

Death Comes to All

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] Well, please turn your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 2. You'll be picking up this morning at verse 12.

! And the website publishes written submissions from all kinds of people who want to share first-time experiences about anything.

And they do so anonymously because some of the subjects are quite sensitive. One of the submissions on the site is titled, The First Time I Realized Death Was Unavoidable.

And the writer of the submission begins with the following introduction. When I was around 12 years old, I realized that death is inevitable and that all I ever worked for and gained in my life will just be lost one day when my life ends.

My body will be placed into a finely crafted casket and put into a six-foot deep hole with a headstone saying something nice about my life.

[1 : 21] The question I have then is, why do we work hard to have this fabulous life when one day we will all end up in a claustrophobic hole for all of eternity?

Why must human lives end? We are the most developed species on the planet and hold all the knowledge that will support future generations.

Every time I would think about this, I would get very scared and a little lighthearted at the thought of what I would do for all eternity. Would I see the sun blow up?

How will I spend all of my days? There is a sense of time here on earth, but in death, is there anything like that? What happens when you die?

All of these questions were stirring around in my head when I was a mere 12 years old. I'm sure that all of us, to one degree or another, have thoughts about death and its unavoidability.

[2 : 31] But the truth is, death is a topic we don't like to think about. It's a topic we don't like to talk about, especially our own death.

But this morning, as we continue our sermon series in the book of Ecclesiastes, we come face to face with this topic about death and its avoidability for all of us.

So please follow along with me as I read from Ecclesiastes chapter 2, beginning in verse 12. So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly.

For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.

The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to them all. Then I said in my heart, What happens to the fool will happen to me also.

[3 : 46] Why then have I been so very wise? And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise, as of the fool, there is no enduring remembrance, saying that in the days to come, all will have been long forgotten.

How the wise dies just like the fool. So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me.

For all is vanity and is striving after wind. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you this morning for your word.

And Lord, we thank you for the way that you speak to us from your word, especially in areas that sometimes we just don't think about.

Lord, as we consider this topic of death and its unavoidability for all of us, I pray that you would sober us.

[5 : 0 0] I pray that you would help us to think of death in biblical terms. And in particular, help us to think about our own death. Lord, you know where each one of us is, and I pray that you would speak to us in the way we need to hear from you this morning.

And Father, we trust you to do that all over this room. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Last week we considered how the preacher indulged in limitless pleasures, and he tried to determine what was good, what was appropriate for the children of men to do under heaven during the few days, he said, on this earth.

And we considered how the unbounded pleasures he pursued and enjoyed led him to the same conclusion that it really was just vanity.

We considered how he enjoyed food and wine and work and accomplishments and money and possessions and art and entertainment and sex and companionship. And the preacher didn't just sample these pleasures.

We saw how he indulged in them. And in the end, we saw his sad conclusion in verse 11 of chapter 2, where he says, Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the toil I had expended in doing it.

[6 : 3 2] And behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. Again, that's the same sad conclusion that the preacher came to, because what he found was that pleasure will never bring lasting satisfaction.

His conclusion was that it is vanity. It is a mist. It is a vapor. It is a mere breath. It is chasing after wind. It is an impossibility to attain dissatisfaction going after pleasure.

And so we see that in verse 12, he now turns back to considering wisdom and madness and folly out of his dissatisfaction where pleasure led him.

He turns back to this topic, and it's a topic that he had turned his eyes to previously. He had started to think about wisdom and madness and folly.

And as he sets out to think about wisdom and madness and folly, the preacher comes to a sobering conclusion. And his conclusion is this.

[7 : 5 6] Death is no respecter of persons. Death comes to all. The preacher concluded that it comes to the wise. It comes to the foolish.

And it's quite interesting that when he indulged in his pleasures, when he indulged in these unbounded pleasures, everything his heart could imagine, everything his eyes saw, the preacher never came to this conclusion.

He never came to this sober conclusion about life and about death and the reality of death and the inescapability of death. But when he begins to consider wisdom and madness and folly, he comes to this conclusion that death is no respecter of persons.

Death comes to all. So this morning, I want to consider how the preacher comes to this conclusion. And for those of you who are taking notes, I have this morning three simple points.

First, we see that the preacher begins by comparing wisdom. He begins by comparing wisdom. And as I mentioned earlier, we see that in chapter 1, verse 17, we looked at this about three weeks ago, the preacher applied his heart to know wisdom, madness, and folly.

[9 : 14] He started this back earlier in his life. And here again, we see him picking up the theme. And it seems like what he's really saying is that there was some sense that he had not explored it enough.

There was some sense that pleasure certainly would not give the answers. He had concluded that he had indulged in enough pleasures that pleasure just would not give it.

So he turns once again to consider wisdom and madness and folly. And as he does so, the preacher asks the question, for what can the man do who comes after the king?

Only what has already been done. And it seems like he is justifying turning away from his massive works and all of his endeavors and accomplishments that he expended so much resources on.

And he seems to be saying that really, there's almost a tinge of I want to do greater than anybody else. And he's kind of saying, well, all the one who comes behind me can do is what has already been done.

[10 : 21] So I don't really need to go and build anything else and plant anything else. I don't need to accomplish anything else. I'm just going to give my attention now to trying to think through this issue about wisdom and foolishness.

So he feels justified now turning away from these works because as he says, the only thing that the guy comes after me can do is the same thing that I've done.

So he wants to now think deeply about wisdom and madness and folly. Now, I think it's important to notice that although the preacher talks about wisdom, madness, and folly, that madness and folly are one and the same are very closely connected.

And we see that in verse 13 where he says, then I saw that there's more gain in wisdom than folly. So he's comparing wisdom to folly. Madness wraps up into folly.

When we think about wisdom and folly, though, it's important also not to think about it the way we traditionally think about it in life. We tend to think of a wise person as a person who makes good decisions.

[11 : 35] They'll make good deals. It's not easy to swing them. But a fool, you know, you can swing a fool. You could tell a fool, you know, hey, give me that dime and I'll give you this nickel.

And the fool will take it because the nickel is bigger. But no, that's not the way the Bible uses it in the wisdom literature. In Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon and also in the Psalms, when we encounter these words, wisdom and folly, it's actually using them in a moral sense.

The wise person is the person who is living by God's way. He's the person whose life and whose decisions are informed by godliness.

whereas the fool or folly refers to wickedness. Michael Eaton in his commentary on Ecclesiastes points out that folly is saying wickedness as fun.

That's what we see in the wisdom literature that folly is saying wisdom, sorry, wickedness as fun. The fool is the person who is going into wickedness and into sin and he has a big grin on his face.

[12 : 58] It's a big, fun journey for him. Whereas the wise person is repulsed by that and the wise person sees it for what it is and the wise person would shun evil and seek to walk in God's ways.

So what we see and we don't know the length of time that the preacher would have dedicated to this before he came to his conclusion but we see in verse 14 that the preacher says, in verse 13 the preacher comes to a conclusion he says I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly as there is more gain in light than in darkness.

He says that the wise person in verse 14 has his eyes in his head but the fool walks in darkness and we know what happens when you walk in darkness.

We know what happens if you're in a generally dark area of your house he cuts the power and you lose sense of where you are and you bump into things. But he says well that's the way it is for the fool the fool walks in darkness and the fool will stumble but the wise person has eyes in his head and he says there's more gain in wisdom than in folly.

So the preacher tells us that wisdom and folly are direct opposites they are direct opposites like light and darkness and really he gives us a window to look into our own lives to consider would we be marked by wisdom or marked by folly would we be marked by those who are seeking to walk in God's ways and to obey God's ways as a wise person or would we be the fool who is walking contrary to God's ways and who is having fun in wickedness having fun in sin enjoying sin now the preacher his conclusion in verse 13 is very insightful again because he sees this not when he was pursuing pleasure but he sees it as he is considering wisdom as he is considering folly as he is comparing the two together and it's also insightful because for the first time in all of his experiments that he has done he finds something of gain for the first time he says there is a gain there is something to be gained there is gain in wisdom there was no gain in the pursuit of pleasures there was no gain in trying to accomplish and achieve and to build and to amass things there is no gain he says it all amounted to nothing but now the preacher says you know what there is some gain in wisdom and you would think the preacher would really be excited you would think he would be elated and he would come to the end of his experiments and his attempts to discover things about life under the sun but he doesn't the preacher actually is not excited about what he sees even though he recognizes that there is some gain in wisdom and the reason is that's not all the preacher saw the preacher saw something else he saw that although there is gain in wisdom more than in folly the gain in wisdom was not enough to prevent death the gain in wisdom was not to prevent what comes to the fool death from coming to the wise so the preacher moves from comparing wisdom to number two comparing death or considering death he moves from comparing wisdom to considering death and what we see is that he recognizes that when it comes to death the ground is level the playing field is level it is level for the wise person it is level for the foolish person no one has an advantage death is no respecter of persons death comes to all and we see in verse 14 that this is not just a general observation for the preacher the preacher takes this very personally he takes it very personally when he says in verse 15 he says and I said in my heart what happens to the fool will happen to me also and he goes on to tell us what that is in verse 16 that the wise dies just like the fool now the truth is there are only two kinds of people in the world from moral point of view when we read the wisdom literature there are two kinds of people there are the wise and there are

[18 : 25] those who are fools and the preacher is saying that death is universal that death comes to all of us and he realizes that again although there's wisdom and much to be gained in wisdom wisdom gives no advantage when it comes to death death does not discriminate it takes it takes the wise as well as the fool it takes the poor as well as the rich it takes the young as well as the old it takes those who are ready to die as well as those who are not ready to die death comes to all and this applies to all of us this morning whatever defines us whatever category we would find ourselves in whether it's rich or poor whether it is young or old whether it is wise or foolish we all stand vulnerable to death we all stand equally vulnerable to death and once again the preacher really is taking us back to

Genesis he's taking us back to the fact that sin entered into the world and when sin came into the world death came with sin here's how scripture explains it in Romans 5 starting in verse 12 therefore just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin so death spread to all men because all sin for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given but sin is not counted where there is no law yet death reigned from Adam to Moses even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam who was a type of the one to come so death comes to all because of Adam's sin the pursuit of pleasure does not bring you to this conclusion the pursuit of things that will distract us will cause us to go through life and not be mindful that we are here today and we can be gone in the next moment the psalmist says in psalm 90 lord teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom it is only when we come in touch with our mortality when we come in touch with the fact that life is brief and death is certain that we are minded to turn our hearts to wisdom we are minded to turn our hearts to wise and godly living francois mitterrand was the president the prime minister of france and he was he was all of all of his life self proclaimed atheist but i remembered reading an article when as he was facing death he had cancer and was certain to die in the article i read they said the most prominent book on francois mitterrand's desk was a bible when we face death when we begin to consider death death causes us to turn our hearts to wisdom it causes us to become sober about life and realize that some things that we can engage in are really pointless diversions pointless distractions they help us to really measure life for what it really is and to see soberly and to see clearly and so it was only in death as he faced death that he began to second guess it may be i was wrong about this let me just see if this book has anything to offer me remember an old preacher saying how he had been at the death bed of many businessmen who had died and he said that he had never seen one of them dying who regretted that they spent too much time with their children or spent too much time enjoying their wealth spent too much time taking vacations he said those were not the regrets the regrets were they spent too much time doing business making deals making money amassing a fortune it is only as we turn our hearts towards death that we begin to think in these sober terms and so

the preacher is coming to these sobering conclusions about life and death and even as he sees gain in wisdom he doesn't run after it and he pursues it he actually is tempered by it because he realizes you know what not even wisdom can stave off the reality of death we would be wise to hear the preacher's words this morning we would be wise to hear that death is no respect to persons there's no special circumstance that we can enjoy this morning that will prevent death from coming our way by confronted with all of this the preacher is sad the preacher is in despair and he actually begins to wonder whether it was worth it for him to have been wise look at how he says that in verse 16 for of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance saying that in the days to come he will have been long forgotten how the wise dies just like the fool

I'm sorry I should have read 15 at the end where he says and I said in my heart this is also vanity why have I been so very wise the preacher is regretting that he was wise he's regretting it because he says there's no advantage I'm going to die just like the fool and his conclusion is this is as profitable as chasing the wind this is as profitable as going after a mist or a breath it amounts to nothing because both the fool and the wise die and there is no enduring remembrance for any of them and here the preacher brings us face to face with yet another reality that we sometimes forget when we die there will eventually be no remembrance of us when we die the flowers on our gravestones our grave plots actually will die eventually no matter how long we live and no matter what we accomplish in this life we will largely be forgotten

I remember when I was I remember where I was the night that Butch Kirshner died I was sitting in bed I was looking at the news and I saw this breaking news tickler go over the screen that Butch Kirshner had died in a helicopter crash in the Dominican Republic and I went online just trying to see if I could see more details about what happened and I didn't in that moment but what I did find was an interview that he gave to a newspaper in Singapore where two months ago two months before he had passed away and he was talking about this huge project that they were getting ready to build in Singapore and one of the things that struck me that night as I read that interview was he said my father and I want to be remembered for the things we have built and I thought how ironic that two months ago he would make that statement and now he's gone and he wants to be remembered for the things that he has built well he didn't hear the words of the preacher because the preacher says it doesn't matter who we are it doesn't matter what we've accomplished there will be no enduring remembrance of us and what we have done it may take longer for some people because of who they are and because of what they have done but eventually given time it will all fade away and as I was preparing this message and as I thought about that those words that Butch

[28 : 19] Kirshner uttered I began to wonder is his name even mentioned at Atlantis today you see because his father eventually lost Atlantis lost it to one of the investors because they weren't able to pay when certain loans came due and I wonder if weeks do not go by perhaps even months without the curse of name being mentioned at Atlantis and in 10, 15, 20 years whether anyone would remember that he and his father built Atlantis see these are the words of the preacher the preacher says that in addition to death being a level playing field and death coming to all of us he says the reality is whatever you do in this life at the end of the day it's not going to be remembered it's all going to be a faint fading memory in the minds of people and so again the preacher despairs and so we see him moving from comparing wisdom to considering death and the face of the reality of death and no enduring remembrance next we see the preacher despairing life he did more than despair life the preacher actually says he hated life he says that in verse 17 so I hated life because what is done under the sun was grievous to me for all is vanity and a striving after wind the preacher is saying the fact that one can be wise and live wisely and another can be foolish and live foolishly and yet both die and are eventually forgotten is a hard pill to swallow what would it be like to train for the

Olympics and then go and win the race and when the race is all over there's no difference between the winner and the loser there's no award there's no medal to receive it's just that it's all done but as far as the preacher considered it as far as he saw it he saw that death was the great leveler and fading memories in our minds also the great leveler that it doesn't matter what you do death and fading memories is going to make it all equal in the end and so the preacher says the whole thing is pointless the whole thing is like chasing after the wind because he knows there's gain in wisdom yet when it comes down to death when it comes down to being remembered wisdom provides no advantage and to some extent the preacher's right in terms of his observations righteous people and unrighteous people are dying a mortician will come and get their bodies perhaps even this morning as we are together as we are together in this room probably in the two hospitals on this island we'll have people pass away and some might be righteous and some unrighteous a mortician will come get their bodies those who are going to be buried will be embalmed and some would be prepared for cremation and then after a funeral or memorial service those who are going to be buried will be buried and those who are going to be scattered will be scattered and you look at that and it's all equal it's all the same there's no difference the righteous the unrighteous the wise the fool no no difference in terms of our observations if you stood from a distance couldn't hear what was said of those memorials you would you would say well the very same thing is happening but there are two different outcomes and the reason the preacher despairs is because the preacher was not thinking beyond death the preacher despairs because for him that was the end of the story it was after you were buried or after you were scattered then the book closes but what we know is that the book doesn't close a chapter closes but the book doesn't close one of the age old questions that we find humans grappling with we see it in the old testament in particular is what happened after death in one of the wisdom books in job job asked the question in job 14 14 he asked this question if a man dies shall he live again and the answer to job's question unfolds in the old testament and we see it come into full bloom in the new testament but even up to the time of Jesus people were divided about what happened after death the pharisees believed there was a resurrection the sadducees believed there was no resurrection but Jesus made it very clear in his life when he stood at the tomb of Lazarus when Martha despaired and she wept Jesus said to Martha Jesus said to her in John 11 verse 25 I am the resurrection and the

life whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and then in verse 26 he says and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die do you believe this Jesus offers us the rest of the story that the preacher doesn't focus on he tells us that it is it is more than just death and it ending no after death there's coming a resurrection and although Jesus was addressing Martha about the resurrection of her brother scripture is very clear that there will be a resurrection of the dead those who have done good to the resurrection of life those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation but Jesus shares these words with Martha as words of comfort and like the preacher we will despair in life when we have no hope beyond death like the 12 year old girl or the person who wrote that submission when she was 12 years old we have this muddled view about life after death and when we do despair sets in and we have no hope but Jesus Christ who has risen from the dead helps us to despair helps us not to despair about death because if we have trusted him we have a hope that endures even in the face of death one of the most beautiful things to behold is a dying saint and in my short ministry

I've seen both I've seen those dying without any hope of of Christ and I'm reminded of people who would say well you know am I dying bad I'm going to ask the Lord to forgive me not realizing that in that moment God is the furthest thing from people's minds but then watching one who has put his or her trust in Christ rest in the assurance and absent from the body they're present with the Lord gives incredible hope that in life we belong to the Lord and in death we also belong to the Lord and when the memories of who we are and what we have done would cease in this life we have a promise that we will be remembered we have a promise that we will not be forgotten we have an enduring name as well the Apostle

Paul to the church at Corinth in 1st Corinthians 15 as he talks about the resurrection he gives these words of comfort in verse 58 when he assures us that we don't have to despair over our death he says therefore my beloved brothers be steadfast immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain Jesus said to the thief on the cross that he was going to remember him and I think we can take great assurance as well those of us who have trusted in Christ that he will remember us as well when the apostle Paul appeared before Felix in Acts 24 we read these words he says to Felix but I confess to you that according to the way which was the Christian way which they call a sect

[39 : 01] I worship the God of our fathers believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets having a hope in God which these men themselves accept and here's what he says that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust so I always take pains to have a clear conscience both toward God and man friends there is going to be a resurrection of the just and the unjust and depending on where we are this should give us hope or it would bring fear and the hope that it should bring to us if we are in Christ if we are those who will be described as just and what that means is to be in right standing to be justified to be declared righteous even though within ourselves we know that we are not righteous but God has declared us to be righteous and what

Paul says is there's going to be a resurrection of the just but he says there's going to be a resurrection of the unjust as well those who are not found in the righteousness of Jesus Christ those who will stand before God and will have to give an account for themselves by themselves in themselves because God is perfect and holy there's no human being on this earth who can please a holy God because 99.99% righteousness is unrighteousness to a holy God it is only those who have that credited righteousness of his own son the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that he makes available to all repenting sinners those are the only one who are able to stand before God and be declared just and to be remembered as belonging to him and so brothers and sisters death comes to all but death is not the end after death there's a resurrection and after resurrection there will be a judgment and those who are found in Christ trusting in him and his righteousness will survive that judgment and if you have done that this morning

I encourage you to rejoice and be grateful for the mercy and grace of God that we sang about this morning that that is your portion that is not based on your performance but it's based on the performance of another but if you are here this morning and you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ I urge you lay aside your own righteousness and throw yourself for the mercies of God and plead for the mercies of God and Jesus Christ to be your portion so that when your day of death comes you can stand confidently before God not trusting in yourself not trusting in going to church or reading your Bible or doing good works but trusting in the fact that the one who has brought immortality the one who has conquered death that has come to all that one is the one you're hoping and trusting in and his righteousness will be your plea on that day

I pray that this will be true for all of us this morning that we would all be resting confidently in Christ's saving work and if we are as we go through life even as we observe death as the preacher did we won't despair we won't regret living righteously because the same thing that happens to us happens to the wicked we would remember that there is something beyond death it's called resurrection resurrection and there's something beyond resurrection it's called judgment and only those who are in Christ will survive that judgment let's pray together so