

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Answers

Part 2 What Happens After I Die?

Wendell Anderson, Stewardship Pastor

Weekend 10.17-18.09

Well, good morning Crossroads. Some days, we just wish we had answers. Isn't that true for all of us? You know, people look for answers in a whole lot of places. Some people look for answers in the newspaper. I've been told you can tell a lot about a person by where they start to look at when they start to pick up a newspaper and they start to read it. If they start in the front page they're interested in current events and what's going on in the world. If they start in the money section they're wondering where their money went. They start in the sports section they're wondering what happened yesterday afternoon. Like me, if you start in the comic section, you're just trying to get some comic relief. And some folks look to the obituaries to see whether this is a good day or whether they're already done.

Well, I'm Wendell Anderson – one of the teaching pastors here at Crossroads and last week Tim began a series called Answers and we're continuing that series this week and we'll be in the next couple of weeks, with part two, What Happens After I Die? Or what happens after I find out that my name is, in fact, in the obituaries. You know that is a tough question. It's a question that we tend to not to want to look at. We'll ignore it as much as we can and yet, inevitably we'll have to address it.

You know, we don't put the issue of well, when are we going to die on our calendar or in our Blackberry. If somebody was to come up to you and tell you I think to day is the day that you're going to die I don't think you're going to have the opportunity to look at your calendar and say, well, I've looked at the calendar and I'm booked all morning. Between 1:00 and 1:15 might work out. You know, it just doesn't happen that way. We try and try to avoid it and yet eventually, death and each one of us will meet face to face. We're getting older minute by minute, year by year. You know, and if we aren't pondering this question we've got friends or family who have been or are facing death. So, we might want to continue to put this off and yet the scriptures teach about and speak to the issue of death.

In Ecclesiastes 7:4, which is in your message notes, we see Solomon writing and it says a wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool only thinks about having a good time. Wise person thinks a lot about death. In the book of Colossians Paul actually writes and this isn't in your notes but he writes to set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth. Set your mind on things above. Paul encourages us, that's in Colossians 3:3 to think about heaven. To think about the future, the afterlife after we die. So ultimately there really are two pathways that we can choose when we try to approach answering this. We could either try to approach it from a humanistic standpoint, from a humanistic view or we can try to approach it from God's perspective, from a God centered view.

Now, the bible is an interesting book and we can actually see in one particular book where Solomon tried to answer this, tried to address this from a humanistic standpoint. Solomon's thoughts on this particular topic are recorded in the book of Ecclesiastes. And he really was looking at death purely from a humanistic standpoint. Purely from evaluating death from his own reasoning, from his own thoughts and as he was doing this we can extract four things that Solomon came up with from his perception of death, his view of death.

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Of course, you've heard it said that there's two things we can't avoid: death and taxes. Well, I think Solomon was collecting the taxes so that wasn't his problem but death was something that he determined was unavoidable. Death was unavoidable. And in Ecclesiastes 3, verse 19 we see for what happens to the children and what happens to the beasts was the same. As one dies so dies the other. They all have the same breath and man has no advantage over the beast for this is vanity. Death is unavoidable. Now, some people try to cheat death, you know. There are people spending millions of dollars to have themselves frozen and put away and they're hoping that some place down the road that, in fact, there will be a cure for the disease that they have. That that disease will be cured and that they will actually be able to be brought back to life. There is a whole science that goes around that and yet the fact of the matter is death is unavoidable so all the millions of dollars they're spending to have themselves frozen is a bad investment. If they even, in fact, do get brought back to life and get cured from that particular illness they'll die of something else. Death is unavoidable.

Well the second thing that Solomon found out about death from his natural viewpoint is that death is universal. Ecclesiastes 2 tells us no one remembers the wise and no one remembers the fool. In days to come we all will be forgotten. We must all die. We must all die. The wise and the foolish alike. Death is universal.

So, I can't talk about death and afterlife without a little joke about heaven. So on one particular day there was a pope and a lawyer that passed away. And, well I'll be stepping on, probably no pope's here but ok, anyhow so the pope and lawyer died. Saint Peter ushered them through the pearly gates and introduced them to God and God took them and started leading them down the hallway. As they were going down the hallway they came to this first room and he opened the door and ushered the pope in and it was a small room with a small bed and a small chair and desk and the pope was saying oh thank you my God. I'm so thankful, so appreciative of that. And so then, he walks down the hallway a little bit farther and opens up this large room with a huge king size bed and walk out deck with a pool outside of it and angels just waiting to minister to anything that this lawyer wanted. And he ushers the lawyer in. And the lawyer says Mr. God, I don't understand. The pope, he got this small room and look what you gave me. And God says, well, we have lots of popes up here but you're the first lawyer we've ever seen.

Well, you know, death in fact is universal. It's universal for popes. It's universal for lawyers and it's universal for you and me as well. In Ecclesiastes 3, verse 22 Solomon continues this look at death from a natural humanistic standpoint, from his own reasoning. And he wrote so I realize that the best thing we can do is to enjoy what we've worked for. There is nothing else we can do. There is no way to know what we'll happen after we die. No way we can know. Continuing to look at death from our own reasoning we come up with the conclusion that death is a mystery. Death is a mystery. It's the only natural conclusion. We can't figure it out. We can't understand it. And lots of people try to figure

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this out. You know, those people that start to try to walk down this reincarnation standpoint. They come up saying, well, you know I just don't know what's going to happen. So, it must be well, if at first you don't succeed try, try again. Or I'm going to keep coming back and see if I can get this better. Of, some of the new-agers think we're going to somehow evolve into the overall cosmos. Or the atheists or agnostics think well, we came from dust and we're just going to go back to dust and that's all there is. And yet I don't think any of them are truly satisfied with that. But if we exclude God from our thinking, from our equation and rely solely on our own reasoning we're just left to conclude that death is a mystery.

Well the fourth thing that we conclude from a humanistic standpoint is that death is final. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 says for the living know that they die but the dead know nothing and they have no more reward. For the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun. Death is final.

Well, from the humanistic standpoint, from the humanistic view we must conclude that we're just left in a situation or a status of despair. How disappointing. How discouraging. How despairing we are left with. But fortunately there is another viewpoint. There's humanistic standpoint or we can enter into an equation with God as well. God's perspective. And God doesn't leave us in despair. He doesn't leave us thinking that death is just unavoidable, universal, mystery or final. In fact, He writes a verse that I think in our own natural standpoint we have a hard time understanding. Psalm 116, verse 15 says precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. And in our own reasoning, in our own understanding we might be confused by that. How is it that death can be precious and yet God says death is precious, death of His saints is precious in His sight.

Well, we can get some insight into that as we start to look into the New Testament and when Paul wrote to Timothy this one particular verse gives us a lot of insight into it. In 2 Timothy 1, verse 10. He says, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death. As Jesus appeared, lived His life, died and was crucified for our sins and was resurrected. Through His appearing death was abolished. He brought life and immortality to us, to light through the gospel. And the Gospel is good news. This is good news. As Jesus Christ came we don't have to stay in despair. We can have that hope, knowing that life is there to replace.

Well, Solomon's problem was that he was trying to figure this out all on his own. He was just looking at it just by himself without bringing God into the question and as a result of that he asked the wrong question. He asked the question, really, what happens when we die rather than just looking at well, what happens after we die. In Jesus' appearing, Jesus' ultimate sacrifice answers the question what happens after we die.

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Well, what happens after we die from God's viewpoint is that we either immediately suffer or enjoy the consequences of a decision that we made here on earth before we died. It's an either – or situation. Either we suffer or either we enjoy.

Hebrews 9:27 tells us that it is appointed for man to die once, and after that face judgment. With this judgment comes the either – or. The suffering or the enjoyment. So, our decision must come before death, before this body stops. And we don't know when that is going to happen. Just talked to one of our members here just before service and found out that a family member of theirs, a young family member passed away here on Friday, really not expected to happen at all. They didn't have it in their daytimer or their blackberry, just like none of us do and yet death does come and knock on our door when we're not expecting.

Well, we also see that upon death there is an immediate. You'll notice in your note there it says immediately we either suffer and Paul wrote in another place and I don't have this on your screen but in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 8 he's writing to believers, to Christ followers and he says to absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So, when we breath our last breathes we immediately, that decision is made, it's the either – or. Either we suffer or or we end up enjoy. It's the either – or immediately. It's an immediate consequence of a previous decision. It's irreversible. Not like the reincarnationists think that well, if you don't succeed try, try again. There's no mulligans like the golfers like have. There's no do-overs. There's no reset on the video game. This game is all done at the time we draw our last breath. And it's not a result of how good we are or how nice we are or if we do the right things. What has eternal significance for each and every one of us is the decision we make before we draw our last breath about Jesus Christ.

Well, Jesus taught us what that decision was all about and He used a word picture to help illustrate it. In Matthew 7, verses 13 and 14 He writes, He said enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those that find it are few. Jesus used that same illustration, either – or. Either there's a wide gate and many people go through that and they suffer destruction. They suffer. OR...they go through the narrow gate to life everlasting and not everybody chooses that. It's a tough choice. And the hard fact is that this really does separate the men from the boys. I know that most of us here have made that decision at some point and time in our lives and yet people will still challenge us and might even try to figure that out in our own mind and it's a hard choice to stick with. This is a choice. God's view of this tough choice isn't popular in our society, where we want to be politically correct. We want to accept everybody's viewpoint as being equally valid. Everything can be true and yet that's not what the Word of God teaches. Many struggle with what Jesus and the New Testament teach about this.

But you really have to ask yourself. Are you going to adopt a man only, humanistic viewpoint, reasoning? Are you going to bet the whole farm on that or are you going to, in fact, go with what the bible teaches with respect to eternity? Where are you going to get

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your answers to this irrevocable decision with immediate results and consequences after we die?

Well, what we can see from the New Testament and Jesus' teaching as well, that as a result of that decision either we suffer separation in hell. And 2 Thessalonians points to that in chapter 1, verse 8-9. It says in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.

Now researchers tell us that the majority of Americans believe in an afterlife but they don't believe in a literal hell. But you know, whether the majority of believers, the majority of Americans believe in a literal hell or not doesn't change the fact that the scriptures speak of a literal hell. When Jesus was speaking of hell He didn't check the pollsters to see if this was going to be a popular speech like happens in our society so much. In fact, twelve of fourteen references to hell in the English Standard Version of the New Testament were spoken by Jesus. Jesus definitely believed in a very literal hell; a real hell. He talks about it as a real place and we see it as a place with physical suffering, emotional suffering, relational suffering and spiritual suffering.

Now, some people think that pastors or teachers will sit in their office and think, you know, I think I'm going to teach a message on hell so that I can scare the hell out of them. Well, I don't think that's true but I might mention the reality of what scripture teaches about hell so I can try to scare some out of hell. Not scare the hell out of them, ok, because that would be my desire to scare everyone of us out of hell.

Jesus said that this place would be a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth; a place of eternal sadness. Why is that? Well, because God won't be there. And when do we weep, when do we gnash our teeth? When we find out we made the wrong decision and we don't have a mulligan, we don't have a do-over. We can't change that decision. We end up weeping and gnashing our teeth. So, what happens when we die is that we suffer this immediate, irrevocable, everlasting separation OR we end up enjoying the presence of God in heaven.

Now, in Revelation 21, verse 3 and 4 we see and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God, himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. So, on one hand we have this eternal separation and on the other hand God starts to give us a glimpse of what heaven is like. A very real heaven and a very real hell and the choice is us in the middle. What do we do with Jesus Christ before we die? Well, I'd like to believe that as we ponder some of

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the reality of heaven that we are drawn to that as much as we might be scared away from the reality of hell.

One of my favorite classes in seminary was a class that I took on the theology of heaven and you know, it's amazing that as you study what the scriptures teach about heaven how you realize some of the popular myths that we have had formed in our minds, either through art or comics or whatever it might be get dispelled. The fact is, is that we are not going to somehow morph into chubby little cherubs setting on clouds, playing harps. That is not an accurate biblical depiction of what heaven is. And of course, many of us if we actually thought about that says isn't that cute but that doesn't sound like what I'd like to do for an afternoon, let alone eternity. You know, it's pretty boring.

Now, it's interesting that Paul, as he was nearing the end of his life he actually said something that really made an impression on me. And if you'd like to turn to Philippians 1 I want to share one verse that's not in your program notes. Philippians 1, verse 23. Paul was near the end of his life and he was ministering to the church that he had helped found there in Philippi and he knew he was near the end of his life and he knew there was a lot of work to be done; a lot of work left to do. And in verse 23 he says, I am hard pressed between the two. Now, the two is do I stay here and do this work that's left for me in the church, to help this church get thriving and growing or do I go on and be with the Lord? He says I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. In fact, the NIV says, uses the language better by far. Better by far and that has always made an impression on me. In fact, one of my favorite things to do is to eat and to eat all kinds of different foods. I love just enjoying all of the variety of foods that exist. An yet when we get to heaven scripture talks about a banquet, a marriage supper of the lamb. When we get to heaven the best foods that we can think about here will pale to comparison to what's available in heaven because heaven will be better by far.

You know, in similar fashion whether we've got a simple home or a very beautiful home, when we get to heaven our home will be one that has been handcrafted, a handcrafted mansion by Jesus Christ, himself, the master carpenter and that home will be better by far. And if you think about perhaps the most beautiful spring flowers coming up or beautiful birds at your bird feeder. But in heaven, all of those visions will be better by far. Or perhaps the most beautiful sunset that you've ever seen. But in heaven it will be better by far. In fact, repeat that with me. Heaven will be better by far.

You know, I know that the majority of us here are, in fact, Christ followers. So my desire is that you will be encouraged in a decision that you have already made and this is you just get a glimpse of what heaven might offer us. That you'll be encouraged by that decision. You'll be encouraged by that decision knowing that what heaven promises for each and every one of us will be better by far. Now, some of us here are still checking out the bible; still checking out the claims of Christ and my prayer is, is that you will respond to the

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leading of the Holy Spirit. That in fact, you will desire to be drawn away from this reality of hell and towards this glory of heaven that is better by far.

You know, Jesus said, in John 14:16, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except by me. A very tough decision to make. I am the way, the truth and the life. Enjoy God's presence in heaven, which is better by far. Doesn't depend on how nice we are, how good we are, whether we've done the right things. It depends on what we've done with Jesus Christ. Have we accepted Jesus Christ into our hearts? Have we, in fact, acknowledged Him.

You know, in another place He wrote, come, follow me. Come, follow me. Really, after we die, after we draw our last breath, whether it's fifty years down the road or this afternoon there are no mulligans. No video game resets. No do-overs. It's an either – or at that point in time.

Well, another place scripture records, I have set before you life and death, blessings and cursings. Choose life. Respond to the calling of the Holy Spirit to accept Jesus in your life. So, how do we prepare for this? Well, we choose life. We accept Jesus into our life. We says, Lord, I want to know you better and better each and every day. And as we do that, as we invite Him in we realize that death from God's perspective brings eternal joy. Eternal joy.

The psalmist tells us that precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints because we are with him forever. Well, I'm going to pray and Bill is going to come out with some announcements for us.