

When Is a Man Ready to Die?

Sunday, November 24th, 1985

Luke 2:28-32;

"Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

I have a most important question to consider in my message today and this question will serve as the title or topic. I will read my text later on in the message. The question is, "WHEN IS A MAN READY TO DIE?"

All my life I have heard people say; "Well, he was ready to die." I have heard others say, "I'm not afraid to die; I'm ready to meet my Maker." We hear that often stated, "I am ready to die; I am ready to meet my Maker or he was ready to die."

When is a man ready to die? I do know this; the great and important things in life are done but one time. We are born one time and we live on this earth one time, there is one life. We die one time, the Scripture says, "*It is appointed unto men once to die, after that the Judgment.*" We must face God and stand in the judgment one time; after that it will be eternity.

We have nothing to do with our birth; we are born one time and have nothing to do with that. Then, we die one time and we have nothing to do with that. The Scripture says; "*Man is born of woman of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like the flower and is cut down and the number of his months are with the Lord. God hath appointed his bounds so that he cannot pass.*"

In other words, our death, my death and your death, is in the hands of God. He has fixed a date, determined the time and the instrument of death is already prepared.

We do have something to do with how we die. We do have something to do with how we meet God in the Judgment. The Scripture says, "*Prepare to meet thy God.*" So, that indicates that I have something to do with this matter of preparing to meet almighty God, my attitude toward the living God and my attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. That determines how I am going to die.

Our Lord Jesus said this; "*If you believe not that I am He, you will die in your sins.*" He was talking about Himself as the Messiah, the Redeemer, the same one who spoke to Moses at the burning bush.

Moses said, “*When Israel asks me, who sent you, or what is His name, what shall I say?*” God said, “*Tell them; I AM has sent thee.*” This is what our Lord said here in this passage, “*If you believe not that I am, (that I am God, and that I am the Redeemer, that I am the Messiah), you will die in your sins.*”

So, your attitude toward Christ, your attitude toward the eternal God and Redeemer determines how you will die and where you will spend eternity. Our Lord said this to Martha; “*I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me though he were dead, yet shall he live.*”

So, I have nothing to do with when I was born and I have nothing to do with where I was born. I have nothing to do with when I die or where I die. I do have something to do with how I die and how I meet almighty God. This dying and meeting almighty God has something to do with faith, attitude, and our feelings toward God almighty and toward His Son Jesus Christ.

I’m going to give you three illustrations from the Scripture. I am going to go into the Old Testament and choose a man and then pick two men from the New Testament. I am going to give you three illustrations that deal with this subject: “When Is a Man Really Ready to Die?”

First of all: There is David and he is called twice in the Scriptures, “*a man after God’s own heart.*” This is a man whom we know that was ready to die whenever God was pleased to call Him. David was a “*man after God’s own heart.*”

He is then called, “*a man who was raised on high.*” He was also called, “*the anointed of God.*” David was called the “sweet psalmist of Israel.”

If you have your Bible, you can open it to 2 Samuel chapter 23: verses 1 through 5. Here you have the last words of David. You will have the last words of this sweet Psalmist of Israel, this man who was raised on high, this man who was anointed of God, “*a man after God’s own heart.*” You will have for your reading and learning, the last words that David spoke on this earth.

It is said in 2 Samuel 23:1; “*Now, these be the last words of David.*” In verses 4 and 5 we have them and I want you to listen to them; “*Although my house be not so with God, yet God hath made with me an everlasting covenant ordered (and arranged) in all things and sure, and this is all my salvation and this is all my desire.*”

David was saying, “This is it.” David didn’t talk about the time that he was anointed as a shepherd lad to be the future king of Israel. When David was on his death bed, he didn’t call to mind and remind the people of the great exploits and battles which he won. There was the slaying of Goliath and the defeating of the Philistines.

Nor, did he remind them that he was the one who brought the Ark of God back to Jerusalem. He did not remind them of his friendship to Mephibosheth and so many others. Nor, did he remind them of his forty years that he reigned successfully over Israel. He made them one of the greatest nations that the world has ever seen.

No, when David comes to die, he is talking about his preparation and his readiness to die. When David was reaching out to find some comfort and assurance, where does he take us? He takes us back to the foundation of the world. He takes us back to the eternal council halls of God Almighty.

David takes us back to the time “*before the morning stars sang together*” or before the “*sons of God shouted for joy.*” Here is where he finds his confidence, not in himself or not in his works, but in His God, in the faithfulness of God.

He did not find his confidence and assurance in the day of death facing eternity in his own faith but in God’s faithfulness. His confidence and assurance was not in his works, but in God’s works in Christ Jesus. David had no goodness but his confidence and assurance was in the greatness of his God.

His confidence and assurance in the hour of death came from his faith in the covenant mercies of God. Do you have that faith in the covenant mercies of God, the greatness of God, the faithfulness of God, the promises of God and the purposes of God?

David believed God. Like Abraham before him, David believed that “*what God had promised (purposed) God was able to perform.*” Like Abraham before him, David believed that what God had promised, what He promised to Christ, what He had promised in the covenant of grace, He would bring to pass.

You might think, why does he keep talking about this Covenant? David talked about it and the apostle Paul talked about it. Paul said in Hebrews 13: 20 and 21; “*Now, the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect.*”

It is through the blood of the everlasting covenant that you are made perfect, that you are made acceptable before God and made righteous in every good work to do His will, “*working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ.*”

In other words, what David is talking about, here on his deathbed, is a covenant of grace, an everlasting covenant, and “*a covenant ordered in all things and sure,*” ordained in all things and arranged in all things. David, the great king, the sweet Psalmist, “*a man after God’s own heart*” said; “*this is my salvation and this is my desire.*”

I will tell you what it is, the Lord God, the eternal God, “*who declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my council shall stand; I will do all my pleasure.*” That God has given to His Son a people in eternity past, before the world began. He gave His Son a people, “*a people out of every tribe, kindred, nation and tongue under heaven.*”

Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God, became the Surety, the everlasting Surety of the everlasting covenant, a “*Surety of a better testament,*” and His blood, the blood of the everlasting covenant. He took upon Himself the full redemption of every one of those people. That is the covenant that David is talking about. This is what he is saying when he is about to die, “*I am ready to die.*”

How do you know that you are ready to die David? Where are you going to find strength in this awesome hour? Where are you going to find some confidence for this traumatic experience? Where are you going to find light for this dark path you are about to walk?

David said, “*The Lord God hath made with me an everlasting covenant*” and that covenant does not depend on me, it is God’s covenant with His Son in eternity, “*ordered in all things and sure; this is my salvation and this is my desire.*”

It is not what David has done or what David has given. David said, “I believe God. I believe that God has purposed to have a people to populate the new Heaven and the new earth, from Adam’s race, through His covenant of grace.” David believed that God had mercy on him and that by His grace he had been included in that covenant and that God would keep His Word. That was David’s confidence.

You won’t find David going back to some experience, some decision or some work that he did. You won’t find David going back to some deed he performed or some religious feeling that he had. David had his confidence in God. He found his comfort in the faithfulness of God. He found his assurance in the Word of God. He found his confidence in the person of Christ, in that covenant of grace.

That is when a man is ready to die, when he can lay hold of and cling to things greater than this flesh, feelings, fickleness, foolishness or professions of faith. A man will lay hold of and cling to things greater than walking an aisle, shaking hands or carrying on in the flesh. God is greater than these things.

Here is what David is saying in Titus 1:2; "*In hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie, promised before the World began.*" That is where it all started; "*which God promised before the World began.*"

Secondly: The second person that I want you to consider is the apostle Paul. There is no use in me talking about Paul too much; you know who Paul is. He was the great Pharisee whom God saved and revealed Christ to his heart. Paul said, "*He revealed Christ in me.*"

Now listen to this, (you are going to miss it if you don't listen); Paul knowing that he would soon die wrote to Timothy from prison and said; "*Timothy, I'm ready to be offered.*" A better translation (which is helpful), tells us that he is saying, "I am ready to be poured out on the altar as a drink offering."

Paul says, "*The time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me in that day, not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing.*"

Here is a man that is ready to die. We don't have any doubt about his salvation or his readiness to meet God. Here is a man with great confidence, not in confidence of himself but of God's mercy to him. The key to this whole testimony and statement is found in two statements and are genuinely overlooked.

Paul says, "*The time of my departure is at hand,*" we understand that he was about to die. He is talking about his departure from the earth. He did not say, "My death but *my departure* is at hand." Here is the first statement that people miss.

Paul says, "*I am ready to be offered*" or I am ready to be poured out as a drink-offering. Most of the Jews to whom Paul, Timothy and others preached, understood what he was talking about because they knew what a drink-offering was.

Most of us don't know what a drink-offering is. We haven't taken the time to look it up. A drink-offering is found in Numbers 28: 7 and 8. Here is what a drink-offering is and what Paul is saying:

When a lamb was offered upon the altar as a sin-offering to God, a lamb was slain and its blood was shed and its body was burned on the altar. This is a picture of Christ, which is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of these Old Testament sacrifices were pictures of Christ and patterns.

God did not save people through these blood-offerings. "*It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away man's sins.*" These were pictures of Christ. These sin-offerings and sacrifices were by faith until Christ came; He is the Lamb of God, we are told to, "*behold the Lamb of God.*"

Here, the lamb was slain, its blood was shed. That was the sacrifice or the atonement and the sin-offering. Along came the priest and the people; they brought a drink-offering. Wine or oil was poured on the sacrifice. Wine or oil was poured on the sin-offering, the sacrifice on the altar.

This wine or oil had nothing to do with the sacrifice; it did not have anything to do with purging our sins. This wine and oil was a thanksgiving, a praise-offering; it was added out of gratitude to God.

That is what Paul is saying here (and it was a drink-offering); "Christ Jesus is my Lamb, Christ Jesus is my sin-offering. Christ Jesus is my sacrifice before God to take away my sins." Paul is saying that he is ready to be identified with Him. He was ready to be poured out as a token of praise before God and as a thanksgiving to Christ and gratitude to God. He was ready to die for His glory.

That is what he is saying, "The time of my departure is at hand, but I am ready because Christ my sacrifice has died for me and I am ready to join Him in death. I am ready to die for His glory. I am ready, literally, to be poured out just like a drink-offering, the wine and the oil on top of the altar where Christ died. I'm identified with Him."

You see; as David dies, he reaches back to the faithfulness of God. He reached back to the covenant of grace. As Paul died, he reached back to the cross of Calvary, to the Lamb of God. In God's covenant of grace it was the blood of the everlasting covenant.

Both of these men talked about the covenant. One talked of the covenant and the other talked of the blood of the covenant, the blood of the everlasting covenant.

All the hope, confidence and faith that we have is in Christ. You see; Paul looked back with satisfaction; he said, "*I fought a good fight; I have kept the faith.*" He looked around with peace and said; "*I finished my course,* (I finished what God gave me to do)." He looked ahead with assurance and said; "*Henceforth, (by God's Word), there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.*"

Here is the second statement that people miss: Paul faced death looking to Christ his sin-offering and to Christ his righteousness. You don't think this "*crown of righteousness*" was his righteousness do you?

This man who talked so much about Christ's righteousness while he lived, do you think that he would spend his dying hours talking about his righteousness? Don't be foolish! Paul talked about the righteousness of God in Christ in Romans 3 and the righteousness of God which is Christ in Romans 10. When he came to die, he certainly would not be bragging about his righteousness.

Paul the apostle found his comfort and his readiness to die looking to, rejoicing in and resting in Christ the blood-sacrifice and Christ our perfect righteousness.

When is a man ready to die? This is a heavy subject isn't it? It is mighty important. When you read of these men of God, men of whom we know were men of God and didn't just claim to be, they were men of God.

We find that their foundation and their rock sounds a little different from all of the people today saying, "I've made my peace with God; I'm ready to die because I walked the aisle." They say, that they "have joined the church," that they were a "Baptist," "Methodist" or a "Catholic." They also say that, "they have had a feeling or had an experience."

These men who came to die, their last words had to do with something that God had done, not something that they had done. It was something that God had done for them. David said, "*God hath made with me an everlasting covenant.*"

Paul talked about Christ dying for him. Christ was his Righteousness. You can die in peace, if that is your foundation.

Here is the third man: In Luke 2, the Scripture says; "*There was a man in Jerusalem, his name was Simeon.*" It says here, "*He was a just man, a devout man.*" It says here that he

was waiting for something. He was anticipating and expecting. “*He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.*”

What does consolation mean? He is talking about the Messiah. He looked for the Christ, the Redeemer. In the next verse it says, “*It was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death, till he had seen the Lord’s Christ,*” God’s Christ, God’s Redeemer, the Saviour of sinners. “*This was the prophet of whom Moses wrote.*”

God spoke to him and God told him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. What a promise; what rich promises! It says here that “*Mary and Joseph brought the child to the temple, Jesus of Nazareth, to perform that which was required in the Law of God.*” God led this old man, Simeon, right down to the temple, the very day that Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus to perform for Him what the Law required.

Listen to what follows: “*Then Simeon took the child up in his arms and he blessed God and he said; Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace (die in peace) according to your Word for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*”

Here is a man ready to die. He is not talking about his devout ways and he is not talking about his just ways. He is not talking about the years that he spent waiting and waiting on the Lord; he said, “I am ready to die; I am ready to leave this earth.”

Why was he ready to die and leave this earth? Why are you ready? Why is there such readiness to leave here? “*I have seen the Lord, (the Messiah); I have seen the Lord’s salvation.*” By his own confession Simeon was quite ready to die. His assurance was in the fact that with eyes of faith he had seen the Lord and His salvation in the Lord and in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let me show you something here. Here is a man ready to go; he is talking to God. You will notice that he is not bragging about himself; he is bragging on God’s mercy. The Scripture says, “*He blessed God.*”

First of all; the Holy Spirit led him there. The Holy Spirit led his path to cross the path of the Son of God. That is the way that everyone is saved who comes to know Christ. Everybody that genuinely comes to know Christ and to know God in Christ is a work of the Holy Ghost.

This work is a miraculous work and not a religious decision. This work is not just someone winning you to a movement, organization or to a doctrine.

There is a stanza that a hymn writer wrote:

“Not by might nor by power
But by My Spirit saith the Lord.”

“It is the Spirit that quickenth; the flesh profiteth nothing. When He is come, the Holy Ghost, He will convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.” It is by the Spirit of God that men are born again. So, the Spirit of God brought Simeon to that temple.

Simeon took Christ up in his arms; he received Him and he embraced Him. He embraced Christ with an embrace of faith; he knew who He was. This was just like Paul when he said, *“I know whom I have believed.”*

Simeon took up Christ with an embrace of love and with what tenderness he held Him. He took Him up with the embracement of hope. He turned his back on everything else, the sacrifices, the Sabbath, the ceremonies and rituals.

He received Christ and then he blessed God, the fountain of all grace. He blessed God for His revealed mercies. He blessed God for this day and for this hour. He didn’t write to some soul-winner and say, “Thank you for bringing me to Jesus;” he blessed God for bringing him to Christ.

Simeon’s last words were, “Let me depart in peace. Lord, you are sovereign in life and in death; let me depart in peace.” It was all in God’s good favor and wisdom. He could die in peace now because Christ was his peace.

There is no way that a man can die in peace that does not have the Prince of Peace. He will have a song in his heart because he has Christ in his arms. Simeon says, *“Let me die in peace; I have seen the Lord’s salvation.”* Salvation is of the Lord, in the Lord, and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

When is a man ready to die? He will be ready to die when he knows something about God’s grace and Christ’s death. He will be ready when he knows something about the person of Christ through saving faith.