

# The Definitive Word On Death

## 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

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**[Dr. McKinley, *Definitive Word On Death* ]**

And all of the church said? [AMEN!] I thought you'd say hallelujah. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. [congregation laughter] How fabulous is the truth that Jesus has prepared a place for us called heaven and that one day those who have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will indeed go to a place where there will be no more night. And Alan Monk, I think you for sharing that song with us. This weekend marks the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Alan and Dewana Monk coming to be leaders in our business arena. Alan is the business administrator here at Prestonwood and along with Jerad and Jordan a great blessing to our church [applause] and a..., we just praise the Lord for them and there could not have been a better message in song for the message from the Word of God this morning. So if you have a Bible, open it to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 15 and in just a moment we're gonna be reading and studying there together. But a..., I also had the opportunity of going and spending a few days with our students in New York and then after being there for a couple of days catching a train and going up to Boston and a..., it was wonderful to go to a..., such a city of heritage here in America. I was there just after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and a..., took some time to make the journey of the freedom trail, to go back and to mark some of the a..., early moments in American history and some of the places associated with that. And I found myself, while on a few days of vacation in June [July ???] a..., walking through a cemetery in the heart of Boston. In fact, what I did was I walked around in a place that is known as the Granary Burial Ground. It was established in 1660 and with just a brief turn off of a major street there a..., right in the heart of the downtown area of Boston, you stepped back into time and back into the names and the final resting places of some of the most significant figures in American history. When you step off of Tremont Street and in the through the gates there of the Granary Burial Ground, you immediately see a big a..., oblige that is straight ahead and there you see the name Franklin. And while Benjamin Franklin is buried in Philadelphia, his parents and all of his extended family are buried there in the Granary Burial Ground, right there in the heart of Boston. In fact this small plot of ground is said to be the final resting place of some 1600 people and among those whose names are found there is also a ~~very~~...another very significant figure in the American Revolution and that is Paul Revere. It is where Paul Revere's grave can be found. It also the place that you find the names of 3 of the signers of The Declaration Of Independence; it is there that you find the names Samuel Adams and John Hancock, you know about putting your John Hancock and the John Hancock name? And then the a..., burial place of Robert Treat Paine. But one of the more curious places that I visited as I walked through this cemetery on that day was the headstone that was marked for the name of a lady by the name of Mary Elizabeth Goose. Mary Goose, she's known as Mother Goose and

our children have grown up of course hearing and reading the stories and the rhymes of Mother Goose and so she is one of many whose names are found there. And as I spent some time there, I was a bit surprised that here on vacation I'm strolling through a cemetery, but I did find it to be a fascinating experience. Because you can learn a lot as you simply take time to stop and to read the epitaphs that are there upon the graves. An epitaph is simply a, a word that expresses what is upon the tomb. The word epitaph comes from the joining of 2 Greek words, "*epi*" which means upon, and "*taphos*" which means tomb. Now we use the word, not only to speak of the marking of a grave, but we also use that word today when we use the word epitome. Do you ever say that is the epitome of? It's simply condensing something to the final statement, to the smallest expression. And so going all the way back to the time of the Egyptians epitaphs have been put on tombstones to mark the life and the legacy of people who have gone before. I found a number of interesting things on some of the epitaphs there at the Granary Burial Ground. And it also caused me to look at some other epitaphs that a..., I've come across in recent days.

In England there is a grave that is marked:

*Sir John Strange*

*Sir John Strange, here lies an honest lawyer and that is strange.*

That is what is on his epitaph in England. [pause for congregation laughter] And all you lawyers said, "Oh me!" Okay, [more laughter] down in Key West Florida a lady doctor had this put on her tombstone; it simply says:

*I told you I was sick.*

Heh, heh, heh. [more laughter] And then in the 1880's in Nantucket, Massachusetts this epitaph was placed on a headstone:

*Under the sod and under the trees lies the body of Jonathan Peas. He's not here ~~there~~...this is only the pod. Peas shelled out and went to God.*

Heh! [pause for more laughter] You'll love this if you're from the deep south in Lee County, Mississippi there's an epitaph that says this:

*Once I wasn't, then I was, no I ain't again.*

Heh! [pause for more laughter] And in a Maryland cemetery there is this epitaph:

*Here lies and atheist, all dressed up and no place to go.*

Heh, heh! [pause for more laughter] Well, there's some place to go, he may have just gotten dressed for the wrong occasion though, that's all I can say. [more laughter] But back to Boston. As I walked around in the old Granary Burial Ground I did find an epitaph that a..., was a bit alarming and a..., definitely made me stop and think. The grave was simply attributed

to Captain John DeCoster who died on January 28<sup>th</sup> 1773 at 26 years of age. And on his grave this is what it said:

*Stop here my friend and cast an eye, as you are now so once was I.  
As I am now, so you must be. Prepare for death and follow me.*

Happy day, pass the Prozac. I mean I stood there and thought, Lord that is so straight. In fact it is so true. In fact there is a same epitaph found on another grave over in England and someone came by and read it and so found the need to not just leave it as it was that they added this inscription:

*To follow you I'll not consent, until I know which way you went.*

Heh, heh, heh! [pause for more laughter] I like that a lot better. But the fact of life ladies and gentlemen is simply this; that there is tremendous truth in the epitaph found on the tombstone of Captain John DeCoster. Death is a reality. In fact every day in life we are surrounded by the reality and the alarming nearness of death. If you pick up a newspaper today there is a list called an obituary. If you watch a news story or news headline you will find that there are many who in the past 20-hour...4 hours have faced the sudden reality and the stark tyranny of death. And wherever it may be that we go in the course of the day, whether it's driving a car, passing the...one of the many cemeteries in our area or looking at news or whatever it may be. The fact of life is, is that every one of us has to face this issue called death. Now there are a lot of different ways in which we try to deal with it. Hollywood has chosen to **GLAMORIZE** it. We've glamorized death through violence and through fear and fright and there are tremendous dollars made in movies today that simply glamorize death, going out in glory a..., all of the things that are associated with that. We also live in a world that has chosen to **COMMERCIALIZE** death. That is we've taken it and tried to move it from the grim reality of what it is and we've tried to dress it up. If you've ever had to deal with the settlement of a body and a...and a funeral cost, you know that it is ~~as a~~...absolutely astronomical what can be invested in buying a vault and buying a casket and all of the things that are involved and, and all of the expenses that are associated and, and ultimately you have to ask yourself, "What am I perpetuating here?" Because to be dead is to be dead. Other people have chosen to **ECONOMIZE** it, to economize death. When I lived in South Florida every day I would drop my a..., children off at a school and when I would turn off of the parking lot of Westminster Academy there at Corridge Presbyterian Church and turn south on US 1, getting ready to make a U-turn to go back north to Boca Raton, as soon as I would turn on the right-hand side, right there in the store front was a big store called the Casket Store and all you could see were open caskets inside. And I was always amazed when I saw that, especially when they had the banner out front that said "SALE." [pause for congregation laughter] In the corner of, of the window it said, "WE DELIVER" I wanted to go like, yeah, like I'm gonna pull up and pick one of these things up, [more laughter] and yet I thought how, how strange this is. I mean I understand the why and the what and, and all of that, but as I looked at it, I

thought, you know that's the way that some people have chosen to do it, it's just, let's just go ahead and economize this and just make it a business transaction. Sadly in America we've even chosen to **LEGALIZE** it, we've chosen through the process of abortion that is protected on demand in America to legalize the destruction of a human life in a mother's womb, a place that oughta be the safest place in all of the earth has become the place of death for many babies. And we're living with such a callous conscience that we even live in a time in which we are threatened that one day the way that we will deal with death is to simply choose the method and the timing of exit through euthanasia. What a tremendous tragedy it is. At times we've even tried to **PRIVATIZE** death, that is that we just don't talk about it. And we assume that if we don't talk about it, if we don't deal with it that maybe, well maybe death'll forget about us, if we just never mention it, never talk about it, maybe it'll just go away. You see ladies and gentlemen, we've done all these things in the reality of a world that is indeed surrounded by death. We've done everything but one thing that we must do and that is that we have to **PERSONALIZE** it. Because the statistics are unchanging, one out of one people's dies. And while I know that's not the most enjoyable thing for me to talk to you about this morning it is true. And while I know that this is not exactly the subject that you would get up and, and make coffee talk, as you would sit around with your friends or possibly go to the water cooler and say, "Let's talk a little bit about death." I can promise you everybody will leave if you do. The fact of the matter is that the Bible speaks very opening and forthrightly to this subject and of all the themes that are themes in the Bible. The Bible is very a..., direct in dealing with the issue of death and in talking about this subject that is both and invader and an equalizer among all of mankind. And over the last few week as we've studied the Word of God together I've talked to you about the last word on faith and the final word on truth, but today I want us to go to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 15 and I want us to consider together, *The Definitive Word On Death*. And while this is a message that makes all of us uncomfortable including the guy standing behind the pulpit, it is a message that I think that is of the utmost importance. The Bible is very simple in it's approach to the subject. In the book of Ecclesiastes where it talks about times and seasons, the Bible simply says there is: [Ecclesiastes 3:2]

*A time to be born,...*

And there is:

*...a time to die;...*

These are the bookends of live.

*A time to be born and a time to die;...*

But when it comes to the issue of death, what does the Bible have to say and how can we address this issue in life? Well, let's begin reading in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 15 and in verse 19. The apostle Paul is writing to the church in Corinth and wanting to deal with this very issue that I'm

discussing with you this morning and this is what he says, he says:

*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

Literally, he says, this thing called the Christian faith is a faith that deals with death and deals with eternal life. But if there is no eternal life and if death is all that there is, then if we have hope only in this life we're a pitiful group of people. Because the message that we preach and proclaim is not a message that leads to death, it is ultimately the message of life and of the triumph that we have in Jesus Christ and therefore he goes on to say in verse 20:

*<sup>20</sup>But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For since by man come death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom of God the Father, when He puts all...an end to all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For He must reign till He has put all things under His feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy that will be destroyed is...*

Say it together.

*...death.*

The last enemy that is gonna be destroyed is death. But Paul said, don't you wonder for one minute about what is ahead, because the fact of the matter is that Jesus Christ came, Jesus Christ died, Jesus Christ rose in order that He might give us the hope of life everlasting and while death is a reality and an ever present nearness in this life, we have a definitive word on death. And these are not just ancient words, these are vital words today.

In the late 1980's Dave Dravecky's name was found in almost every newspaper in America. He was a young pitcher who was making his way up through the ranks in the San Francisco Giants organization. He had an incredible career, he was a promising prospect, he was a major league picture. But he began to develop trouble with his pitching arm and through a series of tests and diagnosis it was ultimately determined that he had cancer, a mass that was effecting his muscle tissue. They went in and did an extensive surgery, removed a portion of the muscle, frankly said that Dave Dravecky would never pitch again, but against the odds and through faith and trust Dave Dravecky came back to pitch in the major leagues again. it was an incredible comeback and he wrote a book entitled, *Come Back*. But one day in a filled stadium and before a national television audience, Dave Dravecky made a pitch and in that moment his arm snapped. It was the indication that the disease was again in his arm and had progressed even futher and this time Dave was not able to make a comeback, instead Dave and his wife Jan faced one of the ultimate crisis of life and

that is, not only did he have to struggle with the issue of not pitching, he had to begin to fight a tremendous battle with cancer that resulted in the removal of his arm and even a portion of his shoulder. Those days being very difficult days in their lives have been recorded in several of the books that they've written. But Jan Dravecky made this statement, she said:

*"When we face death, when we face the loss of loved ones, we desperately need a rock solid hope. The thought this life is all there is, that we live and then die is dreadful when you realize how fragile life is. You search hard for truth. You have to know what is real. You need a hope that is beyond this life."*

And that's exactly what Paul is saying to us in these ancient words. Yes, we live in a fragile world. Yes, we face the reality of the threat of disease and of death and of all of the things that are there and associated. But we do have a definitive word, a word that underscores the reality of what Christ has done for us and therefore it is in this truth that we have hope. Now as we think about this subject today I want us to do it in 2 ways.

One, I want us to **EXAMINE** some common thoughts on the subject of death, to examine some common thoughts on the subject of death. Because, today if we were to go out and to simply do an interview with some people in the street, people who didn't choose to get up and come to church today, but who simply are out there just, you know, going on about life, we would find some very interesting thoughts and philosophies about life and about death. And I'm convinced that if you were to go out and just to ask people on the street and say what do you think about death, what happens when we die? There are at least 3 concepts or perspectives that you would find out in the community around us.

One is that surly you would find some people who would simply say that they believe that death is a **TEMPORARY TRANSITION**, a temporary transition. It's sort of an exit out of this life, but they're not really sure what happens next. In fact there are many people who believe that you sorta step out, but you step in to sort of a, a holding tank, a, a transitory period and that ultimately, even some of these people who would go to church would say that, that you come out of life, but you kinda wait until the very end of all things, the, the end of time and then one day you go either to heaven or to hell. Now the Bible speaks very directly against this concept. In fact it's in the teaching of Jesus that we have, as though it were, the antiseptic of the concept of purgatory. In the teachings of Jesus in Luke chapter 16, He tells of 2 men who died. One was a rich man, the other ~~was a~~, was a poor man. The poor man's name is given, Lazarus, we don't know the name of the rich man. But what we do know is that according to the Scripture that each of these men died and immediately Jesus says one of them went into the presence of God, the other one went directly to hell. And in Luke 16 you can read an account about what happened between heaven and hell after the death of 2 men and so the Bible knows nothing of death being some sort of a temporary

transition.

Other people on the street today may say that death is a **RECYCLING REINCARNATION**. It's sort of a celestial recycling program and that really what is, is energy and essence and that we're all just part of one big continuous whole taking form and being remade and reshaped. Life is not linnered moving through time but it is circular and you just move from one sphere to another sphere, to another sphere; different forms, different functions, different beings, different essence. But again the Bible speaks very directly to this. In Hebrews chapter 9 in verse 27, the Scripture says"

*...it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment,*

It is a point, a time and yes we live on a line of time, going through time and space here and there's a moment in which we will face death.

And then there is a common concept today and a growing concept in the material world in which we live that basically death is nothing more then a **COMPLETE CESSATION**, a cessation of life that you simply live and you die and that's it, that there's nothing beyond, there's nothing to it, it's just a veil of darkness. Therefore the philosophy of life is eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. And because this is all there is people try to live their life just hoping that they can avoid any sort of tragedy or uncertainty and that they can go long enough to find fulfillment in life and in a material world and a material culture a lot of people have bought into nothing more then just a mindset of despair and of destruction. The end, that's it! But again the Bible speaks against this forthrightly. In the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 that says it...there's a time to be born and a time to die, down in verse 11 it says:

*...God has set eternity in our hearts,...*

And if you'll look back through all of human history and you study anthropology and ancient civilization you will find that there has never been a civilization of mankind where man did not look to try to find understanding and meaning and what lies beyond in death. You see the animal kingdom looks to the earth for grain and food and survival. But mankind looks into heaven and says why and I here and for what reason was I created? And there is a heart cry within all of us to know the eternal significance of life. And so there is a common thought today that there's nothing more than cessation. And while these are common concepts I think for those of us who opened this book, the Bible, we need to see and understand what does the Bible say on the subject? And so here in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 I believe that we are given several perspectives...

Let me just say it this way, we are going to **ESTABLISH** a biblical perspective on death, a biblical perspective on death. Now I know, please, I know not one of you got up this morning and said, boy I can't wait to get there and hear the preacher preach about death this morning. There's nothing fun about this subject. But I want you to know there are some

facts about this subject that you need to know and therefore there are some things that we need to understand according to the word of God. So I want you just to jot these down and to remember these, because I think that they may be of importance to you.

Number 1, from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 we discover that death is the **PENALTY** of sin. The Bible's perspective on death, first and foremost, is that this was never a part of God's plan or purpose for the people He created. You will recall that God made man and woman, Adam and Eve and put them in The Garden of Eden, put them in a perfect environment. They were given everything that they needed for life and health and happiness. In fact the Bible said that: [Genesis 2:16-17]

*...you can eat of any fruit, of any tree in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in that day you will surely...*

Do you know what the Bible says?

*...die.*

Now what happened? Did Adam and Eve take a little bit of fruit and then fall over? No, but God was giving them the signal, the signal that to be right with Him they needed to obey and follow His promises, His precepts, His teaching. But because they chose to disobey God and chose to sin against God, the result was death was put into all of mankind. And in that moment that they ate of that fruit they died spiritually, they were cut off from the life that God had given them and though they were eternal beings, they no longer had the eternal life of God and ultimately, progressively they died physically. And therefore the Bible tells us here in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 15 and in verse 21:

*For since by man came death...*

Verse 22:

*...in Adam all die,...*

Death is the penalty of sin, it is the consequence of sin. That's why the Bible says in Romans ~~3:23~~ **[should be 6:23]**

*...the wages of sin is death,...*

You see sin has a consequence and the reason that we face death and deal with death is because of something that happened with the first man, with Adam, and death had reigned from Adam to all of us today and therefore it was for this reason that Jesus came. Hebrews chapter 2, in verse 14 says this:

<sup>14</sup>*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same,...*



That is Jesus.

*...that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup>and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Why did Jesus come? To take on human life, physical life, in order that He might destroy death and take away the penalty of death. Jesus has broken the curse of sin through His death, burial and resurrection and therefore when we understand what the Bible says about death we must begin with the fact that we understand that it is the penalty of sin. Now I did not say that when somebody dies it's because they sinned. I said that it is the curse of sin on all of mankind that has brought death into the world.

There a second thing that we understand from a biblical perspective about death and that is not only that death is the penalty of sin but death is the **ENEMY** of all mankind. Please don't miss this. Look at what the Bible says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 and verse 26:

*The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.*

Death is an enemy. It is an enemy that is to be feared and to be respected. It is an enemy that invades, that devourers and destroys, that separates and therefore just as we would seek to guard against an enemy, we guard against the presence of death around us. Death is an enemy to all of mankind and humanly, physically we struggle with the reality of death. In the book of John chapter 11 Jesus is told of the death of His friend Lazarus. Jesus would often go to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus and Lazarus died and Jesus went there and one of the most beautiful scenes in Scripture is when Jesus stepped to the tomb of Lazarus and the people were there grieving and the Bible simply says:

*Jesus wept.*

What was the response of Jesus looking at this scene? It was to weep. It is a picture of a heart of God because death is the enemy of everything that God created and it is the enemy of all of mankind. Therefore we need to know how to deal with the injury that this enemy brings to us in life. We can't resist it. We can't step by it. We have to deal with it and it's an enemy that has to be reckoned with. What I'm saying is, ladies and gentlemen, instead of thinking that our faith is some sort of a saccharine sweet syrup that just sort of lets us tiptoe through the tulips when we die, we need to deal with the reality that death brings injury and death is an enemy and it's okay to struggle with this enemy. In fact I'd like to just ask you as you have that pen and paper on which you've been taking these notes, that's an expression of faith if you did not know that, [pause for congregation laughter] I'd like you just to jot down some things that you and I can do when we deal with people who are grieving. Because sometimes I'm afraid in our effort to have such a solution to death as Christians. We fail to deal with the enemy of death as human

beings and indeed our faith is what makes the difference. But we need to know how to deal with this enemy when the enemy invades and injures people around us. What are we to do?

Number 1: **RECOGNIZE YOU CAN'T FIX IT.** I so tire of Christians who feel that it's their job when someone faces the grief of death to go in and to fix it, pop off a Bible verse, make it somein simple and sweet. I'm not saying that you don't need to offer hope and encouragement but I want you to know that ladies and gentlemen death is not a problem to fix it's a change to which we must adjust and therefore instead of just solving a problem like we do, let's solve the problem, you can't solve the problem of death. You have to deal with the change that death brings. And therefore it is an enemy and we have to realize that it's something that we can't fix.

Secondly, not only we need...need to do that, we need to **REMEMBER THAT OUR FRIENDS NEED A SHOULDER AND NOT AN ANSWER,** a shoulder and not an answer. The fact of the matter is, is that even if you could offer your friends and loved one answers when they face the injury of the enemy of death, that answer would not return their loved one or take away the pain. Therefore it's important that you understand that the greatest thing that you can do when someone faces death is in sensitivity to them is to offer them a shoulder and not an answer. It is presence that makes the difference and so remember they need a shoulder and not an answer.

Next, **REALIZE THEIR NEED TO GRIEVE.** Realize that people around you need to grieve. It is okay to cry and it's okay to ask why? God has given us our tears. God has given us our laughter. One of the greatest gifts God's given is laughter and I love it, but God has equally given us our tears to release the grief of the soul. And tears are not a sign of weakness they are a sign of humanness and therefore we need to use the grief that comes. Now I believe in, encouraging each other and cheering each other when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. But ladies and gentlemen, well I like what my wife has said. She said, "I just wanna tell you I want somebody to cry at my funeral." [pause for slight congregation laughter] I mean I, and I agree, I, I wanna say the same thing. It's not that I want people to be devastated I just want people to realize that maybe I contributed enough that it mattered. You know, don't just say to me, oh he's gone, praise God. [pause for congregation laughter] Well, praise God, I'm doin that in heaven but you can grieve a little bit down here, okay? [pause for more laughter] Realize their need to grieve.

Next, **REFLECT ON THE LIFE OF THEIR LOVED ONE WITH THEM.** Reflect on the life of the loved one with those who have lost that loved one. Don't neutralize and depersonalize talking about the deceased. If his name was John, if her name was Mary, if you knew them and shared life experiences, share those experiences again because people live on in the experiences that we have shared with them. Reflect on the life of their loved one.

Then next, **REST IN GOD'S PROMISE BOOK.** Rest in God's promise book, now that's not my encouragement to them, that's my encouragement to you. What

I mean by that is, I'm not saying just go get a Scripture and tell them. Maybe God will give you a Scripture to share, but I'm saying open the Word of God and when people grieve, you begin to believe that just as God promises comfort that He will minister comfort to them, the comfort that you can't give, the comfort you can't find.

And then finally, **REMAIN IN CONTACT AFTER THE CRISIS**. Sometimes we're so good at gathering up, huddling up and giving it a few days. But you know when people have faced the enemy of death they need somebody who's gonna continue to be a friend long after they've faced off with the enemy and they need contacts and encouragements and remembrances to help them to be effective in dealing with the enemy and the impact of the enemy in their lives.

So what is a biblical perspective on death, number 1, death is the penalty of sin. Number 2, death is the enemy of all of mankind.

Number 3: the Bible tells us that death is a **PATHWAY** into eternity. It is not a destiny the Bible says, it is a pathway. The Bible speaks of it in Psalm 23, we walk through the valley of the shadow of death and the Bible describes death as a pathway that takes us out of this life and into the life that is to come. Now for the believer that is a pathway not only into eternity, but it is the very pathway into the presence of God. For the Bible says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 5, in verse 8:

*...to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*

And for the believer, death is a pathway that walks me out of all of the weakness and all of the brokenness and all of the failure of this life, but ultimately into the presence of God. And therefore I am able to see the wonder and the blessing of this reality in Christ. People often wonder, what happens when we die, will we see one another, will we know one another in heaven? The answer is absolutely, yes! Every person who ever appeared again, the transfiguration of Jesus, Moses and Elijah came and the disciples saw them. We will know each other. We will share life together. The Bible says, so shall we ever be with the Lord. And so yes, there is a pathway of death and it is injurious and it is difficult, but it is not a pathway unto darkness, it is a pathway into the presence of God where there will be no more night. [long pause]

But there's one final thing that I want you to see about death and that is according to the Word of God, death is the **VICTORY** of Jesus. Death is the victory of Jesus. What I mean by that is through His death He conquered the power of death, of sin, of hell and of the grave and that Jesus now offers up the gift of eternal life,

*...the wages of sin is death,...*

Romans 6:23!

*...but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

And today because Jesus Christ lived and died and was buried and rose again; we can look at death, enemy that it is, a fearful foe that surrounds us. But we can do it with the confidence that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is victory beyond the grave. Hebrews chapter 2, in verse 9 says:

*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone of us.*

Don't you understand it? That's why Jesus came into this world. Jesus had to be born, to become one of us in order that He might taste what we taste, the penalty and the consequence of sin, which is death. But Jesus, being sinless, died in our place, tasted death for us in order that we now can taste life; life that is everlasting in the Lord Jesus Christ and life that is eternal. And that is the definitive word on death! Death in Adam! Life in Jesus! And today as I stand before you I stand with confidence and with triumphant proclamation that Jesus Christ is the life giver and while death is real the definitive word on death is that death has been defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I recognize that the very nature of this message is like garlic on the breath, you know? It's just a kind of message that to have somebody come in and speak is just like having somebody get too close to you who just finished eating a big clove of garlic. But I share it with you because it's not just a topic, it's been a part of a life journey for me this year. In 1985, in the early days of my ministry I had the joy of marrying a wonderful young couple, a teacher and a CPA, a promising young CPA who was climbing a corporate ladder and I had the joy of performing their wedding ceremony and then seeing what was a point of contact in ministry turn into a wonderful friendship and Kevin and Ginger, this couple became life friends to Connie, to me and we've shared so many life and experiences together. When we lived in Dallas before for 3 years they would come out every New Years and we'd celebrate the New Year together and I walked through a variety of different accomplishments and successes in their lives and I walked through some hard things with them. They had 2 premature children who were born and I did the funeral services for those children and then one day I saw the day when God worked in Kevin's life and he left his professional career and joined my side as an executive pastor in ministry and then during those years they adopted a precious little girl into their family and it just seemed that so much of life was coming together, but then an old foe called cancer reared it's head and there began a battle a number of years ago that we've shared together in life. In January of this year 2003 started for me with the news that Ginger's death was pending and within days she died and I went back to Florida and stood at the same place that I stood to marry that couple as I stood to say goodbye with that family. And then within days of that experience, having been there with Kevin and with their 6 year old daughter Mary Ellen I received news that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who had had a great impact in my son Joseph's life and who was on my faculty, I had

the joy of being the pastor of a church where we had a Christian school and had a wonderful faculty and this young, late 30's teacher had been diagnosed early this year with a disease and just in a matter of weeks she was gone. And then just a few weeks ago, in the middle of June, 2 men who were dear friends, godly men, men who have a... been an encouragement in my life as I was a pastor in Boca church, one of them who actually was my neighbor just lived across the street from me for 2 years. They were on their way back from a mission trip in the Bahamas and touched down in Fort Lauderdale and then made a quick little jump from Fort Lauderdale Airport in a small plane up to Boca and 2 planes collided over the Atlantic Ocean and those 2 men were gone. And what I'm saying to you is that this message is more than just something that is a good topic, it's just something that's touched my life this year. Time and time again I've found myself at this place, wrestling with these issues and thinking through these matters, but ever grateful that I have a definitive word on death. Now I want you to know I love life. I thank God every day for the joy of getting up and breathing and eating. Oh I have thanked God for eating. And for [pause for slight congregation laughter] for my family, my 2 incredible children, my wonderful wife, a dear church, precious friends and I'm tellin you I'm gonna squeeze everything that I can out of life and I'm gonna live life with every full joy that I can, but I thank God that when I get in the cross currents of that wind or when I face that tunnel and that valley called death, I thank God that there is a definitive word on death and that Jesus is the victor.

When Jesus stood at the grave that day of Lazarus, after He wept He looked at the family that were gathered there and in John chapter 11, verse 25 Jesus said these words, He said:

... *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die..."*

And then He said this:

*"...Do you believe this?"*

That's the question this morning. The question this morning is do you believe this? Have you believed on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God Who is the author of life, the One Who has destroyed the enemy of death and Who extends to you the gift, the gift for your asking, the gift for your taking, the gift of eternal life. And today if you have never believed on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I want to encourage you and urge you and ask you to do that by faith. You say, pastor are you trying to scare me today with this message? No! I'm not trying to move you with fear, I'm trying to challenge you by faith to face the reality of death and to make a decision today that can make a difference for all of eternity. And I'm not saying to you today, you need to get ready because you may die, though that is true. I'm trying to say to you today, you need to face death so that you can know how to live and to live a life that will matter for the glory of Jesus Christ.