

We're All Gonna Die!

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[0:00] Amen. Amen.

Well, brothers and sisters, I may as well give it to you straight this morning. We're all going to die.

Now, that's a sobering thought, isn't it?

Each of us, unless the Lord returns in our lifetimes, each of us is going to see the grave. Each of us is going to return to dust.

Now, we might try to ignore it. We might try to deny it. We might try to forget it. As much as it might make us uncomfortable, we're all going to die.

And not just us, everyone. We're all going to die. Now, every year at Ash Wednesday, Christians around the world gather together to remember we are dust.

[1:28] We remember on this day that the things of this world, even our bodies, are dust. We remember that thieves can break in and steal our worldly goods, that everything in this world rusts, decays, fades away.

Now, of course, we remember that formally every year on Ash Wednesday. But sometimes life itself gives us that reminder, doesn't it?

Sometimes we lose the people that we love the most. We lose friends. We lose loved ones. And sometimes we're reminded of the frailty of our own bodies.

We're reminded that they're only dust. Now, I remember the first Ash Wednesday service that I ever preached took place right after a seminary classmate of mine was found dead in his room of a heart attack unexpectedly.

Now, all of us, the students, the faculty, had to face the reality that without warning, our classmate Terry was taken from us.

[2:43] And losing him reminded us painfully that we're dust. The dust we shall return. Have you ever had that kind of painful reminder?

I think most of us have. Most of us have seen those we love be lowered into the ground.

Have you ever felt that your body isn't going to last forever? That it's frail?

It's subject to corruption? That no matter how strong and healthy your body may be, it's going to decay? I've certainly felt it.

You know, as a young man in seminary, healthy, strong, and athletic, and confident, I started to get sick, and we couldn't figure out why. Started running fevers and having flu-like symptoms, and then my joints started swelling.

[3:56] I went from being an athletic young army officer to being barely able to get off the couch. Now, when the diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis finally came, I had to accept that my life had changed.

That while my disease could be managed, and that with treatment I could basically lead a normal life, there's no cure.

With my disease, my body literally attacks itself and tries to destroy itself. When I feel tired, when my joints hurt, I'm reminded that I'm dust.

That to dust I will return. I've had to learn to trust that God's grace is sufficient for me. That His strength is made perfect in weakness.

That's a lesson that each of us has learned, or will learn eventually, when our bodies remind us of their frailty.

[5:03] The things of this world are passing away, brothers and sisters. Our bodies are growing closer and closer to death every day. When we go, we can't take our stuff with us.

Our money, our possessions, none of it's going with us. Now, if this were the final word, we would rightly fall into despair and hopelessness.

But it's not. What does Jesus say in our gospel verses appointed for today? Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. In these verses, Jesus is rightly reminding us that the things of this world are fleeting it's all passing away, even our bodies.

[6:12] But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't leave us in hopelessness. He doesn't tell us to abandon our hope. He tells us to place our hope in something that will last.

To place our hope in the gift of eternal life given by grace through faith in Jesus. Jesus. He doesn't tell us to cast aside the longings of our hearts, but to direct the longings of our hearts in the right direction.

To have our hearts in heaven. To find the joy of our hearts in something that cannot be taken away from us. And that treasure is, of course, the gospel, the love of God, the sure and certain hope of eternal life that we have in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, thieves cannot, cannot break in and steal our gospel treasure. Our heavenly gospel treasure can't be corrupted by rust or moth.

Jesus said so. Do we believe him? Are we certain and are we confident? Jesus, our Lord and our God, has said so.

[7:37] In John 6, Jesus says, All that the Father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. He goes on to say, For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.

And I will raise him up on the last day. That's our hope. If we come to Jesus in faith and in repentance, he will never cast us out.

It's the will of the Father that everyone who believes in the Son will have eternal life, will spend eternity in the loving, joyous presence of God, and will be raised from the dead when Jesus comes again in glory.

If we have come to Christ in repentance and in faith, we have the assurance that we have total and free forgiveness of our sins through his blood.

And we have his promise that just as his body was raised from the dead, he will raise us from the dead too. And will give us glorious bodies, glorified bodies.

[9:00] Bodies that won't break. Bodies that won't get sick. Bodies that won't die. Jesus promised that to all who will come to him in faith.

We here today who have that hope be encouraged. Look to Jesus. Abide in Jesus.

And keep running the race set before you. Not in sadness or discouragement, but in hope.

Because nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing. But it's hard sometimes, isn't it?

Pain really does hurt. The troubles of this life really can trouble us. We'd be lying if we said otherwise.

[10:09] Our bodies are moving in the direction of death and decay. We've all lost people that we love. These things really hurt.

But what does Paul tell us in 2 Corinthians 4? We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For this light, momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Compared to what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do for us and His Son, Jesus Christ, the troubles of this life are like a momentary affliction.

Our troubles won't last forever. God Himself will take away our pain and will Himself wipe all tears from our eyes.

[11:24] The troubles of this life and the struggles of this life will end, but the eternal joy of the Lord will never end. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

Now, in light of that, I have to say that I think sometimes we get lent wrong, or at least we're tempted to. Lent ultimately isn't about making ourselves miserable or about feeling as guilty as possible.

It's about laying aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely to run with endurance the race that's set before us. Now, Jesus has put away our sins and Jesus has given us the promise of eternal life.

We have every reason to rejoice. Every reason not to try to make ourselves miserable because the things that weigh us down in our Christian walk are the things that make us miserable.

When we place our hope in things that don't last, when we find our pleasure in sin, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment and for misery.

[12 : 46] Why is that? Well, because those things can't satisfy us and they're fading away. St. Augustine of Hippo once wrote so many centuries ago, our hearts were made for you, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in you.

Lent isn't about making ourselves miserable. Ash Wednesday isn't about making ourselves miserable. Lent is an opportunity to seek the Lord's grace, to turn our hearts from seeking after things that will only disappoint us, to turn to seeking after heavenly treasure, eternal joy.

For where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thank you.