

An Attempt To Listen To God

Meditations On The Death Of A Believer

Part 1

By

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The Death of a Believer - Part 1

Introduction

There is no greater grief than the death of a loved one, especially if it is the only remaining parent, child, or the suicide of a family member. Words, no matter how well intentioned, can seldom touch the lonely aching emptiness of coming into an empty and silent house, or looking at clothes the loved one wore, or the first birthday, wedding anniversary, Christmas, or special days and places spent together.

The agony of bereavement can only be lessened by the assurance that the loved one knew blessedness of sins forgiven, and they are at home in Heaven. There is no thinking so pathetic as those who say one dies as a dog or those who “celebrate” the life by having a party to anesthetize themselves of the reality that they too must die. In the fulness of health men may say they do not fear death, but when the last moments come and there is the consciousness of a dark eternity and a righteous Judge, all bravado disappears.

It is almost impossible to think of the death of a known individual and not think of ones own mortality. When in that frame of mind I suppose all of us have thought, what would I like to have remembered as my last words or inscribed on my tombstone. There are four words I would love to have on my headstone: “he trusted in God” (Matt. 27:43).

The following are the results of years of personal ministering to breaking hearts, articles on bereavement, and speaking at funerals. I have spoken at many funerals, from that of a little baby, the only child who lived a couple of hours to an elderly gentleman in his 90’s; from people I have known and loved; those who died and so few really cared about and where the attendance was only a few to those which were attended by several hundred; and from the sudden death of a father of three weeks due to a long protracted illness.

Since the majority of the funerals I take are those of believers, it is my desire that this paper will be used by God to give some measure of comfort in the darkest hours.

Possibly, apart from the moment of salvation, there is no other aspect of life more personal than that of dying, or being closely related to one who has died. Unless one dies at a very young age and unless the Lord comes in our lifetime, all of us will know the sorrow of having to say that last “goodbye”. As with so many other aspects of life, death has two prospectives: that of the believer and that of the unbeliever. Concerning the unbeliever, it is irrelevant whether they are a religious unbeliever, a pagan unbeliever, or an atheistic unbeliever, if at the moment of death they are conscious, very few go out with a smile on their faces.

Death is not an isolated happening for the scriptures inform us clearly: “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom 14:7). That is, no ones lives or dies in total isolation. Each life has an affect on others as the following illustrations show:

- a) Abraham mourned for Sarah, a husband for his wife. (Gen. 23:2)
- b) David mourned for Absalom, a father for his son. (2 Sam. 18:33)
- c) A people can mourn for a leader, the people for Aaron. (Num. 20:29)
- d) Bathsheba mourned for Uriah, a wife for her husband. (2 Sam. 11:26)
- e) A man mourns for his “Brother” in the work of God, the old prophet for the unnamed prophet. (1 Kgs. 13:30)

Death is an experience mentioned constantly in the scriptures. The following is a tabulation of the words associated with death.

Word	Number of verses	Word	Number of verses	Word	Number of verses
Dead	331	Mourned	22	Wept	70
Death	351	Mourning	48	Sorrow	66

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Word	Number of verses	Word	Number of verses	Word	Number of verses
Dying	7	Crying	32	Sorrows	22
Died	190	Weep	47	Sorrowing	2
Mourn	44	Weeping	48		

To the nonbeliever, death is frightening, something to be avoided, and those who are left are to be pitied for:

- a) It is heart breaking to hear folk with all sincerity praying for the dead.
- b) They seek to nullify its starkness by calling it a celebration of life.

Sadly, for many there is the acceptance of man's foolish words whenever there is said: "When you feel the soft wind in your cheek, that is me speaking to you". Even the greatest of once philosophers were totally ignorant of the after life, for instance:

- a) Seneca said: "the life hereafter is that which wise men promise, but they do not prove".
- b) Socrates said: "I hope to go hence to good men but, of that I am not very confident, nor doth it become any wise man to be positive so that he will be I must now die and you shall live. But which of us is in the better state than living or dead, God only knows. Clearly, neither soul nor body has any more sense after death than before it was born."

Ideally, believers are not to be like that, rather it is an opportunity not for the celebration of life but as a reminder to all present of the words of the Holy Scriptures: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" (Ecc. 7:2).

The liberation of Israel in Exodus 12 to 14 has spiritual lessons for us for we all need liberation.

- a) There would be agreement for the need of liberation from the power of indwelling sin.
- b) There would be agreement for the need of liberation from the attractiveness of sin.

But, is it possible that we, who are believers, need liberation from the Egyptian prospective relative to the death of a believer?

- a) A prospective which views life that eating, sleeping, and working is all there is to living.
- b) A prospective that says death is such a tragedy.
- c) A prospective which views life beyond as surreal, thus we say: "poor 'so and so' the saint of God, has died".

This is not the prospective of God. It does not mean that we do not miss the individual or we do not sorrow for the loss of the individual. All I am saying is that if we live in God's prospective of the death of a saint, it helps ease the sorrow and pain.

- a) "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). We are expected to sorrow. Love automatically necessitates sorrow and grieving when a loved one is gone. However, it ought not to be the desponding languishing of relentless grief, of unspeakable loss, emptiness, and hopelessness. Let our hearts rejoice in the fullness of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom Paul wrote: "Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. 1:10)

Grieving

Grieving is an automatic response to the loss of a loved one, and one can feel sorrow for an individual or a family, even if the deceased is not known personally to them. Such a situation occurred when Princess Diana died. There was a public outpouring of sorrow and grief yet the vast majority never knew her personally. When it comes to grieving, no two people grieve in the same way for we all are related to each other in different ways. I have a brother and sister and our dad died. Even though we were all his children and all loved identically by him, we all grieved differently. It is very wrong to expect others to grieve as I do, and it is wrong for one to judge how another grieves.

It is interesting that even some wild animals grieve, for a mother elephant will be very reluctant to leave her dead baby, and indeed at times other elephants gather round with her. For us humans it is a God given avenue by which we can start to get through the loss. It is often said: "They will get over it in time" or "time heals". I personally believe both are wrong. From my communication with those who are left, they just get used to the emptiness and life is adjusted accordingly.

1) Grief is:

- a) The God given process by which we can, to some degree, recover and move on from the many losses we experience in life.
- b) No respecter of persons.
- c) Something we don't fully understand until we pass through it.
- d) A hurt that wounds the heart like no other hurt.
- e) Something that exposes our vulnerability – it forces a door open into the deep parts of our soul.
- f) Something that others find awkward and uncomfortable to deal with, and not knowing what to say, often end up saying inappropriate things.

2) Some reasons for our grief:

- a) Grief does not only come from a bereavement, it also can come from:
 - i) Broken relationships – Abram with Hagar and Ishmael. (Gen. 21:11)
 - ii) The loss of health, wealth, or family, as Job experienced. (Job 2:13)
 - iii) Anguish and anger at the actions of others – Nehemiah regarding Eliashib's harboring of Tobiah. (Neh. 13:4, 8)
 - iv) Our own sinful actions that hurt or damage done to others, a fact that was seen in Joseph's brothers. (Gen. 45:5)
 - v) Deep, unfulfilled desire, as was seen with Hannah and her longing for a son. (1 Sam. 1:16)
 - vi) Anger at God's actions, as Jonah was because of the salvation of Nineveh. (Jon. 4:1, 6)

3) Unbeliever's response to our grief:

- a) When the bereaved are family and friends the usual statements are: "they are looking down on you and smiling", "Look on the bright side", keep a smile on your face". Such sentiments are satanic and dribble void of any biblical support. They are only in a better place if they are saved. They are definitely not looking down on the family and its afterward joyous occasions and smiling. Such statements are from the devil to keep people thinking about eternity and the reality that those whom they loved are in hell. I do not blame them for laying hold of a straw for comfort, for it is a dreadful realization to understand that one we knew and loved, whose picture we can look at, etc. is even at that moment weeping and wailing in a Christless eternity.

4) Some believers inept responses to the grief of others:

- a) Sadly, there are believers who are so imagined heavenly minded that there is a judging of others and that Christians should not grieve saying: "I am surprised how badly they took her passing"; or "it's not a good testimony to get so upset". I wonder have such ever read John 11:35 and the narrative of the Lord going to the grave of Lazarus. Even when the sisters chided the Lord, He never chided them, but entered into their sorrow and wept.

5) The stages a grieving person may go through:

- a) There are distinct stages in grieving. So much depends on the circumstances surrounding the death. Was it sudden or a protracted death? Was it an elderly person or a child? However, no matter how

long one is waiting for the news that a loved one has died, it is always a shock. This is usually followed by a numbness, a denial, the sense of all being so unreal as one goes through funeral arrangements in a mechanical manner. There will possibly be a sense of guilt, imagined or real, being expressed in such terms as: "If only I had . . ."; loneliness, possibly sudden releasing of tears; and there can be depression and despondency. There can also be anger, and the questioning: "Why me?" or "Does God not care?"

6. Coping with Our Grief

- a) There must be the allowing of one to grieve and no one can set a time duration on it. Christians are not immune to grief, and while we have the Holy Spirit to comfort, yet God does not protect us from experiencing pain, loss, or grief. Sometimes one may feel embarrassed by their tears and sudden times of uncontrollable sorrow or loss. This is not a sign of spiritual immaturity. Never forget: "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:35).
- b) However, in our grief of one who has gone to be with the Lord, it must be understood that how one grieves for them is totally different from how they grieve for one who is lost. I mourned because of the death of my dad, but when my aunt Evelyn, whom I dearly loved died, I wept bitter tears, and even several months later when sitting waiting in a restaurant waiting area, the reality of her death swept over me and I just cried great sobbing tears. The difference was, she was as one who had no hope. (1 Thess. 4:13)

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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