

Fear Of Death And Dying

On Sunday, we concluded our “Fear Less” sermon series by grappling with perhaps our greatest human fear – death.

1. Warm up question: Some psychologists believe that our fascination with things like zombies and werewolves and other such things is an indirect way of coping with our fear of death. What’s the scariest movie or story you’ve ever seen, heard, or read?
2. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us of the obvious, “It is appointed to humans once to die.” When we’re young, death seems far away. But as the decades pass, our appointment with death looms larger. Jeff told how in his late 30s, it hit him that, if he lived a normal life span, he would soon have more time behind him than left in front of him. It was sobering thought.
 - a. How often do you find yourself thinking about death? What thoughts occur to you? Do you think it’s good for us to think about our death?
 - b. What scares you most about death? What scares you most about dying, i.e., the process that leads to death?
3. Sunday’s sermon focused first on death itself and what comes after, then on the process of dying. So let’s focus first on death. Jeff suggested that the best way to tame our fear of death is to more fully internalize the concept of eternal life. The promise of Scripture is that, just as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we. To help us put eternity in perspective, Jeff used a 60-foot string to illustrate the timeline of our existence, then suggested that none of us (no matter how old) has yet moved beyond the first inch of that timeline.
 - a. When you looked at the string on Sunday, and thought about where you currently are on that timeline, what thoughts or feelings arose within you?
 - b. Why is it so hard for us to live the days of our lives with an eternal perspective?
 - c. Jeff said, “Life here on earth is awesome, and important, and we should make the most of it. But when seen in perspective, it’s a preparatory phase, the start-up phase. What we’re experiencing here is preparing us for ‘an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.’” II Corinthians 4:17. How do you feel about the idea that life on earth is a preparatory phase? Do you agree or disagree? If this is preparatory phase, what are we being prepared for?
4. Conversation about the life to come inevitably leads to questions about what that new reality might be like. Meditating on that question may be one of the best ways to push back against our fear of death.

- a. I John 3:2 says, “Beloved, we are God’s children. What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we know is this: When Jesus is revealed, we will be like him. . . .” What do you think that means, especially when it says “what we will be has not yet been revealed”?
 - b. Paul tells about a near-death experience during which he was “caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.” II Corinthians 12:4. What kinds of things would you guess Paul may have heard?
 - c. Paul goes on to say that, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love God.” I Corinthians 2:9. What do you think that means? Do you think eternity will include streets of gold, gates of pearl, mansions, etc.?
5. In a cover article for *Newsweek* magazine four years ago, Dr. Eben Alexander described a near-death experience while his entire cortex was registering no activity. He tells about seeing transparent shimmering beings arcing across the sky, radiating a booming chant of joy. He could see sounds and hear visuals. “Everything was distinct, yet everything was part of everything else.” He describes an angel guide whose look of love was “something higher, holding all [earthly] loves within itself, while at the same time being much bigger than all of them.” Before sending him back, the angel gave him a three-part message: (a) you are loved and cherished, dearly, forever; (b) you have nothing to fear; and (c) There’s nothing you can do wrong, i.e., nothing can separate you from the love of God. When you hear Dr. Alexander’s story, what thoughts, feelings, or questions arise?
 6. For many of us, it’s easier to calm our fears about death than our fears about the physical process of dying. So let’s turn our attention to that. Psalm 23:4 promises that when we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” God’s rod and staff will “comfort” us. When Jesus was in distress in the Garden, “an angel from heaven appeared and gave him strength.” Luke 22:43. When Stephen was stoned to death, he had a similar experience of comfort and strength from beyond. Read Acts 7:51-60.
 - a. How do you think Stephen felt when he first realized they were going to kill him?
 - b. How do you think the vision he experienced affected how he felt about what was about to happen?
 - c. Jeff suggested that, when we’re dying, God will give us a special presence and power to ease us over. He shared the story of a man who saw a vision of a little girl in his room and told his caregiver, “She’s here to help me die.” Have you known someone who had a similar experience of divine comfort while dying?
 - d. What thought or idea most helps to ease your fear of dying? Is it possible that dying can be beautiful?