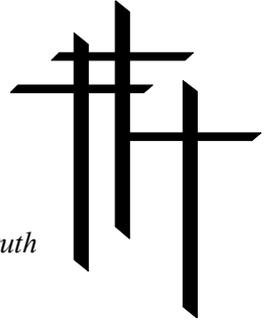


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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LIFE MORE ABUNDANT

Facing Death with Hope

By Gregg Bing

The Bible describes our time here on earth as “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). We might think that if a person lives to be 80, 90, or even 100 years that they have had a long life, but in comparison to eternity, our span of years comes and goes like a vapor. Many people assume that our time on earth is all there is. As they face the prospect of death, for themselves or for a loved one, they are filled with deep sorrow. There is a finality about death that leaves them feeling devastated.

While the prospect of one’s own death or the death of a loved one is a time of sorrow, grief and loss, we need not face this time without hope and without comfort.

Life Beyond this Earth

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he reminded them that there is life beyond our time here on earth.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Our physical life here on earth is temporary. The afflictions we experience in these bodies of flesh, the “outward

man,” are “light” and last only “for a moment.” But, Paul stresses there is life beyond just the physical. We have an “inward man” that is spiritual and eternal. The sufferings we experience in this life will one day give way to a “weight of glory,” a glory that far exceeds our present sufferings, a glory that will last for all eternity. The things we see and experience with our senses are temporary. There are things we cannot see with our physical eyes; there are eternal things that can only be seen with the eyes of faith.

Life More Abundant

When the Lord Jesus Christ lived here on earth, He said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). A person may have what the world considers to be a full life; maybe a life of many years, maybe a life with great financial success, maybe a life of great popularity, maybe a life filled with the love of family and friends: all things that people consider important. Jesus came to provide us with a life more abundant than anything the world can offer. Jesus came to give us life spiritually, a life of blessings that exceeds anything we experience in this world, a

life that will last forever.

How did Jesus provide this abundant life for us? Jesus did not come into this world to teach us a way to live. It is true; Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived. We can learn many things from studying what He taught, but that is not why He came. Jesus did not come to provide an example for us to follow. Certainly, Jesus is the perfect Man. He lived a perfect, sinless life, a life that provides a wonderful example of a Man who humbled Himself and became obedient to the will of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-8). However, trying to follow Jesus’ example and live as He did will not bring us “life more abundant.”

Jesus came into this world for one purpose: to die. This is why the eternal Son of God had to become a Man and take a body of flesh and blood—to shed His blood and die, that we might live. To many this makes no sense; it seems foolish. Why, they ask, did Jesus have to go through this?

Why is There Death?

People struggle with this question because they fail to understand two important truths. The first truth is that people, by nature, are sinful.

We are born that way. The common belief is that people are basically good, and since God is loving and merciful, He will accept those who at least try to live a good life. While this assumption may sound reasonable to us, it is simply not true. The Scriptures tell us, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). In Paul's letter to the Romans, he declared,

"There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10-12)

We may not like to hear these things, but they are true. No one does what is right in God's eyes. Other people may consider us righteous, but God does not. "All of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" in the sight of a perfect God (Isaiah 64:6). None of us will seek after God on our own. It is not in our nature. We turn aside and follow our own desires, not to please God, but to please ourselves. No one does what is

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6:00 PM	Evening Worship

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good in God's sight. Again, we might appear to other people to have good character or to do good deeds, but the nature we are born with is a sinful nature. There is "nothing good" that dwells in us by nature (Romans 7:18).

There are no exceptions to this, for "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Because of our sins, we "fall short" of God and His perfect standards. Why is this the case? Where did sin come from? When did it begin?

Sin began with one man: Adam. God created Adam and Eve to have a relationship with them. He placed them in a perfect place, the garden of Eden, where all their needs were provided. God met with them, walked and talked with them each day. They were allowed to freely eat from all the trees of the garden except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned Adam that in the day he ate from this forbidden tree, he would "surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

In spite of this warning, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and, thus, sinned against God. Though they did not die physically that very day, the process of death began in

their bodies. Bodies that had once been incorruptible were now susceptible to disease and pain. Bodies that had once been immortal could now physically die.

Another Type of Death

The sentence of death was more than just physical death; it also meant spiritual death. Spiritual death is separation from God. The very moment Adam and Eve sinned, they were separated from God. They felt the shame and the guilt of their sin immediately. They tried to cover their nakedness and guilt by making coverings for their bodies from the leaves of the trees. They tried to hide themselves from God amongst the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:7-8). In judging them, God expelled them from the garden and no longer walked and talked with them daily, as He had done before their sin (Genesis 3:23-24).

When Adam disobeyed God, his sin and the consequences of that sin, death, passed upon all men. We read in Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Because of Adam's

sin, we all became sinners, for we inherited his sin nature. As a result, we are all under the same penalty for sin as Adam: death. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The word "wages" means the just payment which is due for sin is death.

However, God is a loving, merciful and gracious God. He did not abandon us in this terrible state: "dead in trespasses and sins." God, in fact, "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4); His plan and purpose all along was to "reconcile" us or bring us back to Him. The problem is that God cannot accept us in our sinful state. God cannot simply overlook or excuse our sins.

The second truth that many people fail to understand is that God is absolutely holy and righteous. This is why we, as sinners, "fall short." God is holy, meaning He is separate from sin. God is so pure, He cannot accept what is wicked and sinful (Habakkuk 1:13). God actually hates sin. We don't often think of a God of love being capable of hatred, but He does hate sin (Jeremiah 44:4). (Though God hates sin, as we shall see, He loves sinners. We must be careful to make this distinction.) God is

also righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4), meaning He always does what is right or just. A righteous God **must** judge sin, and the just reward (wages) for sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Our problem is that in our sinful state and with our sinful nature, we are helpless to do anything to change our miserable condition. How, then, can sinful people ever be accepted by a holy God? The answer is through the death of a substitute. Someone would have to die in our place to pay the penalty for our sins, but this substitute must be without sin. This requirement was illustrated when Israel lived under the law. The people were required to bring a lamb to die as a sacrifice to cover their sins, but these sacrificial lambs, these substitutes, had to be "without blemish" (Leviticus 1:3). Because all people are sinners, none of us is qualified to be a substitute for anyone else's sins.

The only Person who is without sin is God, therefore, only He could die as a substitute for people's sins. However, God is a Spirit (John 4:24). In order to shed His blood and die for our sins, God had to become a Man; He had to take on a body of flesh and blood. The eternal Son of God "was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John

1:14) so that He could provide the way for sinful men to be reconciled to God. The Lord Jesus Himself declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6). How did God accomplish this wonderful reconciliation?

Life through Death

God's provision of salvation for a sinful world came at great cost to Him. He endured harsher sufferings than anything we face here on earth. Some of Jesus' sufferings we can identify with; sufferings we cringe at when we think about them. Jesus was subjected to extremely painful physical sufferings: beaten with a rod, crowned with thorns, scourged with a whip, and nailed to a cross for the slow, cruel death of crucifixion. Jesus suffered emotional anguish as well: rejected by His own people, the very ones He had created, abandoned by His closest friends, betrayed by one of those friends, and denied three times by another. Jesus suffered the social stigma associated with being crucified, a punishment reserved for the worst of criminals. He was publicly humiliated, mocked, and insulted as He hung on that cross for six

long hours.

As terrible as these forms of suffering were, Jesus endured far worse. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus "became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." The "death of the cross" has reference not just to death by crucifixion, but Jesus' death on the cross. God's sinless Son not only "became flesh;" He also "became sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). As He hung there on that cross, Jesus Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

Christ died for our sins in two different ways: He shed His blood and died physically for us because "without the shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness) of sins" (Hebrews 9:22), but Jesus also died spiritually. What does this mean? As Christ neared death, He cried out in agony, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Because Jesus bore our sins, He was separated from God, completely and utterly forsaken by His Father. That is what spiritual death means. We can understand, to some extent, how it might feel to be forsaken by our own father, but Jesus' relationship with God the Father was closer and dearer than any relationship we have in this world. The agony Jesus experienced

when His Father turned His face away was more painful than anything we can imagine. This dreadful judgment should have been ours, but He took it for us!

Why would God do this for us? The simple and wonderful answer is love. “For God **so** loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God did not love us because of any goodness or good works on our part. “God demonstrated His own love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It was “not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The word “propitiation” simply means satisfaction. Christ’s sacrificial death as a substitute for our sins satisfied all of God’s holy and righteous requirements.

Just before Christ died, He cried out with a loud voice, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). His sacrificial work was complete, meaning that the wages (or penalty) for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) was “paid in full.” God proved He was satisfied with Christ’s sacrifice for our sins by raising Him from the dead after three days in the grave. Jesus was raised unto

eternal life, never to die again (Romans 6:9-10), and because He lives, we can live as well.

The Gift of Life

Romans 6:23 begins with bad news: “the wages of sin is death,” but it concludes with good news: “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The gospel, or good news, for all men is that “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

While Christ has paid the penalty for everyone’s sins, and the gift of eternal life is available to all people, not everyone is saved and reconciled to God. Why not? Because the gift of salvation must be received by each person individually. We do not have to earn it or work for it, for it is a gift! Therefore, it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done” (Titus 3:5). Salvation is by God’s grace; it is His gift to us, though a gift we certainly do not deserve. So, how is it received?

This wonderful gift of eternal life can only be received by simple faith in Jesus Christ and what He accomplished for us on the cross. “For by grace you

have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is not by any goodness in us—there is none! Salvation is not by any good works we do—there are none! Salvation is by faith, which means that we trust in God to save us from our sins; we rely upon His finished work on the cross, not on any of our own works.

When we hear the “word of truth, the gospel of our salvation” and trust in Christ as our Savior, God’s Holy Spirit places us “in Christ” and seals us there “until the day of redemption” (Ephesians 1:12-14). We are “made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21), and “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). The moment we put our faith in Christ, we are “passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). This truly is “life more abundant!”

Life—Even in Death

What happens, then, at death, to those who have this abundant life in Christ? While spiritual death is separation from God, physical death is also a separation. When a person

dies physically, their spirit is separated from their body. The body, which is made of dust, “will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit of an unbeliever will be reserved for eternal judgment by God, but what happens to the spirit of a believer? Paul expressed the hope, or expectation, we have as believers in Christ in his second letter to the Corinthians.

“So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

Even though we are saved from our sins, as long as we live in these bodies of sinful flesh, we cannot enter into God’s presence, thus we are “absent from the Lord.” However, when we physically die, we become “absent from the body.” Our spirits are separated from our bodies of sin, thus making it possible for us to be “present with the Lord.” Paul spoke of death for the believer as a departure. He wrote to the Philip-

pians of his desire “to depart and be with Christ which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). This is what death means to a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we physically die, our spirit departs from our body and enters into the very presence of the Lord, which, as Paul says, is “far better.” In His presence, there is no more pain, no more sorrow, no more tears, and no more suffering. The Psalmist David wrote that in the presence of the Lord there is “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

This is the blessed hope of every believer in Christ. This is what we can look forward to, with expectation. We are confident this is what our future holds, because this is what God has promised us in His Word. Not only do we have the hope of one day being with the Lord; we also have the hope of being like Him.

Christ is our life, and one day He will appear in the air to take His church (all believers in this present age of grace) home to be with Him in heaven (Colossians 3:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). When that day comes, those believers who have already died physically will have their bodies resurrected. Those believers who are still alive when He comes, will

be caught up together with the “dead in Christ,” and “we shall all be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). Our sinful, shameful bodies of flesh will be transformed and made like the glorious body of our risen Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20-21), and “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a wonderful message of hope and comfort!

What About You?

Do you have this abundant life in Christ? Do you have this blessed hope in Him? If so, you can rejoice and take comfort in knowing what the future holds for you, even in facing death. If not, you are still lost, spiritually dead in your sins, and separated from God. However, you need not spend eternity in this miserable condition. You can be saved from your sins today. You can be reconciled to God and receive the gift of eternal life if you simply trust Christ as your Savior. He will give you such a wonderful life, a life more abundant than your mere existence here on earth. He will bless you with a life of love, joy, and peace—a life with Him that will last for all eternity.

VICTORY

By Dennis Blankenship

I've victory in my Lord,
Why fear the path I tread,
I need not worry what I face,
The cross has banished all my dread.

Delivered from the tempter's power,
From his realm I've been set free,
Translated to another world,
I in Him, and He in me.

Though led by Satan in the past,
God has taken all his right,
And banished it to finest dust,
The Son of God has won the fight.

Satan no longer rules the day,
From his realm I've been set free,
I rest in one central supreme,
I in Him, and He in me.

I'm seated now in Christ above,
Rescued from the first Adam's fall.
O'er spiritual powers set on high,
I have the highest place of all.

Oh, praise the Father's wisest plan,
And let the Spirit's power be,
I've victory in the Son of Love,
I in Him, and He in me.

*"In all these things we are more than conquerors
through Him that loved us." —Romans 8:37*

THIS ISSUE

The lead article in this issue: “LIFE MORE ABUNDANT: Facing Death with Hope,” was written to help those who are facing the prospect of their own death or the death of a loved one. We thought our readers might benefit from this message of life, hope, and comfort from God’s precious Word.

This article will soon be available in booklet form. It will be placed on our website to read online, or, if you would like a copy, please write to us or email us, and we will be glad to send you a copy.

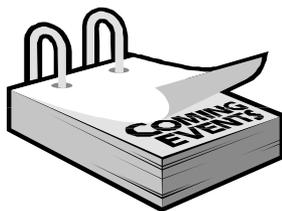
NEXT ISSUE

We will continue with our series on:

“The Passion Week”

in our next issue, looking at Jesus’ “Confrontations with the Jewish Leaders” in the temple area in Jerusalem.

**That we through the patience
and comfort of the Scriptures
might have hope.**



ANNUAL BIBLE CONFERENCE

March 16-18, 2012

“The Wonderful Word of God”

Our Annual Bible Conference at Grace Bible Church will be March 16-18. We will have services each night at 7:00 and 8:30 PM, as well as regular services at 10:00 and 11:00 AM on Sunday morning. More information will soon be available on our website:

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