

Ecclesiastes 8: 8; “Power to retain the spirit”, Bible Study # 58 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall
On June 8th, 2011, at the Rendall home.

Although the context of chapter 8 is wisdom in relation to politics; everyone, even the king, must understand that they are not sovereign over the day of their death. A person may have authority over a good many things and people in this world, and yet “no one has power in the day of death”. No one, that is, but God. And so I want to approach this study tonight from both our standpoint, and God’s. First, we want to examine the truth that even though we cannot retain the spirit that God has perfect control over it. Secondly, we want to see that with us death is a warfare, but with God there is victory over it.

1st of all – Let’s understand that even though we cannot retain our spirit, that God has perfect control over it. (Verse 8)

“No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death.” The wording is interesting here; the phrase, “to retain the spirit”. The New American Standard translation is unfortunate at this point. It says, “No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.” It is unfortunate because, although the word in the Hebrew can be translated wind, it should not be translated this way here. The second part of the verse being plain; that no man has authority over the day of death; it also then appears not only plain, but important; that the first part of the verse should have its reference to people not being able to retain the spirit. It is people who are not able to hold on to their own life, and keep themselves in life by their own will. They are not able, by the strength of their own will, to keep their own spirit tied to their body. Even a king, who is used to commanding others, cannot command his own spirit to stay within his own body if he wants it to. He does not have authority over the lives of his subjects in this way either. He may even have the authority of capital punishment, but He does not have authority to take away their spiritual life or authority over their conscience in regard to his commands. The king ultimately does not have the power and authority over death, except God wills it to be so. And God exercises that authority sovereignly in regard to each and every person.

Let’s look at a few verses here. Turn over to Psalm 66, verse 5. “Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men.” “He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the river on foot.” “There we will rejoice in Him.” “He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; do not let the rebellious exalt themselves.” “Selah”. “Oh bless our God, you peoples!” “And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved.” The NAS translates it this way: “Who keeps us in life, and does not allow our feet to slip.” The ESV – “who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip.” You can see that this verse is referring not only to God’s ability to keep men in the land of the living physically, but also His

keeping them in this life and the next spiritually. God preserved the Israelites at the Red Sea, but destroyed the Egyptian armies of Pharaoh. He makes a distinction between those who are His people who are trusting in Him to keep them in life, and those whom He brings down and destroys; those who are not trusting in Him and who are rebellious to His word. How can we apply this to ourselves? Well I believe that we need to be warned against thinking that the things of this world are what we should live for. We need to be warned against thinking that we will have many years of pleasure ahead, in regard to living and enjoying earthly things, when we might not have another day. A righteous person will heed the warnings. A foolish person will not.

Turn with me to Luke 12, verse 13. “Then one from the crowd said to Jesus, “Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” “But He said to him, ‘Man who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’” “and He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’” “Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.’” “And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’” “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.’” “And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many good laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” “But God said to him, “Fool!” “This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” “So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” You can see the point here can’t you? This rich man was a fool because he was not rich toward God; the One who had made him, and kept him in life all of these years. He was building bigger barns, and storing all of his crops, and expecting to be able to take his ease, and eat, drink and be merry, when he had stored up nothing with God. He was laying up treasure for himself and not for God. King Solomon had fallen into a similar problem at some points in his life. God dealt with Solomon by bringing him to repentance over his sins. But God dealt with this man by requiring his life that very night when the man was thinking himself most secure with his earthly things. He did not consider that he did not have authority over the day of his death, or what God would do with him at that time. The man in the parable lost his soul. He had no control over the day of his death, but God had perfect control.

2ndly - We want to see that with each of us death is a warfare, but with God there is victory over it.

“And no one has power in the day of death.” “There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.” Death is here called a war. It is that which we battle and fight against. The will to live is something which is given to us by God. To resist death and oppose death is the right thing to do. You can see this if you turn to Job Chapter 2 and verse 3. “Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’” “And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without

cause.” “So Satan answered the Lords and said, ‘Skin for skin!’ “Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.” “But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!” “And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.’” You can see here from what Satan says that he knew that, by nature; we as people want to keep ourselves in life, and so we will do all that we can, and give all that we have to fight against it. There is nothing wrong with this even though Satan tried to make it out to be something bad. A Christian, however, will fight against their own death, not simply to save their skin, but because he or she wants to love God and to glorify God with all of their strength, as the first and greatest commandment requires. They want to live because they want to honor Him with their life. This is not to say that they might not feel so pressed by afflictions, or by Satan’s schemes that they might not wish for death. But they see that their purpose in life is to glorify God, and not that they would always feel good physically. They may even righteously long for death if their conscience is clear.

Look at Job Chapter 3, verse 20 – “Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave?” “Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?” “For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water.” “For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me.” “I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.” Look now over at Chapter 6, verse 8. “Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant me the thing that I long for!” “That it would please God to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off!” “Then I would still have comfort; though in anguish I would exult, He will not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One.” “What strength do I have, that I should hope?” “And what is my end, that I should prolong my life?” Job knew what you and I should know. It is that we should trust in God and pray to God to glorify God with the days that He gives to us. This truth is found in Psalm 30, verse 14. “But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’” “My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.” “Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies’ sake.” You see, a Christian’s purpose in life is to glorify God with whatever number of days and whatever strength He gives them. This is the greatest argument against euthanasia and suicide. It is God who has our times in His mighty hands. And He expects that we would honor him with whatever small strength that we still have, while we live.

The best example of righteous dying is, of course, the dying of our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s timing of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ shows us how much our times are in His hands. The Father timed it to the very week and day and hour of Passover. The death of Christ was a spiritual war, and there was no release from it. Turn with me over to Matthew 26, verse 36. “Then Jesus came with them a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over

there.” “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.” “Then He said to the, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.’” “Stay here and watch with Me.” “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” Verse 42 – “Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’” Jesus prayed these prayers as a perfect man having a true human nature. He prayed that He might not have to suffer and die, but He wanted more than anything to glorify God by His sufferings for the Elect, if that was the Father’s will. Now turn with me to John Chapter 20, verse 28. “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’” “Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.” “So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’” “And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.”

Now, this death of our Lord Jesus Christ was different from other men. He “gave up His spirit.” He had power to retain it, because He was a perfectly righteous man, yet He chose to give it up after His sufferings, so that He might save us; all who would believe in Him for eternal life. In Matthew’s gospel it says that He “yielded up His spirit”. If you will turn with me over to John Chapter 10, you will have this truth verified. Verse 17 – “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.” “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.” “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” “This commandment I have received from My Father.” Jesus is the only man who has ever lived who had the power in the day of His death to retain the spirit; but because He voluntarily laid it down, on our behalf, we find that we gain the victory through Him, over death. Look at 1 Corinthians Chapter 15: 56. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.” “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Our text in Ecclesiastes 8, verse 8 says that “wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it”, and in Proverbs Chapter 11, verse 4 it says, “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.” Now let’s look at the outcome of these things. Hebrews Chapter 9, verse 27 – “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.” “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” We will indeed have to die physically some day. But our war will then be over. We do not have power over our spirit to retain our spirit. But through Jesus Christ our Lord we shall be delivered from the great weight of death and the punishment of hell. We do not know what we shall encounter in the future; neither do we know the day of our death. But listen to the consolation of Paul in 2 Corinthians 1: 8 – “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.” Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that

we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us....” This is where our trust is, not in our own power to retain the spirit, but to have Christ’s power to save us from our sins, to raise us from the dead, and grant to us to know the blessedness of eternal life.