

Rooted: Death

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, November 5th. It's good to see so many smiling faces this morning, and I apologize for puns. I can't avoid them. My name is Kent Dixon. It is my joy to be the pastor here. Welcome to each of you this morning.

We know that people are listening on the phone line in the days ahead or on the website or different things like that. So a quick pastoral announcement. We will be away next weekend.

So we're welcoming Paul Hay, my good friend Paul. You know Paul well as our guest speaker next week. And Paul will be bringing a sermon titled Lavished that will explore God's blessings to us.

And I've already written a little bit of a blurb, so watch the newsletter this week for a teaser on what is to come next Sunday. So this morning we're continuing in our sermon series, Rooted.

And over the past several weeks in this series, we've been considering many of the things that form the foundation of our faith. Things that we need to remember and understand clearly to remain rooted firmly in Christianity.

[1 : 0 7] And every sermon in this series will be available, is available on our website, and on our podcast, and the phone, all the different channels. So that, especially on the website, you can revisit them.

Because as I've said before, they are standalone topics, but they are overall a good study of the foundations of our faith. So if you've missed them or want to catch up, I know people have said, I sometimes read the passages or share the passages too quickly, but those are also listed there if you ever want to go back and look again.

So we have a diverse group with us this morning, right? Everybody take a look around. There's different ages.

There's different heights. Some of us are shorter. There's different colors. There are different backgrounds. Some of us may be follically challenged. Some are not.

Pray for me. So everyone here this morning is different from everyone else in some way. Is that fair? Does that seem accurate to you? Some of us are different from others in many ways, in fact.

[2 : 1 4] But we all have one thing in common. You may say we have many things in common. You might say, well, we're all in church this morning. Okay, that's an obvious one.

Unless someone forgot daylight savings, so they may not be with us, but are with us in spirit as they realize what time it actually is. We might say we're all followers of Jesus, right?

We're here in church on Sunday morning because we follow Jesus and we consider ourselves to be a family under him. And if you read the newsletter blurb this week, you've had a bit of a hint.

So there's something every one of us will experience at some point, and that is death. Linda said to me this morning that Paul is dying to hear my sermon this morning.

Sick. And I loved it. So I said I have to use it. But death is the common experience that we will all share at some point, and that's our topic for this morning.

[3 : 14] So you may have heard the saying before that there are two things that are sure in life, and they are death and taxes. Yes.

You may have also heard the saying that you can't take it with you. I've talked about death briefly in the past. I personally enjoy the addition that someone made to that concept by saying, that is why you never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul.

Takes a moment to sink in on that one. So the topic of death, as I talked to pastor friends and a few others this week, I said, oh, I'm preaching on death next Sunday.

That'll be fun. But it's important. It's critical. Because at least we're going to consider it for a while this morning, because we will all, as we've recognized, face it at some point.

And you could say, well, some of us are closer than others. There are no guarantees. So the Bible has a lot to say, not only about death, but about our death.

[4 : 20] Since this sermon series is looking at some of the important topics, the important foundational beliefs of our faith, this is one that we really need to know about, really need to recognize, really need to understand.

And so we're going to spend some time on it this morning. And you may be here this morning with lots of questions about death. Anytime I've officiated a memorial service or a funeral, people come with questions.

But we need to recognize that we don't likely have, I don't believe we have, the full revelation necessary to answer every question that someone might have.

We just don't have it. There are things that we may know or may come to know about death, but there are many things that will continue to be a mystery to us.

I'll just tell you quickly, I told this story before, I believe. So I've been, you all know, I was a person in a pew, just like you, for many, many, many, many, many, many years.

[5 : 23] And I would, if I attended a church, I would hear a pastor use an illustration. So I'm always aware if I'm using an illustration I've used before, just so you don't think I'm losing my marbles.

So the veil between this world and the next, sometimes it's thin. We've talked about that, a thin place before.

But one of the coolest stories that I've heard, that gives me hope, evidence even, I guess, was when my father sat at my grandmother's bedside.

So she was at home, she was passing away. She was not medicated, she was not delirious, she was completely lucid. And as she passed, she said, I'm over here, Mel.

Mel was my grandfather's name, and he had passed before. She recognized him there as she passed, and the last word my dad said, she said, was, angels.

[6 : 28] Cool. Very cool. So today we're going to focus, back grounded into the hard stuff, we're going to focus on four main questions about death.

And then we're going to see what the Bible has to say about them. So let's just dive right in, because you can't rip this band-aid off quickly enough. Question number one, why do Christians die?

It's a fair question, and we probably all have it. So there's some references there for you, and I will go through them. Maybe you've never even considered that before, but I've heard it.

I've heard it many times. Why do Christians die? Why do Christians have to die? If we are saved, why do we even have to die? Maybe it's a fair question.

Aren't we going to live forever anyway? Why can't we just be taken directly up into heaven, and not have that awkward, oh, here's my time, moment? Why couldn't we just be taken up like Elijah was, just immediately?

[7 : 30] Well, the first thing we need to clarify, this is important, is that death is not some kind of punishment for Christians. Do you hear that?

Death is not a punishment for people who follow Jesus. Romans 8, verse 1 says, there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Death is not a punishment. The Bible is clear on this many, many times. If you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you will never be condemned by God.

Does that give you hope? You've been freed from ever having to pay for your own sin. And as we considered in our sermon on Jesus Christ last week, he already paid it all.

He paid the full bill, past, present, and future, in full. But, it's always a but, we still live in and suffer in a world that is shaped and influenced by sin.

[8 : 42] That's our reality. Romans 8, verses 20 and 21 says, for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Our world is not right. We look around us and we recognize, hopefully, we recognize that. It's not how God meant it to be.

It really isn't. And even Christians suffer. The Bible talks about it all the time. Are you suffering in some situation in your life?

I know I am at times. We still sin. We still get sick. We're still caught up in wars and disasters, just like other humans are.

And the death of Christians is still part of living in this broken world. That's just our reality. But we also need to remember that one day, death will be, hallelujah, completely removed.

[9 : 58] It will have no power over us any longer. 1 Corinthians 15, 25, and 26 says, For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. One day, death will be swallowed up in victory. One day, death will no longer have any power.

One day, death will no longer be a thing. It's a pretty big thing for us right now. Jesus will return and death will cease to exist.

Poof. But until that day, death will continue to claim every single one of us. So question number two.

What happens to Christians when they die? There's a whole list of verses there. So first of all, as Christians, we don't need to be afraid to die.

[11 : 04] So as you sit here this morning, pondering your mortality, does it scare you? Does it worry you? Does it concern you? Hebrews 2, verses 14 and 15 says, Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, he being Jesus, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Friends, Jesus broke the power of death. He shattered it. And it no longer has any hold on those who belong to him. No permanent holds.

So if you're a sincere follower of Jesus Christ, have you ever thought of, I think this is neat, have you ever thought of death as not an ending, but a beginning?

Can you look at it that way? Have you ever thought of death as being a doorway? A transition into the real life that God has for us?

If you're struggling with the idea of death or dying, ask God, and I mean this sincerely, ask God to give you a deeper understanding and a faith that the promises he has given us in scripture regarding our death are true.

[12 : 41] That what waits for us, what the Bible says waits for us is true. Don't ever, ever struggle in concerns like that alone because that's why we are a family.

Bible tells us that when Christians die, their souls go into the presence of God immediately. Isn't that cool?

2 Corinthians 5 verse 8 says, Yet we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Paul is so clear there that you're either in your body or you're with the Lord. There's no transition there. Philippians 1 verse 23 says, I am hard pressed between the two.

He recognizes the struggle. My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. The reason I'm struggling a bit this morning is I miss people who are gone.

[13 : 52] I really do. But I will see them again. So our bodies remain behind, but our souls are with Jesus.

And I can say with confidence that it will be far better, even on my best day, to be there than to be here. But, giving you lots of grace in all of this today, it's still alright, it's healthy, it's normal to mourn the death of a Christian friend or relative.

I've said to people before, we mourn deeply, we grieve deeply because we loved deeply. we feel our humanity feels torn, feels that separation, feels that gap that's created when someone we love is gone.

Acts 8, verse 2 says, devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. John 11, 35, you know it, says, Jesus wept.

the people who knew Stephen knew he was with Jesus. They had the same faith that he did. And Jesus knew, Jesus himself knew that he was going to raise Lazarus.

[15 : 20] But death still moved him because he knew in his humanity and his divinity that this death of anyone, beloved, is not how it's meant to be.

1 Thessalonians 4, verse 13 says, but we do not want you to be uninformed brothers about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

Our hope is built on nothing less. It's okay to cry and miss our Christian loved ones who have died.

But even when we grieve or mourn, it is not without hope. Right? It's okay and natural to miss them, but we also know that they are safe with Jesus and that we will see them again.

Question number three. this is the hard one. What happens to non-Christians when they die? This is the part that sometimes makes pastors or anyone who recognizes all of what the Bible says to be true extremely uncomfortable.

[16 : 51] This is the part that makes people reject, outright reject Christianity and negatively judge their view of God.

But my friends, we can't just take the easy stuff. We can't just take the, well, this works for me stuff and ignore and discard the rest.

And as distressing as that can be. I'll tell you, I have friends and family members who are gone, who I know, based on what I believe are lost.

Not easy. Matthew 25, this is a bit of a stretch so you can follow along. Matthew 25, verses 31 to 46.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

[17 : 59] And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on the right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father.

Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink.

I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and gave you drink? And when did we see you as a stranger, and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you as sick, or in prison, and visit you? And the King will answer them, truly I say to you, as you did it for one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.

[19 : 03] Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you cursed, and to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. for I was hungry, and you gave me no food.

I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me. Naked, and you did not clothe me, sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.

Then they also will answer, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you? Then he will answer them, saying, truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. This is the hard stuff. The Bible is crystal clear.

That when people who have rejected Jesus die, their souls immediately go to eternal punishment. Their bodies remain in the grave, but their souls go to hell.

[20 : 21] Now, I'm not going to sidetrack into a, is it a literal hell, Pastor Kent? Is it a fire and brimstone? Is it under the earth? Is it above? Is it somewhere? No. We don't need to go there.

There's a clarity of separation and anguish that will occur. John 5, 28 and 29 says, Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out.

Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Fast forward to the end.

Revelation 20 verse 12 says, 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, hear this, according to what they had done. When Jesus returns, the souls and bodies of people who have rejected him will be joined again with the rest of us when we face God's final judgment.

[21 : 38] At that time, they will be judged, as we read, according to what they have done. And both their bodies and souls united will be cast into hell.

So we'll be looking more closely at that final judgment in two weeks. So hopefully that's not a Sunday you'll want to skip. How that final judgment will be looking at it, will be looking at what the Bible says about it, how it relates to Christians in a few weeks.

So please be here for that, because I see this Sunday and the final two Sundays of this series as being a trilogy that you really need to experience.

So the Bible is clear. There's no hope for anyone who dies without trusting Jesus. this. And I've heard the conversation, I've had conversations, what if, you've all heard this, what if someone lived on a remote island and never heard?

We serve a God of grace, my friends. There will be a way. What we're talking about here is being told the truth and saying, nope, not interested.

[22 : 54] that's the judgment we're talking about. Paul wrote that he had great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart about his fellow Jews who were rejecting Christ and dying without him.

And as I touched on, perhaps you've experienced this yourself, someone that you knew that you desperately wanted to know Jesus, and they said, no thanks.

So let me give you this as well. We cannot completely, with our own certainty, know, unless someone tells us that they have rejected the Lord.

We can't know. Or that they have accepted him unless they tell us. So knowing that you're about to die, we know this, it can bring clarity, right?

It can bring focus. It can remind us of the priorities, the things that are of true value in our lives. Also at times, that clarity that comes at the end can bring true, deep repentance, can bring restoration, and a cry to God that we don't see in someone's life in another way.

[24 : 18] And so a seed of the gospel message that was planted in someone's life at any point can be used by God to change and soften their heart before it's too late.

And I'd suggest that most of the time, we simply can't know where a person stands with Jesus. Is that fair? That may sound like a cop-out, right?

Well, you can't know for sure, but it's true. because my relationship with Christ is my relationship with Christ. So you should, hopefully, with some confidence, be able to say, my pastor believes in the Lord, my pastor is saved, my pastor is going to heaven, and is leading us in the same direction.

Doesn't always happen though, but I'll tell you, it is true in my case. But we can't know, right? It's a personal, that's why we call it a personal relationship with Christ, because it is between us and him, ultimately.

God knows our heart like no one else. And so a person's salvation may be something that only they and God know for sure. So hopefully someone with a true and genuine relationship with Jesus that will be clearer in their life by the fruit, we use that, right?

[25 : 43] The fruit that will be evident. their heart, their attitude, the way they speak, the way they treat other people, their relationships, that should be evident.

And if not, I'd be concerned. Christians though, can also produce rotten fruit. You ever done that? Said something stupid, done something stupid, and gone, huh, that was about as unchrist-like as I could have been in that moment.

Have you ever done it? I've done it. And it means we're human. It means we're human and we're sinners and we have a savior. So someone may declare Jesus as Lord with their words, but still not live in a way that reflects that the Holy Spirit is at work in them.

People may act like Christians, may profess that they are Christians, but their words and behavior may point to something different. And that can highlight a concern for the state of someone's heart.

So regardless of that, guess what? You're not responsible for another Christian's behavior. But the best thing to do is to make sure that you are trusting Christ right now and that you keep returning to him.

[27 : 09] I got to fast forward. I'm getting too into this. Question number four, when will Christians be raised from the dead? So, first thing to recognize, I am not going to talk about all the different kinds of interpretations of the end times.

Not going to do it. But as we've talked about, when you die as a Christian, your soul immediately goes into the presence of God. But your body remains in the grave.

Well, what if someone was cremated? Leave it. Just leave it. I had a conversation with somebody one time and I said, you don't think Jesus can restore the contents of an urn into a perfected human body?

I said, don't put God in a box. The reality though is that your soul goes into the presence of God, your body remains in the grave waiting for Jesus to return. When you will be made new.

Romans 8, 22, and 24 says, for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

[28 : 17] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we are saved. faith. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

Faith, right? There's faith. When Jesus returns, we recognize the Bible says we will be fully and completely redeemed and sanctified.

That theological word. 1 Corinthians 15, 22, and 23 says, For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order.

Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming, all those who belong to Christ. So the day Jesus returns, our bodies will be reunited with our souls, and our transformation will be complete.

[29 : 26] and if we're still alive when Jesus returns, the Bible tells us that we will be instantly transformed. You don't have to die to be transformed in Christ.

If we're alive when he returns, that would be nice if it was today, we will be restored into our resurrection bodies. 1 Corinthians 15, 51, and 52 says, and we heard this last week in our sermon on Jesus, behold, I tell you a mystery.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Every Christian will have a new, renewed resurrection body. And where do we learn this? Well, lots of places. 1 Corinthians 15, 23 says, but each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming all those who belong to Christ.

So as Christ comes in his resurrection body, which we know he has now, we will have ours. 1 Corinthians 15, 49 says, just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

[30 : 58] Philippians 3, 20, and 21 says, but our citizenship is in heaven. We don't belong here. And from it we await a savior.

Jesus will come from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body. by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Theologically, this is called glorification. Our new bodies will live forever. Never wear out, never get old, never get sick, never again show the signs of their warranties expiring.

They will be vital and strong forever. So, pastor's prerogative, I'm going to cheat and give you one last question. And you may have this on your mind right now.

What will happen to you when you die? You can be sure that one of two things will happen to you. If you die as a Christian, you will immediately go into the presence of God.

[32 : 17] When Jesus returns, your soul will be reunited with your new body. You will live with Jesus and the others who have died in Christ before you forever.

If you die without Jesus, you will be immediately an eternal punishment. When Christ returns, your soul will be reunited with your body once again.

You will be judged, as we all will, by the way, based on your actions. So my friends, I implore you, as a pastor, as someone who cares about you deeply and your eternal destiny, place your trust in Jesus Christ.

Live as his follower in this life, and your eternal destiny will be secure. Amen.