

More Than Death

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[0 : 00] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name, amen. Please grab a seat. In Victorian times, the taboo subject was sex.

Today, I'd say the taboo subject is death. We don't like to talk about it. You want to bring a dinner party to a crashing halt, just lean over to the host and say, so have you given much thought to your death lately?

Even on this day, right, we were supposed to remember great sacrifices that people have made. As I've listened on the radio today and read some stuff, people tend to couch it in terms of soldiers who have fallen or maybe ultimate sacrifice.

When we're actually talking about death, aren't we? We're talking about people dying. So we don't like to talk about it. We don't like to think about it. It's because in our hearts we know that there is a wrongness about this inevitable conclusion to our life.

Dylan Thomas talks about this in his most famous poem. It's an untitled poem. And it's based on his experience of watching his father die. His father was an army man and I guess like a big strapping lad.

[1 : 19] He saw him kind of just fade away. And he told his dad, you know, you should fight this. You should fight this. And so the first three lines of his most famous poem are about wanting his dad to fight.

Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rage at the close of day. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And I wish we could all stave off the inevitable with a good fight. But of course we can't. We can't. Biblically, death entered creation at the fall.

It was not originally part of God's paradise. But it entered creation when humanity wanted to be, we wanted to be our own gods.

We see we want to do things our own way. Listen to what God says to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Because you have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, cursed is the ground because of you.

[2 : 25] In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth. And you shall eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face. You shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken. For you are dust. And to dust you shall return. So death is the result of our rebellion against God.

Now all that to say, we should be incredibly grateful for passages like what we've just heard read really well, by the way, thank you. What we've just heard read this evening.

Because it deals head on with our great enemy. Death. And not just this passage here. Actually, you know, the last few weeks, the theme of death has been lurking in the background.

Let me explain that a little bit further. So, including this week, we've had four, four amazing kind of miraculous stories, right? And the first one, two weeks ago, Jesus calming the storm.

[3 : 25] That's that one up here. Dan, can you cut the lights right at the back here so they can see that painting? Do you know how to do that at all? Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

See that? Yeah, that's cool, right? So I think Dan Gifford preached on this. So it's Jesus calming the storm. It's a life and death situation. Last week, Jesus exercising the demoniac.

And Ryan made the point of saying that death is all about all around this passage. A guy is living amongst the tombs. This week, we have the healing of the sick woman. I'll get to that shortly. And we have the healing of the dead girl.

Clearly, it's about death as well. Now, Mark has purposely clumped these things together. So the writer wants us to see that death does not just mean the end of biological life.

But death is at work in your life before you die. Death is a weed. It's a curse. It's a disease that has infected creation and impacts everything.

[4 : 27] And all of these stories over the last few weeks are here trying to explain what death is and what it does and Christ's response to it.

So from these four stories, death means chaos. The chaos of the storm. Death means chaos. Death means being mastered by evil.

This demoniac living in the tombs, right? He was the living dead, I think Ryan said. The woman who was bleeding. In ancient times, blood meant life.

It equaled life. So this woman who was hemorrhaging out blood, she was living a socially and financially bankrupt existence because of her predicament.

She was watching life just flow out of her body continuously. She was in this continuous state of death. Death for her meant segregation. It meant separation.

[5 : 29] And of course for Jairus, death meant complete loss of hope. Total separation from his daughter. So all of these characters, these last three weeks, have been living under the shadow of death and Jesus brings them out from under them and actually gives them more than what they asked.

But we'll come back to that. So let's have a look at the passage bit by bit. You can turn the lights back on if you want, Dan. Okay, verses 21 to 27.

If you've got your Bibles over, that would be pretty helpful. 21 to 27. So we have two very different people coming to Jesus for help. First, he's a man.

He's described by his office first. He's a synagogue leader. And then by his name, Jairus. So you're trying to get the idea across that this is an important man. He's a man of wealth.

He's a respected kind of guy. And he comes to Jesus and he begs for help. His daughter is dying. So Jesus follows him to his house. Secondly, we have a very, very different character.

[6 : 34] Not a man, a woman, who interrupts Christ's journey to the little girl. And we don't know her name. She's not given a name. She's not given a name on purpose, probably, to contrast her place in society compared to the man.

She doesn't approach Jesus directly like Jairus, you know, head on, but surreptitiously from behind. She isn't rich or well-respected. In fact, she's regarded as unclean.

It's a technical, Hebrew technical term. She's been, you know, menstruating for 12 years, which means that she's been unclean the whole time according to Jewish law, which means that, you know, she can't get married.

She can't have kids. She can't go to synagogue. She can't have community. No one even wants to be around her. No one's probably touched her in 12 years. Just an awful, awful life.

And why did these two people come for Jesus? Well, the answer is faith. Faith. Faith. They were acting on what they'd heard about Jesus.

[7 : 41] Verses 28 to 34. In this very first line here, we hear her heart's desire. So Jesus, as you know here, is interrupted on his journey to heal a little girl.

She says here, If I touch even his garments, I'll be made well. She wants to be physically made well. That's fair enough. But of course, she's doing it all quite secretly.

Because she's very aware of how her body has, her body has let her down, I guess you could say. Her body has let her down.

And she's ashamed. She carries that shame. And she wants to remain completely invisible in the whole transaction. So she touches Jesus' garment. And it's healed. And then what happens? Jesus wants to know, Who did this? Verse 30. Who touched my garments? In the midst of this large crowd, the woman who desperately wants to remain anonymous and unknown and unnoticed because of her shame is brought to the center stage.

[8 : 50] And why did Jesus do this? Because, you know, one of the greatest grip that death had on her was her invisibility, her separation.

Verse 34. Hear what Christ says to her. Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your disease. So the healing part, that's sort of tacked on to the end there.

But listen to these words at the start. Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.

See, all she wanted was a physical healing, right? That's what she wanted. That's what she got. But she also got daughter. Daughter. It's a reintegration, you know?

Reintegrating it. Who would have said that to her over this last decade? Daughter. She got faith. Your faith has made you well. And that word well there, well, that's a salvation word.

[9 : 59] She got salvation. Peace. She got shalom. All of these things were absent in her life up until this point. And how did she receive this?

How did this come about? Well, it says in verse 33 that she humbled herself in front of Jesus. She told the whole truth, didn't she? Jesus called her out. She fell before him.

It says she confessed, right? She said everything. It was her confession. So it's this beautiful picture. Beautiful picture. Firstly, what death does to a person. Secondly, Christ's ability and desire to reverse how it's affected her and actually do more than what she wanted.

But before we move on, I just want to point out verse 30 here. And Jesus perceiving in himself that power had gone out of him. Did you notice that? Isn't that odd?

It's an odd little verse, right? What's that about? You know, I think this is a reminder that restoration comes at a cost to Jesus.

[11 : 04] A costume. A costume. And it points to the great cost, of course, of the cross, which is going to be, you know, take up like the last third of Mark's gospel.

Okay, verse 35 to 40. Someone comes over to Jesus and says, listen, the little girl, you know, that you're on way to heal, she's gone. She's died.

It's all over. So for the family, all hope is gone. Terrible feeling to have hope completely gone.

Maybe you can relate to that. Jesus says, do not fear.

And then goes to the house anyway. And the house, there's a huge commotion. And then Jesus has this quite remarkable line. He says, she's not dead, she's sleeping.

Now what's, what's that all about? He's not denying that she's dead. He's not trying to smooth it over. He's not sort of saying, oh, it's going to be, oh, it's fine.

[12 : 01] It's probably nothing. You know, I think what he's saying is it's, it's like, he's saying that it's, it's death is just not ultimate. Death does not have the final say. It's like she's sleeping.

And this idea of, of death as sleep is not unique to this passage here. When, when Christ is approaching the tomb of Lazarus in John 11, Jesus said, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. When Stephen, the martyr, is stoned to death, it's recorded in Acts 60. He's the first Christian martyr. Reading from verse 59, while they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold the sin against them. When he said this, he fell asleep. And there are lots more passages you could look at up. So in the Christian worldview, death is not the end.

It's not final. It's actually like sleep. Which is why we should call graveyards cemeteries. That's a much better word for a Christian. Because a graveyard, it's a terrible word.

[13 : 05] The etymology is, it's from the word graven. It means holes. Graveyard means field of holes. Because that's it. You just put people in a hole.

It's all over, right? Whereas cemetery, it's a Christian word. It means sleeping place. Of course, this is not the view of the mourners at the house. The hardcore realists, verse 40 says, they laughed at Jesus.

Verse 41 to 43, taking her by the hand, he said, Talitha kumi, which means, little girl, I say to you, arise. And immediately the girl got up and began walking, for she was 12 years of age.

And they were immediately overcome with amazement. And when he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. Now the original language is spoken here, right?

It's because Jesus would have spoken Aramaic. And I think these words are recorded so that people can't view this as an incantation. You know, Jesus sort of said this, kind of these magic words over her, right?

[14 : 09] Which would have been a common thing and sort of, you know, amongst the pagans of the time. So he says, arise, little girl, which literally means, get up, little lamb. It's lamb, little lamb, get up, little lamb.

They're the kind of things that you would actually say to a little girl, right, who's asleep. Get up, little lamb. So she arose, and they were all obviously amazed. Jesus said, get her some food.

It is a beautiful, beautiful picture, right? All right, let's pull this together. I want to make sure we're all working off the same page here. All right, if you read this passage and at the end of it you thought, great, Jesus can do miraculous things.

I will pray that God will do an amazing physical healing in my life or in the life of someone I know. That is not a terrible interpretation, okay?

I want you to believe in the miraculous power of God and we should pray that God would move in amazing ways like this in people's lives. But it is not the central message because it can't be the central message because Jesus didn't heal everyone in the Middle East.

[15:22] I mean, if that was his thing, you know, I'm going to come down to earth and I'm just going to heal everyone, we would have had a very different gospel. He wasn't a one-man miracle medical center guy, right?

Running around just touching people, touch everyone, touch everyone, it's great, you know, well, good luck in 30 years when you eventually die, but another way you could look at this passage is go, okay, Jesus beat death, when I die, I'm going to be okay, I'm off to heaven.

Again, it's not terrible, like I want you to believe that, that's, you know, that's closer to the central message here. And certainly the passage gives us great hope when we think about our death and the death of people we love.

But Christianity is not just about getting into heaven. Here is my hope. My hope is that you see that the writer of Mark is trying to help us see the impact of death on our lives and Christ's response to it and the hope of God's new creation.

What God did for these people here, God will do for the entire cosmos at some point. Whatever death has robbed you of in this world, it will be restored.

[16:56] Whatever good you have, it will be enhanced. Have you ever met anyone that's been really, really sick, that you've known well and has gotten incredibly ill and you say, wow, they're just, they're a shadow of their former selves?

Folks, you, you are a shadow of your future self. And it's going to be the same for all of creation. It's a, it's a wonderful hope that we have.

But what about now? What about today? What about, what about tomorrow morning? We are, we are, we are muddled, we are muddled in God's story of redemption.

We have these wonderful signposts. We have this great hope for the future. future. But we are, we are muddled in God's story here. And through this gospel, we do see these windows of this, you know, this glorious future, but we're not there yet.

We're here. And perhaps you are having lots of dramas in your life. Perhaps life is hard for you. Perhaps you feel like this woman.

[18:09] Perhaps you feel like life is, is leaving your body. Perhaps at this moment in your life you feel the impact of death more tacitly than you have before.

And the various ways that it expresses itself in this world. Chaos, evil, sickness, whatever it is. What is this passage saying to us here, now, today? Here's what it's saying. It's saying look to Jesus. Death is at work in your life.

Death is at work in your life. But look to Jesus. Let me put it a different way. These stories of these two people that we looked at today, it's the story, I mean, it's the story of faith, really, you know. They hear about Jesus, they act on it, and then God asks them to do something very hard.

[19:17] For the woman, he says, come out of the crowd. Really hard for her, come out of the crowd. For Jairus, he says, don't be afraid, just believe she's sleeping.

So God asked them to do something very hard and then God gives them something more than they asked. they wanted a physical thing and in the process of doing that, God gave them eternal saving faith.

So folks, in the face of death, do not be surprised if God asks you to do something really difficult. And that difficult thing for you might be to have persevering faith when things continue to go really bad.

That might be the really difficult thing God is asking you to do. And do not be surprised if God gives you something more than you have asked for in this experience.

In the midst of asking for an immediate and important physical or practical thing in your life, be aware of the thing that God may be doing in your heart.

[20 : 36] The wonderful, great, important thing God may be doing in your heart. Death is at work in the world, folks.

Look to Christ. Amen. If we could have our prayer come up and pray for us.■■■ Buddha they can type