

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

This sermon was delivered at the funeral of John Dunn, 22nd October 2020

LET ME DIE THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS,
AND LET MY LAST END BE LIKE HIS!
(Numbers 23:10)

These excellent words were spoken by a man named Balaam – a very unusual man. He was not an Israelite, but a Midianite, of Israel’s enemies. He was a prophet, but did not fear God or serve him. Rather, he was a prophet-for-hire. Balaam would pronounce blessings or curses according to the desires of the highest bidder.

The king of Moab hired Balaam to curse the children of Israel, which the prophet consented to. But God overruled, and instead of curses, Balaam pronounced blessings over Israel, glorious blessings and prophecies, even prophesying the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Picture Balaam, standing in a high place beholding camp of the Israelites; a happy and blessed people, in covenant with God, enjoying the blessings of God, in life, in death, in eternity. He sees and understands, and says, “I want to be blessed like them!” And especially, “I want to die in righteousness, with God as my friend, not my enemy; to have an eternity of joy, not misery!”

Prayerfully consider these most vital truths from Balaam’s “dying wish”.

I. DEATH MUST BE CONTEMPLATED

Here is a remarkable thing: a man is thinking about death. Why is that remarkable? Because so few people do it. There is nothing more certain than the fact that we will all have to face death at some point, but how many of us give serious and solemn contemplation of our death?

We do all we can to remove the very thought of death from our consciousness. Practically we go about our lives as if death will never come; and when it inevitably does come, most have not prepared themselves.

This is what is so profitable about an occasion like this. In fact, wise Solomon wrote, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting” (Ecclesiastes 7:2). Now if you were given a choice between going to a funeral, or a celebration party, which would you choose? Yet wisdom says, *this* is better. Why? Solomon explains, “For that is the end of all men”. Today it is John Dunn. Tomorrow it may well be me, or you. One day it will be all of us. And he says, “The living will lay it to his heart”.

I am laying something to my heart today, in this house of mourning. And that is, my father is dead. He has departed this mortal realm into the eternal. Am I truly ready to take that same journey? May we all lay that to our hearts!

But perhaps there is a person here thinking, “What is the big deal about death? You die, and then you cease to exist.” God says otherwise: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

It is not so much *death* that you should be concerned about, but what follows death – a summons to appear before bar of God Almighty to give account for your life.

How could there be anything more important than to prepare for that day?

II. NOT ALL DEATHS ARE THE SAME

Some think death is death, all deaths are alike – breathing stops, the heart stops, circulation stops, the brain and other organs shut down, decomposition begins.

On a physical level, yes, all deaths are essentially the same, but on a spiritual level the difference between deaths is *worlds apart* – literally!

Notice that Balaam specifies a particular type of death he wants – the death of the *righteous*.

We can deduce from this that there is another form of death – the death of the *unrighteous*.

The Lord Jesus spoke of these two deaths in Luke 16:19-31. Two men died. One went to the torments of hell. One went to the joy of paradise.

So we must make every enquiry, and take every measure to ensure that we die the death of the righteous, because the alternative is unthinkable.

What then is it to die the death of the righteous, or who are the righteous? The word “righteous” has the idea of “rightness”, to be just, holy, good, morally perfect.

More than one person has said in recent days, “Your dad was a good man.” Now, humanly speaking, that is true. But he never called himself that. He regarded himself as a sinner, because he understood that it is not *man’s* standard of judgment we are to be concerned with, but *God’s*.

He understood Jesus’ words, “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17). The book of Romans states “there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:12).

By God's perfect standard in his law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, we all fall short. Who among us can say they have never once lied, or stolen, or disobeyed parents, or lusted.

Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers the world has seen, said, "I did enough sinning between getting up in the morning and getting down to breakfast to damn a thousand souls to hell."

God is perfectly holy, and for us to be fit to enter his presence requires holiness as perfect as his. Even our best efforts to please God by our good works, are regarded as "filthy rags" in his sight. "There is none *righteous*, no, not one" (Romans 3:10)

How is it possible then, to die the death of the righteous, and enter into heaven, if none of us are righteous, and we cannot make ourselves acceptable to such a holy God?

There is a solution, and only one solution: we need a righteousness given to us, imputed to us, by another, from another.

The good news is, there is such a righteousness available to every one of us.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Son of God, left his glory in heaven, to come to this world in human flesh, and live the sinless life we could never live; then die the death we deserve for our sins, as our substitute, that we might be saved. Then he rose again from the dead three days later for our justification.

When you repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ, there is a transaction that takes place: your sins are taken by Jesus, and his righteousness is given to you. That is called justification. At that moment, God no longer sees you as a sinner deserving of judgment, but as righteous and acceptable to him.

The righteous man, then, is the one whose sins are forgiven, and who has been justified by faith alone in the blood of Jesus Christ alone.

John Dunn is in glory now, not because he was a good person, but because he was a sinner, saved by the grace of God.

III. MERE DESIRE FOR ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT ENOUGH

You may wonder how it turned out for Balaam. He was slain in battle by the children of Israel (Joshua 13:22). The New Testament informs us that he went to hell, consigned to "the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13).

For all Balaam's longing for heaven and a happy eternity, he never got it.

You see, dear friends, it is one thing to *desire* eternal life, but if you take no pains to secure it, then it is of no help.

It is all very well to desire to quench your thirst with the glass of water set before you, but what help is that until you reach forth your hand, take it to yourself, and actually drink it? Jesus Christ said, "IF ANY MAN THIRST, LET HIM COME UNTO ME, AND DRINK" (John 7:37).

I fear there are many of you who have warm thoughts and hopes of heaven but you have no intention of coming to Christ, of leaving your sinful ways, of abandoning your trust in yourself, and surrendering to him as your King and Redeemer.

Are you saved? I am not asking if you go to church, or if your parents are Christians, or if you were baptised, or if you are a moral person, or even if you repeated a prayer at some point in your life. I am asking are you saved? Has there been a time in your life when you repented with godly sorrow from your sins, and when you put your complete trust in Christ alone, in his blood and righteousness as your only hope of salvation?

Does your life bear witness of salvation? When Christ saves a person, He changes that person. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) If you have true faith, you love God above all things, you live for his glory, not your own; you serve him, not yourself; you hate sin, and desire to be holy.

Balaam perished because he "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). If you are to be saved, Jesus Christ must be loved supremely, above all else. Do you love him, and are you willing to forsake all for him?

There are only two deaths: the righteous, and the unrighteous. There are only two eternal destinies: heaven and hell. And if you end your life without Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, there is nothing before you but everlasting misery in the lake of fire.

I urge you, I beseech you, seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Cry out to him for mercy upon your wretched soul, that he would reveal the depths of your sins, and give the knowledge of the Saviour to you. Cry out for his saving grace. Do not stop seeking him until you find salvation in Christ. He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Amen.

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