

FEAR, DEATH, AND HOPE

- A. Introduction: We're talking about dealing with the anxiety and fear many are experiencing due to the unrest in our country and the turmoil over the upcoming election. It's part of a larger discussion we're having about the importance of knowing the hope to which God has called us. Eph 1:18
1. We can deal with the fear and anxiety generated by what is going by looking at it in terms of the big picture or the overall plan of God. He has called (invited) us to be part of it and that gives us hope.
 - a. In eternity past God devised a plan to have a family with whom He can live. He created men and women to become His sons and daughters and made earth to be home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4,5; Isa 48:15; Rev 21:3
 - b. Both the human race and the family home have been altered by sin. Redemption is God's plan to undo the damage done and fulfill His plan to have a family on earth.
 1. Jesus came the first time to pay the price for sin so sinners can be transformed into righteous, holy sons and daughters through faith in Him and His sacrifice. I John 5:1; John 1:12,13; etc.
 2. He'll come again to restore the family home by cleansing it of every trace of corruption and death and establishing the visible kingdom of God on earth. Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:10-13
 2. The Bible says that the years leading up to the Lord's return will be increasingly challenging for a number of reasons. It also describes world conditions at the time of the Lord's return. We're seeing these scenarios set up right before our eyes (lessons for another day).
 - a. This is difficult to watch and will become more and more challenging to live with. We're going to see increasing lawlessness, injustice, immorality and unrighteousness. Our lives will be affected by the decisions and actions of people with reprobate minds. Rom 1:21-32
 - b. It's not what you see. It's how you see what you see. Luke 21:26-28--In the context of the difficult times coming on the earth just prior to His return, Jesus said some will be so afraid their hearts will fail. Others will be elated in joyous expectation because they know the culmination of the plan of God is about to occur, giving them hope in the midst of the chaos.
 3. Much of the angst everyone is feeling comes out of the fear that if "their" candidate gets elected and "their" programs are enacted it will be the end of society as we know it.
 - a. At the root of all fear is the belief that something's coming against us that's bigger than the power and resources and power available to us. But nothing can come against us that's bigger than God.
 - b. The biggest "something" that can come against a human being is death. There's seemingly no answer for it. There's no undoing it. Death is the biggest gun.
 1. Fear of death is at the root of our fear of a bad economy or a president who won't stop ISIS. If we have no jobs we'll have no food or shelter and we'll die. If terrorism isn't stopped we could be blown up or executed.
 2. In this lesson we're going to look at the connection between fear, death and hope to help us deal with the anxiety produced by the developing circumstances in our nation and world.
- B. We first need to state some facts about death. Death is a universal problem that has plagued mankind since the beginning of time. Everybody dies. The only question is: when and how?
1. People die, not because it's God's will or plan, but because of Adam's sin (Gen 3:19). In the Garden of Eden God warned Adam that the consequence of disobedience would be death (Gen 2:17).
 - a. Adam disobeyed God. As the head of the human race and the first steward of earth, his actions affected both the family and the family home. Mankind and the earth were infused with death.
 1. Rom 5:12--When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so everything began to grow old and die. (TLB)
 2. Death caused by sin is the root problem in the world. It takes many forms: poverty, injustice, lawlessness, famine, plague, natural disaster, etc. Deut 28:15-64 (lessons for another day).
 - b. That's why there's no fixing the world. No candidate, no political or economic system can remedy

death caused by sin. Only God can fix it. In connection with our present discussion we're going to focus on physical death or death of the body.

2. II Cor 4:16--All human beings have an outward part (the physical body) and an inward part (spirit and soul or your mental and emotional faculties).
 - a. At death the inward and outward man separate. The inward man passes into another dimension (either Heaven or Hell) and the outward man returns to dust.
 1. Luke 16:19-31--Jesus talked about two men who died at about the same time. In doing so He gave us much information about human beings when they're separated from their body.
 2. Jesus revealed that people don't cease to exist at death and they do not "soul sleep". They're recognizable and fully cognizant. They remember their life and relationships.
 - b. The apostle John was taken to Heaven where he was given information recorded in the Book of Revelation. He saw many people who had died. None were lamenting the circumstances of their lives or how they died. The hardships of life were behind them.
 1. Rev 7:9-14--He saw a multitude of people who were killed in the chaos of the final years before the Lord's return. He could tell they were of differing ethnicities. They still had hands and voices and wore clothing. They were praising God for salvation that comes from Him.
 2. Note the description of what it means to be in Heaven. Rev 7:15-17--They will never again be hungry or thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noontime heat. For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all their tears. (NLT)
 3. This confirms several things Paul, who also visited Heaven (II Cor 12:1-4), wrote. To be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord (II Cor 5:8) and the suffering of this life don't begin to compare with what's ahead (Rom 8:18).
 - c. Consider something else John wrote: Rev 12:11--We overcome by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. There's much in this passage we aren't going to deal with now. But note the last part: Conquerors aren't afraid to die.
 1. Paul wrote: Rom 8:37--In all these things we're more than conquerors through Jesus. What things? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword (v35).
 2. These are issues Paul faced due to the time in which he lived and the decisions of ungodly men that affected his life: v36--As it is written: We are counted as sheep for the slaughter because we serve the Lord. In all these things we win an overwhelming victory. (Phillips)
3. Paul developed this attitude because he knew the hope to which he was (we are) called. He knew that Jesus came to deliver us from both death (in all its forms) and the fear of death.
 - a. Heb 2:14,15--Jesus took on a full human nature so He could die. At the Cross He joined us in death to break its power over us, bring us out of death and free us from the fear of death.
 1. Heb 9:26--He came at the end of this age to abolish sin (the cause of death) through His sacrifice. Paul was contrasting Jesus' one time for all sacrifice (v27) with animal sacrifices that had to be offered repeatedly because they could not take away sin.
 2. By paying for sin Jesus broke death's hold over us thereby destroying it. II Tim 1:10--[It is that purpose and grace] which He now has made known and fully disclosed and made real [to us] through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus Who annulled death and made it of no effect, and brought life and immortality—that is immunity from eternal death—to light through the Gospel. (Amp)
 - A. Heb 9:28--Even so it is that Christ having been offered to take upon Himself and bear as a burden the sins of many once and for all, will appear a second time, not carrying any burden of sin nor to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are (eagerly, constantly and patiently) waiting for and expecting Him. (Amp)
 - B. Note the idea is that a plan is underway and it will be completed at Christ's return when we receive the full salvation God has provided. This isn't a reference to what happens to

our inward man. That is decided when we acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord. It is a reference to what will happen to our body.

b. As wonderful as Heaven is, it was never God's intention that human beings live as disembodied spirits in an immaterial world. He gave us physical bodies to live in a physical world.

1. In connection with the Second Coming of Jesus all who have put faith in Christ will be reunited with their bodies at the resurrection of the dead to live on earth again.

A. That's what resurrection of the dead is: the reuniting of the inward and outward man which were separated at death.

B. Physical death is called sleep in the body, not because there's soul sleep, but because it is a temporary condition. Our bodies wake up out of it. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2

2. Paul lived with the hope of the resurrection (Acts 23:6). He knew that if his body died he'd reenter the paradise he had seen years earlier. And he knew he'd be reunited with his body raised from the dead. He lived with that expectation. He wrote Phil 3:20,21 while in prison facing possible execution.

4. Prior to going to the Cross Jesus raised people from the dead as a foretaste of what it means when of what the Cross would provide. All those whom He raised lived out their lives and died again.

a. Jesus was the first human being to come out of death permanently. He conquered death through His resurrection. He did it for us as us.

1. It's hard to image the impact the resurrection had on Jesus' first followers. They watched Him die, they buried His dead body and then, three days later, He came out of death.

2. Matt 27:52,53--Not only that, the graves of many Old Testament saints were also opened following His resurrection. The Ante-Nicene Library is a collection of writings from first century Christians. They report over 12,000 resurrected believers were seen in Jerusalem in the forty days after the resurrection. They returned to Heaven with Jesus.

b. Luke 24:46-48--Following His resurrection Jesus sent His disciples out to proclaim what they witnessed along with the ramifications of it. They went out and preached the resurrection. Acts 2:24,32; 3:15; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30,34; etc.

1. The resurrection is proof that our sins have been fully paid for and wiped out. We have been justified or acquitted of sin (all charges dropped because there is no evidence of wrong doing).

2. Rom 4:25--Who was delivered up because of our transgressions and was raised because of our justification (Wuest).

c. The resurrection is visible proof that death has been conquered. Paul was given a lot of details about the resurrection and the subsequent transformation of our bodies. Almost the entire 15th chapter of I Corinthians is about resurrection from the dead. But note one point.

1. I Cor 15:20-23--He referred to Jesus' resurrection as the firstfruits. Firstfruits was a reference to one of seven feasts the Lord instructed Israel to celebrate every year (Lev 23:9-22). They were real events, but they also pictured what the Redeemer would do when He comes.

A. At the Feast of Firstfruits an omer (five pints) of the first crop of the barley harvest was waved before the Lord. The purpose was to dedicate the whole harvest to God with the promise that the rest of the harvest will come in. It pictured the resurrection of Jesus.

B. The day Jesus rose from the dead (Nisan 16) was actually the day the firstfruits were offered that year. His resurrection is the guarantee that the rest of the harvest (all of us raised from the dead) will occur.

2. I Cor 15:23-26--But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised first; then when Christ comes back, all his people will be raised. After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having put down all enemies of every kind. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. (NLT)

5. I Thess 4:13-18--None of this is meant to minimize the pain and loss we experience when we lose

someone we love to death. It gives us hope in the midst of the grief. There's a lot in this passage we aren't going to discuss right now. But consider this point:

- a. To comfort those who had lost loved ones, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that when the Lord returns He will bring them (minus their bodies) with Him out of Heaven to be reunited with their bodies raised from the dead and we will all live together forever.
- b. What's the hope in the midst of their grief? Paul makes it clear that their friends and loved ones are in Heaven (they've gained, Phil 1:21). For those left behind, the painful loss is temporary.

C. Conclusion: We still have more to say, but consider several thoughts as we close. If you think this present life is the best and biggest part of your existence, you'll be fearful of the things coming on the earth.

1. But if you understand that death is not the end, it's simply the closing of one chapter and the beginning of another you'll be full of hope and expectation.
 - a. The most important thing is not what happens to the body but to the inward man. If the inward man is born again through faith in Christ he'll come from Heaven to be reunited with his body through resurrection of the dead and live on earth again.
 1. Last week we looked at Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They refused to compromise their faith in God because they knew this life is not all there is. We have more to say about them, but for now, consider one New Testament comment about them.
 2. Heb 11:35--[Some] women received again their dead by a resurrection. Others were tortured to death with clubs, refusing to accept release [offered on the terms of denying their faith], that they might be resurrected to a better life. (Amp)
 - b. When you know that this life is not your only shot at life on earth it changes your perspective. It helps you see that what happens in this life is not as big a deal as it seems in the moment. It takes away the fear of death and gives you hope in the midst of hardships.
2. Life is going to become more and more challenging as the end of this age draws near. It's clear from scripture which way world circumstances are headed. The decline is going to continue. In one sense, it doesn't matter who wins the election. But God will get us through until He gets us out.
 - a. This doesn't mean we shouldn't pray or vote or be a good citizen. It means keep your perspective in line with God's Word. The rightful King of earth is about to return and that's a good thing.
 - b. Don't fight with people about non-moral, temporal issue. The most important thing is not who gets elected, but that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus so they can have a place in His kingdom on earth.
 - c. Isa 26:3--The Lord has promised to keep us in perfect peace if our mind is fixed on Him. Instead of spending all your thought time speculating on what "their" candidate will do if elected and then fretting over it, why not focus on what Jesus will do when He returns. More next week!