

THE OLD PATHS

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Dealing With Death

Joel Raulerson

The subject of death is perhaps one of the most unpleasant topics people consider. However, it is a topic that we need to consider from time to time. Those that are closest to you, the ones that you meet every day, never have a guarantee of making it to tomorrow. We have no guarantee that we will live to see another day. Hebrews 9:27 says, *“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,”* Death is something that relates to every one of us because it is something that all men throughout time face. However, rather than looking at it as something scary, can we find a positive way to deal with death?

One of the positive ways we can look at death is to look forward to our reward. To quote my friend Kelsey, when she was going through cancer treatments, she often said, “Life is more interesting when you are happy.” Kelsey, like many other Christians I know, was struggling with a terminal illness. Yet, she had an incredibly positive attitude. She prayed and had faith in God to help her through her sickness. Although the illness eventually took her, she had a positive attitude up until the end because she was looking forward to her reward. While death can be a scary thing to face, we have confidence through our Lord Jesus Christ that we have access to eternal life if we are faithful (2 Tim. 1:10). We can take comfort in the ability to see many of our loved ones who have passed on before us. We should strive to have the attitude David did when he lost his child in 2 Samuel 12:23. David said, *“But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”* Death can be a blessing where we no longer have to face the temptations, sickness, pain, or suffering this life has to offer. Rather, we can spend eternity with our Lord. Sadly, many do not look at death with the same attitude.

However, what about those that have not lived faithful lives? To them, death is not a blessing. To the family and friends left behind that recognize

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how the departed lived their lives, it can be incredibly painful. However, even in these dire circumstances we can find ways to deal with death and find something positive. Ecclesiastes 7:1-2 says, *“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.”* There can be opportunities taken even in these upsetting circumstances. The loss of a loved one will bring the reality of death to the forefront of most who knew the deceased. It will humble them to question their choices in life and what they plan to do with their lives now, and in the afterlife to come. Yes, this can be an incredibly painful experience knowing that a soul may be lost for all eternity based on how they lived their lives on earth. We need to take the time to mourn with those who are mourning such losses (Rom. 12:15). However, we should also use this as an opportunity to spread the gospel to others when they are facing the reality of death.

Some see death as a scary unknown in the future. Because of the outlook on death that some have, they spend their whole lives dreading death and what that looks like. Wouldn't life be so much better and interesting if we had a positive outlook towards death? Death will come to each of us just as judgment will. We recognize that death can be a painful process. We have all lost loved ones that we miss dearly and that we wish to see again. There are even those we know who died in a situation where they were not serving God. In any of these situations we can still find blessing in death. The gospel can still be spread and comfort can be found in Jesus. The question is, how will we deal with death? Are we prepared for that event?

How Do We Deal With Thorns?

Joel Raulerson

One of the more highly debated passages in the scriptures pertains to Paul's "thorn in the flesh." In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul writes, *“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.”* Different ones will argue that Paul's thorn dealt with a physical problem

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such as eye trouble, stomach, a speech impediment, or headaches. Some have suggested it to be a spiritual problem like a temper or memories of how he persecuted the church. Still some will suggest that it was a person like Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4:14) or some of the Judaizers who were constantly harassing him and impeding the truth. Rather than arguing what the specific “thorn” was, I believe it was intentionally left vague for us to draw parallels to our own “thorns” we deal with. What does the example of Paul teach us about dealing with our “thorns”?

First, Paul did not blame God for his thorn. Notice that Paul refers to his thorn as a “messenger from Satan.” Sadly, when trying times and circumstances come upon many, their first response is to blame God for their problems. God may allow Satan to attack and tempt us as he did Paul, and Job. However, God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). We should recognize that these problems come from Satan and not God.

Paul also prayed for help and the removal of his thorn. Notice that the text says that Paul prayed three times (2 Cor. 12:8). Do we set aside as much time for prayer with our problems as Paul did? This was obviously not a minor problem. This was something he considered serious and prayed to God three times that it should leave him. When we face our own thorns, do we gripe and complain about them, or do we seek help from our Father?

Furthermore, Paul accepted that he would have to live with his thorn. (2 Cor. 12:9). Sadly, many want to look at their own thorns as something that will hinder them from working for the Lord. Too many today want a quick solution for every problem or thorn that they face. Many have the mentality that we should not have to suffer any form of pain, discomfort, or inconvenience. This mentality leads to various forms of sin including laziness, destruction of marriages, lack of work ethic, etc. This is all because we do not want to live with our thorns and continue to serve despite those problems. If we learn to live with our handicaps, whether physical, mental, or emotional, we can still serve God in a pleasing manner.

Finally, Paul looked at his thorn as a blessing. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, *“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore **I will boast all the more gladly of my***

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weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” It is hard enough for most to live with their thorns and continue on with life. It is even harder for most to look at their thorn as a blessing. Paul saw the thorn that he had as a way to keep himself humble and show God’s power and grace. He saw it as a way to show others that despite whatever thorn we may face, God still wants us and can use us! In fact, in Paul’s time of weakness, God’s help appeared to be that much stronger! What a blessed attitude to have! I pray that we all learn to have an attitude to match Paul’s. When we accept the reality of our “thorns” as Paul did, we will learn to take that thorn and use it in our service to God rather than spend our life complaining about it.

Let us have the same attitude as Paul. Let us look at our thorns as things that the devil is trying to throw at us to lead us astray. Rather than blaming God for such things, let us thank God for helping to keep us humble and refocus our lives to what is truly important, serving Him.



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