how fast he passes by the spectators. That is what life is like for us. Some people in this life live too long. Others live just long enough to die outside of Christ. And, unfortunately, some people die too soon. Some die before obeying the Gospel. We need to be sure—since life is so short—that we get ready for eternity. That, after all, is the real purpose of life.

What is life all about? Why are we here? This life is our one and only chance to be sure that we make things right with God and that we are prepared for eternity. American writer William Saroyan made the following statement to the Associated Press. He said, "Everybody has to die. But I've always believed that an exception would be made in my case. Now what?" Do we sometimes live our lives like this man? Do we believe that we "might" die—but that perhaps an exception could be made in our case? Do we really think about death? As we consider the inevitability of death, we need to understand that sin is the cause of our death. In Genesis 3, we see the sad scene where Adam and Eve have eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the context of verses 1-17 they are told that they would die as a result of the consequences of their own sin. Romans 5:12 makes this point very clear. Death entered in because of sin. Paul wrote, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." From this principle we learn that it is because of sin that man dies. There is a valid principle here not to be missed. When death plagues us, when we have friends and loved ones who die, or when someone who is very close to us passes away, we should not look toward Heaven and ask, "God, why did You allow this to happen?" **God** is not the cause of our death. **Sin** is the cause of death. Just as sin caused the death in the Garden of Eden of Adam and Eve, so people today die because of sin and its continuation in our lives. We can live beyond that sin in eternity with God. That is a principle that we learn from the Bible. But we do not need to blame God or hold vengeance in our hearts toward Him. I know people who, because of the death of a child or someone else who is very close to them, become very bitter in their hearts and who say, "God, why did You allow this to happen?" We must remember that God is not the cause of death. Plus, death can be a good thing if a person is in a saved condition.

As we think about death, we need to realize that the way we live our life is going to determine if our death is going to be a time of rejoicing or a time of sorrow. Will we be able to say, as the apostle Paul did in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul knew that he had lived his life in such a way that if he died, that was a good thing. He was happy. He wanted to go and be with the Lord (Phil. 1:20). Or, will our death be a time of great sorrow? Luke 16 is an example of a time of such sorrow. In this chapter, two men are introduced to us. One was an unnamed rich man. The other was a beggar by the name of Lazarus. While the rich man enjoyed all the blessings of this life, he was not ready for eternity. It is a sad commentary when the Bible says that the rich man died and awoke in torment. Lazarus, too, died. But he was carried into Abraham's bosom. Don't you know that the rich man's death was a time of great sorrow and deep mourning? Not only did this man leave this life, but he left it in an unprepared state. Ask yourself this question. If you were to die right now, would your death be a time of great rejoicing because you have obeyed the Gospel and have prepared your life to live with God so that death is a benefit for you? Or, would your death be a time of sorrow because you are not prepared to leave this life? Revelation 2:10 teaches us that we must be faithful "even unto death." Then and only then can we know that we are living properly and that we are ready to go and be with the Lord.

Yes, death is inevitable. But there are important benefits to death. Many people think of death as something that is bad, sad, and gloomy. But actually there are certain benefits to death. For example, death can end a person's suffering and pain. Imagine that a person is a Christian and that he or she has lived faithfully to the Lord. Toward the end of their life, the individual develops incurable pancreatic cancer. If that person dies from that cancer, is that really a bad thing? Absolutely not. If a person is a faithful child of God and contracts the deadly disease of cancer and dies from it, that is probably the best thing that could have happened to that person. Because they were a faithful child of God, we can know that they will be in Heaven, living with God for all eternity. Imagine someone who had lived all their life as a Christian. They were serving the Lord and volunteering to do all sorts of things in the kingdom in an effort to do everything they could for the Lord. Then they suddenly die in a car wreck. Is that the worst thing that could happen to them? Absolutely not. Listen to the words of Revelation 21:4—"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." This beautiful passage teaches us that Heaven will be a place where we will not have to endure the sorrow, pain, and suffering that exists here on Earth. It is a wonderful blessing to the person who dies in Christ.

There is another benefit to death. Knowing that we are going to die helps us prepare for eternity. A proper view of death will give us a proper view of life. Ecclesiastes 7:2 teaches us, "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart." When the wise writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that it is "better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting," he is saying that sometimes it is better to go to a funeral than to a party. Why is this the case? It is because death is the end of everything, and the living can take it to heart. The last time that you attended a funeral, were you reminded that at some point in the future you would be dead and that people would be gathered around your casket? Remembering death helps us prepare to live this life properly. And that is not a bad thing. The Bible teaches us that we ought to be preparing now. What is our purpose in this life? Isaiah 43:7 teaches us that we have been created for God's glory. As we view life, knowing that one day we, too, will die, it helps us live our lives for the right reasons. We are not to live just for ourselves or for our own lusts and pleasures. Rather, we are to live our lives so that when we die, we can be with the Lord. Consider King Solomon. He looked for the purpose and meaning of life. Then, in Ecclesiastes 12:13 he wrote, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." We are here to fear God and keep His commandments. Amos 4:12 teaches us that we must prepare to meet our Maker. There is a passage in Mark 8:36-37 that teaches us this principle. Listen to what Jesus said: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" As we think about our souls, we must realize that it is the most important thing we possess. If we know that we are going to die, then death can give us the proper view of life. When we get to Heaven, we will not be able to say, "Lord, I brought all this money with me. Even though I did not live right, I want to pay you so that my soul can live with you for eternity." That simply will not happen. Jesus asked, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" The answer, of course, is that it will profit him nothing. If we lose our soul, then we will have lost the most important thing that we possess. Thus, knowing that we are going to die should help us live our lives in such a way that we can be with the Savior for all eternity.

Another benefit of death is that it helps us focus on the eternal, not the temporal. In 2 Corinthians 4:16 through 1 Corinthians 5:1, we learn what is really important. We have a fleshly body—a tabernacle or temple in which we live. But Paul teaches us here that we

need to focus on the eternal, not the temporal. The life that we now have is purely temporary. We need to focus on our spirit and on our soul so that we can live with God for all eternity. As we think of life in view of eternity, it should remind us that this life is both temporary and fleeting. Consider the words of 2 Peter 3:10-12. The Bible teaches us that there is a time in the future when Christ will return. The Earth will be melted with a fervent heat. The Earth and everything on it will one day be destroyed. Peter then asks, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" Knowing that this life is temporary should reinforce us and help us focus on what is really important. In Matthew 24:34-36, Jesus taught us that Heaven and Earth will one day pass away, but that the Word of God will last forever. The nice homes in which we live, the nice cars in which we drive, and all the nice things that we have will not last. They are only temporary. I am reminded of what Puritan John Owen said as he lay on his death bed. He was dictating to his secretary when he said, "I am still in the land of the living." Then he said, "Stop. Change that to 'I am still in the land of the dying, but I hope soon to be in the land of the living.'" Truer words could not be found. We **are** in the land of the dying. But we are **going** to the land of the living where we can live forever with God and the saints of old.

Another benefit of death is that it can help us refine and purify our lives. James 4:8-10 makes this point very clear. James wrote:

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

As we face trials and persecution in this life, we can know that those trials refine us and make us better. This is why James could say in James 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." James said that we need to know that the temptations we endure help strengthen our faith and give us endurance and perseverance. This is why James would say in James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Think about the man Job. Job lost it all—his family, his wealth, his status in life, and even his health. But did Job learn anything through that testing? Yes he did. When we read Job 42, we learn that there were certain things about God that Job did not understand. He did not fully understand God's character. Therefore, he did not fully trust in God as much as he should have. The trials that Job endured helped to purify and refine his life. They helped him to know more about God and about how to live. When we endure suffering, or when death occurs in our families, it should refine and purify us and help us be better people. These types of things should help us live a better life in the here and now.

But think not just about the benefits of death, but the encouragements that apply to those who have died in Christ. One of the principles presented in Scripture regarding death is that it is not a bad thing. Rather, it is a blessing for the child of God—something that is indeed wonderful. Think of the words of Psalm 116:15. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." How does God view death? For those who die in Christ, He views it as a precious blessing. Consider the words of Revelation 14:13 where John wrote, "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" Blessed are those who die **where**? "In the Lord!" Those who die in Christ are blessed because their works that they have done in this life are going to follow them in eternity. This is why Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). We are told in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17,

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Paul then says in verse 18, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” Death should be a comfort, and something that is encouraging to the child of God. We know this is true because Jesus said in John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life.” What makes death a blessing for the child of God? It is the knowledge that we will rise up out of our graves and that we will live with God for all eternity.

Another encouragement from death is that we cannot get to Heaven without dying first. That is a principle that we rarely ponder, but it is so very true. In this life, Christians should be longing to go to Heaven. But we cannot go to Heaven without dying. In Philippians 1:23, Paul said, “For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” Paul realized that he could not be with the Lord without dying first. There were times when Paul truly wanted to die so he could be with the Lord, but he knew that it was better for the first-century Christians to whom he wrote for him to remain with them for a while. I am reminded of an illustration about a young boy who took a shortcut home everyday when he got out of school. The shortcut led right through a cemetery. One of his friends asked him, “Aren’t you afraid to take the shortcut home through the cemetery? Why not go the longer route?” He replied simply, “The cemetery is the shortcut home.” That principle is so true for us today. As we go through life, we need to know that death is the shortcut home. Death is the only way that we can ever go to be with God for all eternity. We therefore need to look at death not as a bad thing but as a good thing. We need to be encouraged by the fact that God will take care of those who have died in Christ. Luke 16:22 tells us that the beggar Lazarus was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom. The God Who created the Universe, and Who keeps all things in check, will take care of those who die in Christ. That ought to bring us great comfort, knowing that the God of love, mercy, and comfort will take care of those who die in Christ. He is the One Who loves them and Who will provide for their every need. We need to realize that if we have been faithful, then when we die we will be with God and with Christ in Paradise. Do you remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43? Jesus said, “This day, you shall be with me in Paradise.” If we live faithfully before God, then we will be with Him and with Christ in Paradise. That is a wonderful thing. It is not a negative. That is a positive thing for the child of God. I am reminded of a gravestone epitaph that was set forth by a man by the name of Solomon Peas. It said:

Here lies the body of Solomon Peas.
It lies under the daisies and under the trees.
Peas is not here; only the pod.
He, shelled out, went home to God.

Isn’t that so true? Our body is merely a tent. It is not what we will live in for eternity, We, too, will one day “shell out.” We therefore need to be preparing to go home to live with God. But the only way we can do that is to make sure that our life is right and that we have lived faithfully before the Lord. There are some very clear messages that death has for those of us who are still living. If death could speak to us today, what might it say? It would scream to us, “Wake up! Wake up in this life!” One of the things that we need to learn

from death is that we need to live our lives in an alert fashion. We need to be sure that we are living our lives according to the will of God. Remember the words of 1 Peter 5:8? Peter said, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." What is Peter trying to say to us? He is telling us that we need to wake up because the devil—in every way that he can—is working to cause us to be lost. Thus, we need to be alert. Death should remind us that we should live life to the very best of our ability. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." We need to live life to the fullest in the here and now. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." Christians are intended to have the abundant life. And we must live it with joy as a great blessing. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." Let's make the most of life in the here and now. We need to enjoy life. We need to spend time with our friends in order to help them learn about God's will.

I once heard an illustration about two boys who were at their grandmother's house. One young man commented on the fact that when he saw his grandmother, she was always reading the Bible. So he asked the other little boy, "Why do you think that grandmother is always reading that book?" The little boy responded, "I'm not really sure, but I think she's cramming for finals." That is so true for us today. The only way that we can be ready to die is if we study the Bible and live our lives according to its precepts.

Are you ready to die? Are you a child of God? If not, you can become one today. We want nothing more than for you to go to Heaven. Believe that Jesus is God's Son. Believe so much that you are willing to repent and change your life. Confess Him as the Savior. As Peter told the people told in Acts 2:38, you need to repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins. If your life is not right today, we beg you to get it right with the Gospel of Christ so that you can be ready to die and go home to be with the Lord.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
607 McLish Ave.
Ardmore, OK 73401

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “ARE YOU READY TO DIE?”

1. According to the teaching found in Psalm 90:10-12, how long can we expect to live on Earth?
2. What happened to the rich man discussed by Jesus in the account found in Luke 12:15-21?
3. What does Hebrews 9:27 teach?
4. What does James 4:14 teach us about the brevity of human life?
5. In Job 7:6 and Job 9:25, what two illustrations did Job use to describe how quickly life passes?
6. According to Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12, what caused death to enter the world?
7. When someone close to us dies and we ask, “God, why did you allow this to happen?,” what is wrong with that question?
8. According to Revelation 21:4, what will God do for those who die in Christ?
9. What message is contained in Amos 4:12 that applies to us today?
10. According to Isaiah 43:7, why were we as humans created?
11. Explain, in the context of this lesson, the meaning of Ecclesiastes 7:2.
12. What point was Peter stressing when he asked in 2 Peter 3:11, “What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?”
13. What message did Jesus teach in Matthew 24:34-36?
14. What should Christ’s message in Matthew 24:34-36 mean to us today?
15. What is the message of Revelation 14:13?
16. Name two blessings of death.
17. Name two encouragements that can be gained from death.
18. In Luke 9:23, what did Jesus remind us to do on a daily basis?
19. According to Jesus’ teaching in John 10:10, what did He come to give us?
20. In this lesson, the question is asked: “If you were to die right now, would your death be a time of great rejoicing because you have obeyed the Gospel and have prepared your life to live with God so that death is a benefit for you?” What is your answer to that question?