

## **"Death and Judgment"** **Hebrews 9:27**

Throughout this chapter, the writer of the book of Hebrews makes a powerful presentation of the death of Christ once for sin. The reason Jesus Christ entered the world as a man was to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. This he did once for all. He need not die again. His one sacrifice, to bear the sins of his people, was sufficient.

In the midst of that discussion, the writer interjects a most solemn declaration about death and judgment. He declares, "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." He handles this subject in the language of comparison. You will note the word "as" in v. 27 and the word "so" in v. 28. The comparison is this:

- 1) As it was appointed for man once to die, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.
- 2) And as surely as judgment follows death for man, so it is certain that Jesus will appear a second time, in order to bring about final salvation for those who are waiting for him.

Our focus today will be on the "as" part of the comparison, the sure and certain death of man and of the judgment that follows. I trust that the Holy Spirit will rivet these two certainties on our minds and hearts.

Death and judgment are certain. There can be no equivocation about this. This is something we all know. It is intuitive as well as the plain teaching of the Bible. Our conscience knows it and the Bible teaches it. It couldn't be clearer: "It is appointed for man once to die, and after that comes judgment."

Benjamin Franklin said in a letter to a friend after the Constitution was enacted, "Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes" (1789). He was right on the first part, death, and is right on the second, as long as there are governments! But it is also true of judgment.

### **I. The Certainty of Death**

The first certainty stated in our text is death. "It is appointed for man once to die." In other words, death is inescapable. No one is exempt from death. Do you know anyone that has ever avoided death? No, of course not. We all have an appointment with death. We all shall die some day.

There is one exception. At the end of the age, when Christ comes again, the redeemed who are alive at the time will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-18). Like Enoch and Elijah (the only two men who did not die), they will be transported into the presence of Christ apart from death.

But that is the only exception to the rule. For all others, there is an appointment to meet death. The word "appointed" (*apokeimai*), means "to be stored up." Death is stored up, reserved, or destined for us all. Our certain lot in life is death!

And who is it that makes this appointment? It is God. Death is a divine appointment. The Bible says, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecc. 3:1-2). God is sovereign over our birth and he is sovereign over our death. Both are part of his "purpose under heaven." R.C. Sproul says:

"Every one of us is called to die. That vocation is as much a calling from God as is a 'call' to the ministry of Christ. Sometimes the call comes suddenly and without warning. Sometimes it comes with a notification in advance. But it comes to all of us. And it comes from God" (*Surprised by Suffering*).

Beware of the spiritual quacks that tell you that God has nothing to do with death. They teach that the devil is the culprit that brings death. But Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ holds the keys of Hades and Death. He said to John on the Isle of Patmos:

"Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Rev 1:17-18).

Satan isn't sovereign; God is. Satan doesn't hold the keys of death; Jesus does, and Satan cannot pry them out of his hands (Sproul).

The good news in this state of affairs is that through Jesus' death and resurrection, life is offered to man – eternal life. Jesus defeated death by dying for our sins and then rising from the grave. That is why Paul could exclaim:

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

The death in view in our text is, of course, physical death. However, the Bible also speaks of two other deaths – spiritual death and the second death.

Spiritual death is the state of all men born in Adam. When Adam and Eve sinned, they died; they died spiritually. And since the Fall, we have all been born into this world spiritually dead.

The second death, so called in Rev 20:14, is actuality eternal death, or eternal punishment. This is separation from God forever in hell. The wicked are not annihilated; they are cast into hell forever. After physical death comes eternal death.

In the new birth, however, sinners are raised from their spiritual grave (Eph 2:1-5). They are quickened, or made alive in Christ. And all who are born again are exempted from eternal death.

That's what Jesus meant when he said to Martha at the grave of Lazarus, "Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:26). That's not physical death but eternal death.

Physical death comes to us all. No one can bypass death. No one has found a way to avoid death. There is nothing so consistent and inevitable as death! Even if you were to live to be as old as Methuselah, you will still die. "No human being, regardless of talent, possessions and status, has yet won a final victory over the universal sentence of... mortality" (Tozer). Death is a fact of life in a fallen world.

I was talking to a friend this past Friday and I told him what I was preaching on Sunday. He said, "The statistics are in: one out of one die."

And yet with God's Word declaring death's certainty, and with the whole history of man death reeling in everyone since Adam, there are many that believe it will not happen to them. They live without any thought of death. They even come to the end thinking that the doctor is going to administer a drug that will keep them alive.

That is a fantasy world. In the real world, people die. You had better get out of the world of fantasy and become a realist! The train of death is coming down the track and it will not pass you by! So quit pretending that you are not going to die! You will, you must – it is appointed unto man once to die.

Consider some of the people that have died this year, 2012. Norman Schwarzkopf, Neal Armstrong, Andy Griffith, Andy Williams, Thomas Kinkaid, Charles Colson, Zig Zigar, Joe Paterno, George McGovern, Mike Wallace, Whitney Houston, and Dick Clark. It doesn't matter who you are, the death train comes! Sometimes death comes with notification in advance and sometimes it comes suddenly and without warning. But it cometh!

We read about a man in the book of Genesis that received an advance notification about his death. The man was a baker (Gen 40:16-22). The baker was in prison with Joseph. In prison with Pharaoh's chief baker was also his cupbearer. Both men had dreams and Joseph interpreted them.

He said that in three days the cupbearer would be restored to his position in Pharaoh's house. And he said that in three days the baker would be hanged and the birds would eat his flesh. The word of Joseph came to pass in both cases. In three days the cupbearer was restored and the baker was hanged.

But the baker was given three days to ponder his death! It was not pleasant news for Joseph to pass along to him, but it was the truth. I wonder if the baker made preparations to stand before God during those days? Did he squander the time or did he redeem the time?

The baker had 72 hours to prepare for death. We have no such deal. But we do have the sure and certain promise that death is coming!

The question is, are we prepared to die? Friend, you are prepared to live only if you are prepared to die! Alistair Begg says, "We cannot really begin to live until we have faced with composure

the reality of death and have prepared for it by faith in Jesus Christ" (*The Hand of God: Finding His Care in All Circumstances*).

Most of us, however, will not get a notification like the baker did. Perhaps we will contract a fatal disease or illness that will bring about our death. But there may be no advance notice! Death will come suddenly and without warning. It may happen at a young age. Look in the obituary section of the paper today and you will see that young people die as well as the old! It will most certainly happen when we are old but death comes even to children.

But ever how death comes, with advance notice or not, it will come! It will come to all of us and it will come but *once*, so says our text. You will not be given the opportunity to come back and do life over again so you can die the second time prepared. There is no reincarnation. You will not be able to check out of this life and start over in a new life. Reincarnation says that you "just check out of this life and start over in a new life"

The teaching of reincarnation, even in the western world today, is popular. But it isn't true! David Jeremiah tells us why it is popular (*Invasion of Other Gods*).

- 1) It is popular because it supposedly offers an *escape from death*. If reincarnation is true, you don't have to worry about dying. Reincarnation takes the fear out of dying. But that is the lie of the devil, who told Eve, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).
- 2) It is popular because it allegedly provides an *excuse for sin*. It lets you live any way you want to live now because it lets you come back to have another chance. You don't have to deal with the consequences of sin!

Don't believe the lie of reincarnation. "The Buddhist dream of reincarnation, of cycles of existence, is an illusion" (Edgar Andrews). That you will die and stand before God in judgment is an objective certainty. I know we are living in a postmodern age that rejects absolute truth, that says we cannot know anything with absolute certainty, but this is what the Word of God teaches.

Will you stake your eternal destiny on relativism or on Scripture? Will you follow the empty, mystical teaching of Hinduism and Buddhism, or will you believe the Bible? God's Word says, "It is appointed for man to die once."

## **II. The Certainty of Judgment**

The second certainty that is stated in our text is judgment. "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."

Thomas Watson rightly distinguishes between two days of judgment for the unbeliever.

- 1) First, a judgment is passed upon the soul at death. "As soon as the breath expires, the soul receives its particular sentence, and knows how it shall be with it to all eternity" (*Puritan Sermons*). This was true of both the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus spoke of in Luke 16. The rich man went to Hades to await the day of judgment. Lazarus entered Paradise.

- 2) Second, there will be a judgment at the last day when unbelievers stand before God for final sentencing. Scripture speaks of men giving an account of themselves "in the day of judgment" (Mt 12:36).

The judgment alluded to in our text is the final day of judgment. Death itself is a judgment but the judgment in view here is subsequent to death. All men will stand before the holy and righteous God and give account for their deeds on that great and awful Day.

There is a judgment that occurs after this life is done. That doesn't mean that acts of judgment do not come upon men in the present world, but the greatest judgment of all is the one reserved for all men at the end of the age.

What remains for people who reject Christ is judgment. Heb. 10:27 speaks of "a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume..." The writer of Ecclesiastes says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret/hidden thing, whether good or evil" (12:14).

This judgment is sure and certain. Men cannot bypass the appointment to death and they cannot bypass the appointment to judgment. There are no second chances. The Puritan, Thomas Brooks, said, "As death leaves you, so judgment finds you."

That is how it happened with the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16). A great chasm was fixed so that no one could pass from one place to the other (16:26). Their estate in eternity was permanent. "A man's destiny after death is irreversible" (Robert Reymond).

Those who die outside of Christ face the searching, scrutinizing judgment of God. There is no purgatory for unbelievers. There is no reincarnation. There is no annihilation, where people might be put out of existence after a while. Spurgeon said, "... in light of the grave, all confidence, except confidence in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, is a clear delusion."

At death, the unbeliever is ushered into Hades where they will await the final judgment at the end of the age. At the judgment, each man's wickedness will be revealed and each will be cast into the lake of fire which burns forever (Rev 20:15; 21:8). And there the wicked will be punished day and night (Rev 14:11; 20:10).

Hell is a terrible thing to contemplate! Yet consider it we must, for unless we repent, we "*will all perish*" (Lk 13:3, 5). We would rather consider the love of God but we must also contemplate the wrath of God. In fact, both are addressed in the most well-known verse in all the Bible, John 3:16. "For God so **loved** the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him might not **perish** but have everlasting life."

The only escape from judgment is to run to Christ! He bore our judgment on the cross so that we might not bear it throughout eternity. Our problem is sin. We must appear in court before God to account for our sin. Our sin is an affront to the holiness of God and deserves eternal punishment.

But there is mercy and grace that reaches out to hell-deserving sinners. Forgiveness is offered to us freely in the gospel.

The gates to heaven stand wide open now. All may enter through Christ. But when death comes, it is too late to enter. The books will be opened, testimony will be given, and every man will be judged according to his works. "There is nothing after death except judgment and that which follows it—heaven for those who trusted Christ or hell for those who did not" (Edgar Andrews).

## CONCLUSION

Are you prepared for death and judgment? Life is short, death is sure, and eternity is long. Nothing is more certain than death and judgment. A friend posted on Facebook recently, "People prepare for everything – exams, vacations, retirement, etc. But how many people prepare to die?" (12-29-12). He then posted this text, Hebrews. 9:27.

According to the CIA World Factbook of 2005, there are roughly 56,575,000 deaths each year. That computes to approximately 155,000 deaths a day, 6,450 deaths per hour, or 108 deaths per minute. On average, nearly two people die every second. Just think of it, with every tick of the clock, two people die! And one of those ticks of the clock will someday signal our death. And after death comes judgment.

And it doesn't matter who you are. Kings and presidents die as well as savages and indigents; the rich die as well as paupers; the famous and the infamous die; the brilliant and the ignorant; the old and the young; men and women; etc. And all shall stand before God. John the Revelator said:

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done" (Rev 20:12).

And yet so few are serious when it comes to death and judgment. They are too busy living that they don't consider death and judgment. Their interest is fun and entertainment. Their philosophy is, "Let's get all the gusto out of life that we can." They don't want to be reminded that they are going to die and that after death comes the judgment.

That is a terrible way to live, for life is short, death is sure, and eternity is long. Death and judgment is a solemn thing to consider but do it we must. We talk too lightly of death if we talk of it at all. "Life seems rosy and death seems far away" (Boettner). But this is serious business.

Thomas Brooks said, "Every ache, every pain, every disease—is one of death's warning pieces" (*The Privy Key of Heaven*). He said that in the 17th Century, when there were few medicines to help. In those days, a headache, a toothache, a backache, could signal something much worse coming. They couldn't run to the emergency room. Not so with us. We don't worry about such things. But every ache, pain and sore should be a divine warning to us to prepare to die. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" (Heb 2:3).

Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote a letter to an unconverted friend. It was written in September of 1842. This is the last paragraph of the letter.

"I was in a very wicked family today, where a child had died. I opened my Bible, and explained this verse to them over the coffin of their little one: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' (Heb. 9:27). Solemn words! We have only once to die, and the day is fixed. If you die wrong the first time, you cannot come back to die better a second time. If you die without Christ, you cannot come back to be converted and die a believer—you have but once to die. Oh, pray that you may find Christ before death finds you! 'After this the judgment.' Not, after this, purgatory. No further opportunity to be saved; 'after this the judgment.'" As death leaves you, so judgment finds you. If you die unsaved, you will be so in *the judgment*. May I never see you at the left hand! If I do, you will remember how I warned you, and prayed for you, and besought you to come to the Lord Jesus. Come to Jesus, He will in no wise cast you out."

Someone posted on Facebook that their license plate is HEBS927. The plate holder for the tag says, "One Life-One Death-One Judgment. R U Ready?" Are you ready? I know not whether you will die a sudden death, a lingering death, a peaceful death, or a violent death, but I know this – you will die. And I know this too, that after death comes the judgment. Therefore, make preparation for death.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (KJV). There are words that should not be said; there are words that should not be heard, but these are not among them. May these be words that bring you to the foot of the cross.