

## The Most Important Thing We Never Talk About

This past Sunday, we looked at the words Jesus spoke from the cross for clues about how, when our time comes, we can die well.

1. Warm up question: People often talk about having a “bucket list” of things they want to experience before their time here runs out. What’s something on your bucket list that you’ve not yet experienced?
2. Death is an uncomfortable subject, yet it’s something we’ll all have to go through, and it’s really big deal. You might say it’s the second biggest thing that will ever happen in our lives, next to our birth. So we need a safe space to talk about it.
  - a. Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed unto humans once to die. . . .” In other words, everybody gets to do this. In the Middle Ages, on Ash Wednesday, when the priest traced the sign of the cross on each person’s forehead, he would solemnly say, “Remember, you are dying.” When you hear that, what thoughts or feelings does it evoke?
  - b. Jeff told about an instance recently when he thought he might be dying of a stroke. Have you ever found yourself in a moment when you thought, “This might be it!” Tell us about it.
  - c. Jeff told about a poem he once heard where the author noted how, every year, the date of our future death comes and goes, and we’re oblivious to it. What if you knew the date on which you will eventually die, and you knew it was still in the distant future, as that date rolled around each year, what would you think or feel? And how might that affect how you live?
3. Read Luke 23:33-46. As followers of Jesus, we look to him to show us the way to live, including how to die. Jesus died under extremely harsh circumstances, and in his death he seemed to experience the full range of feelings dying people often do. We can learn from how he navigated death emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. In the Gospels, Jesus is said to have made seven key statements on the cross, each containing key lessons. We’re going to focus on three of them, but first let’s briefly review the other four. Which of these four most speaks to you and why?
  - “Father forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34) – reminding us of the importance of forgiving those who have hurt us before we die.
  - “Mother, behold your son; son, behold your mother” (Jn. 19:26) – reminding us to do what we can to care for our families in our death.
  - “I am thirsty” (Jn. 19:28) – reminding us to not be bashful about asking for what we need in our hour of distress.
  - “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30) – reminding us to celebrate that moment we can finally lay down the heavy burdens of life.

4. In the middle of his excruciating experience, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” Matthew 27:46.
  - a. Do you think God really forsook Jesus? If not, given all Jesus knew, and his great faith, how could he have felt so Godforsaken? Shouldn’t he have known better?
  - b. What do you think we’re meant to learn from this statement of Jesus about our own dying process?
  - c. When you die, what are the odds that you too will have feelings of being forsaken by God? Can you picture yourself allowing yourself to express those feelings? Why is it so important to express our bitterness to God?
  - d. If you were to die today, what would be your bitterest point of disappointment?
5. Luke 23:46 tells us that before breathing his last on the cross, “Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’”
  - a. This statement seems completely inconsistent with Jesus statement about feeling Godforsaken. How can the two statements be reconciled?
  - b. What do you think we’re supposed to learn from this statement of Jesus about our own dying process?
  - c. Edicio de la Torre says, ““If we look at life as some precious treasure we must hoard, the demands made by others on our life are like losses. And death is the final loss, a final failure to hold on to our life. But if we look at our life as a treasure [to be shared], every service we give to others is a fulfillment of our life’s purpose. And death is the final giving, the total giving.” What do you think about what Smith says? Does it make sense that dying can be our greatest act of discipleship and faith? Does that thought make dying more meaningful to you?
  - d. Jeff told a story about a person falling off a cliff, grabbing a branch, and calling out for help. From below God says, “Let go; I’ll catch you.” The person calls out, “Anybody else down there?” Dying can be the ultimate act of “letting God and letting God.” When your time comes, Jeff said, “Don’t fight it. Let go. Fall into the arms of God. Sweet surrender.” Can you imagine yourself doing that?
6. In Luke 23:42, one of the thieves said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” By this statement, Jesus seems to be reminding us that our vision of heaven can help sustain us when we’re dying. Two weeks ago, we talked about we can get through anything if we focus on our “next reasonable hope.” When we reach our end here, heaven becomes that “next reasonable hope.” The Bible offers a variety of different visuals about heaven. How do you picture it? If you were dying now, do you think your vision of heaven would be a source of strength and comfort?