

Message #11 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

“What Is Death?”

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Hello! Glad you could be with us. Today I'd like to take a look at the question, "What Is Death?" You might say that you already know what death is, because it happens every day. But I'd like to look at some of the ways the Bible refers to death. If you stick with us today, you might see some things beneath the surface that you didn't see before.

First, let's take a look at 1 Timothy 5:5-6. It says, "Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 6 But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." Here is a clear example of a death that is not physical. We see then that there is both physical death and spiritual death. In referring to this woman, the Bible makes it plain that even though she lives, physically speaking, she is dead inside. The reason she is dead is because she's living in pleasure. We see that verses five and six describe two types of woman. Verse 5 indicates a widow that is acceptable in God's eyes, and verse six is one who is not. Therefore, the pleasure, referred to in verse six, is not pleasure in God, but pleasures of this life.

In Matthew 10:39, it says, "He that finds his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it." When we come to Jesus, we forfeit our lives. But the promise is that if we will lose our life for the sake of Jesus, then we will find it. So, how do we go about dying for Jesus' sake? Certainly, we could be martyred. We could suffer an actual physical death. This is one way, but another way is to die daily. The apostle Paul described this concerning his own life. To be a martyr for Christ is to either die a physical death, or to die out to the flesh. When we die out to the flesh, we cease to live for the pleasures of this world, because the pleasures of this world give stimulation to our carnal selves. When our carnal man, our human self, is stimulated, it gets stronger. It's the same for our spirit man. When we receive the spiritual things of God, they stimulate our spirit. It doesn't take much to see this. If you go through a time when you are

very close to God, and you are applying yourself to prayer and the word, your carnal man, your animal nature, begins to dwindle in strength. If you were perfect, which none of us are, and continued only in the spirit, your earthly nature would completely die out. But when you receive stimulation of earthly things, your old man, your carnal nature, that beast nature within you, revives. Stimulation will strengthen either carnal man, or the spirit man, depending on what kind of stimulation occurs.

The process of going to Calvary is a process of crucifying your old man. It is a process of reaching out for things that stimulate your spirit, rather than for things that stimulate your flesh. This means that you are more concerned for the things which apply to your heart, then for things which apply to your belly. In Scripture, the heart is recognized as the seat of spiritual things; the place where God abides in you. The belly is recognized as the seat of carnal things; the place where Satan finds his abode. Other terms for belly, which are used, are inward parts, loins, or kidneys, and the older versions of the King James Bible also uses 'reins', which is an archaic term for kidneys. So the heart is important to the eternal life of man, and the belly, which symbolizes bodily appetites, is important to the earthly, temporal, life of man. So, if the heart of man is the seat of God, if the heart is so important to the spirit man, then it becomes imperative to make sure the heart is stimulated much more than the belly, much more than the carnal man of flesh. The heart must be fed more than the belly. It's quite simple to understand that if you feed something, it will grow, it will become stronger. If you starve something, it will weaken, and its growth will be stunted. Therefore, if you want the heart to be stronger than your fleshly desires, then you need to make sure your heart gets more nutrition than your flesh.

In Ecclesiastes 10:2, we see that Solomon has said that a man who is wise will have his heart in his right hand. He says this because the right hand comes from the word in the original Aramaic language that means, the hand which is dominant, or, the hand which usually takes. If you're trying to ensure that your heart is fed more than your flesh, then you must make sure that the hand which usually takes is assigned to the task of feeding your heart. If you are right handed, you will usually take with your right hand. If what you take with your right hand gives to the heart, and your left hand, which does not take as often, is assigned to your natural man, your belly, then it stands to reason that your heart will be fed better than your belly, and the spirit man will be strong and the flesh will be weak. Therefore, according to Ecclesiastes 10:2, you will be as a wise man who has his heart in his right hand.

A man of God is one who applies himself to the word of God in order that his spirit man might reign over his mortal body. A man of God is concerned with the things of God, and not the things of this world. A man of God has excepted the call to Calvary, and has applied himself to the task of shunning the pleasures of this world. There are many in the church today who steep themselves in pleasures, never realizing that they are strengthening that man of flesh, and are starving their spirit man. The tools of Satan are lies and deception, and the incentives he offers in order to cloud the truth are the pleasures of this world. He knows that the pleasures of this world will weaken our spirit, and thus weaken our relationship with God.

God did not put us here to stimulate the flesh, but to overcome it. Those who overcome, are those who determine to die out to the flesh, to crucify that man of sin daily. These are those who give themselves willingly in sacrifice. No, not always in physical death. Sometimes, but not always. God does not want all of his children to be physically martyred, but he does want all of

his children to die daily, which is a daily dying out to the flesh. He wants all of his children to lose their life daily, for his sake. This is the sacrifice that he desires from us, this is how we put ourselves on the altar, just as Jesus, the Lamb of God, put himself on the altar for us.

A referral to this sacrifice on the altar is found in Revelation 6:9-11, which describes the fifth seal. Here, John speaks of souls under the altar. Commentators of Scripture generally assume that the souls under the altar are those who have suffered physical martyrdom. This could be possible, however, there arises the question of why they would be given white robes at this time, in that white robes indicate righteousness. Yet, the Bible explains that if we die in Christ, we will be with him in Paradise at that same moment. If those who have died in Christ are already with him, then their robes are already white. I think if we look a little deeper we can see that the fifth seal refers to a group of people who have become living sacrifices, and at the time that the fifth seal is opened, they are still alive. The white robes would signal a judgment of righteousness being given to them at this time, because they have proven themselves to be acceptable in the eyes of God.

In Old Testament Scripture, God gave some interesting rules to follow concerning the priests and the altar. In Exodus 28:42, God gives instruction for the priests to have linen undergarments made for them which they were to put on when they came near to minister to the Lord in the holy place, or when coming near to the altar. The purpose for these linen undergarments was that God should not see their nakedness. God specified that the priests should not go up on the altar by steps, so that their nakedness would not be seen by God. Also, that when the priests removed the ashes from under the altar, the linen undergarments were to be worn, and the same reason applied, which was, so that God would not see their nakedness.

You might ask then, what did removing the ashes have to do with God seeing their nakedness? It was the ashes of the sacrifices that had been burned on the altar that the priests would remove. The sacrifices represented the true sacrifice, the Lamb of God. We know that the things of the Tabernacle were symbolic, and that those things that were symbolized were for a foreshadowing. The sacrifices placed on the altar and burned, foreshadowed Christ, and when they burned up, they became ashes. The altar was constructed with sides and a grate upon which the sacrifices were burned. The only way the ashes could get under the altar was by being accepted by God and burned, and thereby passing through the grate. Therefore, the ashes represented the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, the ultimate sacrifice. When the priests stepped under the altar to gather the ashes under them, they needed to be clothed with undergarments, because Jesus, as the sacrificial Lamb of God, was there. Yes, the actual ashes were just a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrificial death, but nevertheless, Jesus was there, just as God was present in all the other types and shadows of the tabernacle.

In Revelation six, notice that when the fifth seal is opened, the whole purpose is to give white robes to the souls under the altar. There is only one way to get under the altar, and that is to become ashes, to become a burnt offering to the Lord, an acceptable sacrifice to him. The souls under the altar are those people who have given themselves as a living sacrifice to Jesus Christ, have been accepted by him, and therefore have symbolically been consumed and have passed through the grate. Therefore, they receive a judgment of righteousness, signified by the white robes. These are those who are not preoccupied with the things of this world, but are like the 144,000, mentioned in Revelation 14, who are special because they follow the Lamb wherever he

goes. This is what Jesus Christ is looking for, a people who will set their own lives aside and follow him, even to Calvary.

In this world there are many people who call themselves Christians. But calling yourself a Christian is not the same as being judged righteous by God. It is God who has the last word. It is God who will have to be satisfied with us. We can call ourselves anything we want, but it will not change what we are. It is not just the lips that need to confess Jesus Christ, but also the heart. Because if the heart is not involved in the confession of Jesus Christ, then no works will follow. Works are not necessary to be saved, but only faith in Jesus Christ. But when the heart is involved in the confession of faith, the works automatically follow. People who love God, who love Jesus, want to please him. People who have a heart for Jesus Christ and truly appreciate the gift he gave to us, want to do something to please him. This is the very basis of love. Love, if present, cannot help but to be demonstrated. When true love for Jesus is in your heart, the Spirit of God will be in you, and his Spirit will move you to acts of love.

If your spirit moves you to seek the will of God, then God will know that you love him. If your spirit moves you to seek the things which stimulate your flesh, then God will know that you love the things of this world more than him. Proverbs 20:27, confirms this. It says, "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly." This means that God can watch how your spirit moves you, and thereby tell what is inside you. This is because it is the spirit's job to search out what is in the heart, and then to move the body to manifest it, to show it outwardly. It's no different with God than with us. In 1 Corinthians 2:10, we see that it is the Holy Spirit that searches out the deep hidden things of God and reveals them unto men. We can know the heart of God by his Holy Spirit.

And, if we do know the heart of God, then we have a responsibility to follow it. God's will is the most important thing that we can be concerned with. It's not our flesh that will please God. We may do many wonderful works in God's name, but still be like those who God never knew, as described in Matthew, chapter 7, who will be rejected, for God will say, "I never knew you, you workers of iniquity." Those who do wonderful works, but without a true heart for God, will not be able to find acceptance with him.

The only avenue that leads to salvation for man is the avenue of accepting Jesus Christ to the point that you are ready to give up your life, and become a living sacrifice for him. Being a living sacrifice is not based on attaining your own goals, on getting as much enjoyment out of life as you can, or of getting as many toys as you can get. Being a living sacrifice means to set your own life aside in order that you might serve Jesus instead yourself.

Many people would say that what I am implying is ridiculous. But let's take a look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. It says there that we were bought with a price, and that we are no longer our own. We don't own ourselves anymore, Jesus owns us, because he paid the price for us. We were indebted to the Father because of our sin, and the payment for our debt was death. We were not free, for we could not pay the debt ourselves. Jesus bought us, just as a slave is bought. Now we are indebted to him. In order to become heirs of eternal life, we are to glorify God in this world. This means to die to self, and live for him.

If we don't die daily to the flesh, but continue to stimulate our natural man with the things of this world, then we will eventually lose our lives in the process. Many, many Christians in today's church have no comprehension of turning away from the constant stimulations of the flesh that the world offers. They think that because they don't drink, smoke, or cuss, that they have fulfilled the Law of Christ, and then they continue to seek their own way every day, always wanting more things for the belly, and only occasionally feeding the heart. It's interesting to note that one of the major sins of Sodom was stated as, "fulness of bread." This means they fed their carnal nature, and not their spirit nature.

There are many who will refuse to taste of that spiritual death, and will be very disappointed when Jesus returns. Let's look at Matthew 16, Mark 9, and Luke 9. Each of these three portions of scripture tells of there being some there who would not taste of death until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. This is not referring to the following event of the transfiguration on the Mount of Olives, but rather that many will not give their lives in sacrifice in their current life, therefore they will suffer the eternal death when they see Jesus come in the clouds of heaven. It is just a matter of either you die to self now, or your life will be forfeit when Jesus comes back.

And just a note here; this does not mean the people there that Jesus was referring to are still living here on earth, but rather that even though physical death comes, all the dead, whether in Paradise or in Hell, still witness the time when the Lord returns to earth. References confirming this are found in Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62, where Jesus tells the wicked high priest that he will see the son of man sitting on the right hand of the Father and coming in the clouds of heaven. It is certain that the high priest of that day is now dead. He, along with the rest of the dead, will lift up their eyes in hell, which is the waiting place of the wicked, and will see the Lord descending from heaven to receive the righteous. They will not be able to partake in that glorious event, but will witness it, just as Abraham witnessed the event of Christ coming to earth as a baby, born in Bethlehem, and rejoiced to see the day of Jesus Christ.

So when do you want to die? Do you want to die the death of sacrifice to the Lord, or do you want to enjoy your life here on earth with all it's worldly pleasures and then die the second death, with is eternal death? The choice is up to each one of us. But we only have the two choices. Either die out to self now, even possibly to the extent of physical martyrdom, or, wait till a later time when physical death takes us anyway, and then suffer death and torment for eternity?

So, . . . what does it mean to die daily? What will it take to be a living sacrifice? It will take a decision on your part to turn away from those things which are stimulating to the flesh. It will mean making a choice not to be preoccupied with sports, not to be preoccupied with games, not to be preoccupied with television, or movies, or surfing the internet. It will mean making a choice not to spend so much time on crafts, and trinkets, and parties. It will mean focusing on the word of God and prayer, seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit as to what God would have you do each and every day. In short, it is like putting your beast nature on a diet, and starting to really feed your spirit nature. It is keeping your heart with your right hand, and assigning your left hand to things which build up the natural man, so that your heart will be stronger than your bodily appetites.

Yes, I know this goes against the grain, even for Christians. But for a very long time, the truth has not been told to us. God did not put us here to be preoccupied with the stimulations of this

world. Christians, especially in this country, have become soft. Their freedom and safety means more to them than their desire to give their lives for Jesus. They're willing to give their lives for their country, but unwilling to lay their lives down for the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus said he was coming back for a church without spot or wrinkle, he didn't mean that he was coming back for a church entangled with the things of this world.

I think it would be good to ponder the scripture in 2 Peter 3:13-14. It says, "Nevertheless, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found by him in peace, without spot, and blameless." When Jesus comes back, what will he see in you? An acceptable sacrifice, without spot or wrinkle? Or, will he see someone who has not yet tasted of death?