

and (3) as a termination of life and transit to eternity (Eccles. 12; Luke 16:19-31). May the Blessed Lord Jesus now assist us as we look at the profundity of death from these three angles.

A Sudden Visitation

“And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”

Luke 12:19,20

“Sudden death syndrome” is not only a phenomenon of infant mortality, but in the sense of an abrupt and unwelcome cessation of human life, can be an experience known by many in the prime of life, as a divine stroke interrupting the most carefully-laid plans and purposes. Jesus spoke of just such a sudden termination of life in the case of a foolish farmer. When this man’s fields brought forth abundantly, he selfishly concluded that he should tear down his existing barns and build larger ones in which to bestow the fruits of his harvest, thereby insuring that he would have ample provision for many days to come. Not a thought of God, or honoring the One Who so blessed His crops, ever occurred to him. His life of self interest is vividly portrayed in the recurring self-references of his recorded deliberations: *“And he said, This will*

I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:18-19; emphasis mine). God’s response to such a foolish scheme is severe: *“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required [ἀπαίτέω - ‘to demand back, to ask back’] of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”* (Luke 12:20). God pronounced this man, who simply followed the philosophy of life by which most men live today, an unqualified “fool.” He exclaimed that his presumptuous plans and his life of self-interest were utterly senseless, because he made not God His first and last thought (Ps. 10:4). Little did he know that in that very night, while in the midst of his self-absorbed planning, his life would be abruptly cut off and his soul, which he held in sacred trust, would be demanded back.

The suddenness with which death may seize its victim demands that we order our lives with a supreme regard to God’s will, purpose, and glory—and with a sincere concern for our salvation (Daniel 5:22-30; Ps. 55:15,23; Nu. 16:29,30; Prov. 29:1; Jer. 28:15-17; Isa. 38:1,9-16). Otherwise death may steal upon us unawares and find us unprepared for its sudden visitation.

A Sentence Against Sin

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”

Romans 5:12

When one ponders the origin of death and seeks to comprehend its profound meaning, it becomes readily apparent that death made its debut into the world of mankind as the direct consequence of sin. God’s very first commandment carried with it a dire warning of death as a judicial sentence against disobedience: *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die [מֵוֹת הַיּוֹמָה]”* (Gen. 2:16,17). Furthermore, the apostle Paul clearly describes death, both spiritual and physical, as a state of existence which has descended upon all men as punishment for the original transgression of Adam, who represented the race, as its natural head (cf. I Cor. 15:22), in his act of disobedience: *“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many”* (Rom. 5:15).

The recognition of death as an expression of Divine judgment against sin provides the living with a profound

spiritual and moral lesson, of which the Preacher of Ecclesiastes took special note: *“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”* (Eccle. 7:2). Every man’s death marks not only the cessation of earthly existence (excepting the Millennial life of the resurrected righteous), but also the end of all opportunity to find the saving knowledge of God in Christ Jesus (Jn. 17:3; Isa. 55:6,7). In itself a revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 5:18), it acts as a conspicuous index finger, pointing to a further, final, and inescapable “judgment to come.” For this very reason, death strikes a dreadful fear in the man or woman outside of Christ, representing, as it does, his passage to a “certain, fearful, looking for of judgment and fiery indignation” (Heb. 2:15; 10:27). But for the Christian, thanks be to God, the prospect of death as a doorway to ultimate condemnation has been forever removed (Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1) by the atoning work of Him Who, by the grace of God, “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9), thereby abolishing it, and bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel (II Tim. 1:9). Thus, for the trusting saint, death’s sting as judgment has been overcome (I Cor. 15:54-56), and its grim nature transformed into infinite gain (Phil 2:21) and a transport to heavenly felicity (Phil. 2:23; II Cor. 5:8,9).

A Termination of Life And Transit To Eternity

“Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them... Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it”

Eccle. 11:10;12:1,7

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom”

Luke 16:22,23

The Scriptures are clear in their portrayal of death as a profound *exit* from earthly existence and *entrance* into the eternal dimension. Considered as an exit or termination of earthly life, death is often an involved process that eventually culminates in the personality taking its leave of the body. This process of gradual decay, with the onset of debility that leads to death is poetically described in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, and is set forth as both a warning to youth not to postpone service to God until one’s waning years, and as an impetus to live in such a way as to finish life well, by a conscientious keeping of God’s commandments, in preparation for the inevitable judgment that follows death (Eccles. 11:9; 12:13,14).

In very truth, death as a process begins before the actual severance of the soul from its bodily connection, much as birth begins with the pangs that lead to the eventual delivery of a child. The Preacher (Solomon) in Ecclesiastes informs us of this process by highlighting, in a series of metaphors and analogies, the change in the various members and powers that are affected by the decay of old age. After searching for the solution to life’s riddle through experimentation (Eccles. 1:12-2:8), making various observations (e.g. 9:13-10:20) and formulating conclusions, the elder Preacher admonishes us to a youthful piety before the long process of aging takes its toll. We are to remember our Creator in the days of our youth before death knocks in the form of reduced pleasure (12:1); failing sight (12:2- this is old age as it affects most of the race and is not necessarily a description of those whose youth is renewed as the eagles: Ps. 103:5; Deut. 34:7; Joshua 14:10,11); a gloomy outlook (12:2); trembling arms and hands (12:3); stooping posture and feeble legs (12:3); fewer molars and chewing capacity (12:3); drawn lips and infrequent speech (12:4); insomnia (12:4); an enfeebled singing voice (12:4); unfounded fears (12:5); snowy-white hair (12:5); a burdened existence (12:5) and waning ambition (12:5). All of these tell-tale signs mark the onset of that profound experience called “death,” when the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it (12:7).

The termination of earthly life, however, does not exhaust the spiritual significance of death, for it also serves as a transit to eternity and the judgment that lies thereafter. Death’s dark corridor leads to the doorway of eternal destiny. Jesus affirmed death’s role as a passageway to the afterlife in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). While Lazarus was an insignificant beggar whose death would have been scarcely noticed, the rich man, traditionally known as Dives, was no doubt buried with pomp and ceremony. But one moment after death, a glaring contrast in destinies appears. Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom (paradise), while the rich man in hell, lift up his eyes, being in torments (Luke 16:22,23). Death became for each of these men an entrance-way to either eternal misery, or eternal, heavenly bliss. And such will it be for each man and woman whose life leaves this life through the profound experience of death. To which destiny will your death lead you? Where will you spend eternity? You can seal your eternal future in the paradise of God now, and escape an eternity of torment—if you will. How? By calling upon Jesus Christ to be merciful to you a sinner (Luke 18:13; Rom. 10:13). Believe that His blood cleanses you this moment from every past sin (1 Jn. 1:7). Confess Him as your Lord and God (Matt. 10:32) and seek Christian fellowship in a true, Bible-believing church.

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IT IS APPOINTED

*UNTO
MAN*

*The Inevitability
Of Death
And
Judgment*

*“And as it is appointed unto men once to die,
but after this the judgment”*

Hebrews 9:27

Death. It stalks the children of men like a relentless foe, felling both weak and strong, young and old, fearful and unsuspecting. As the grim law of mortality inexorably traces its course through human experience, it leaves in its wake a trail of sobbing hearts, pain, and a gnawing sense of helplessness. For every man and woman outside of Christ, death marks the end of all earthly ambitions, and looms on the horizon of thought as an enemy to be avoided and feared. And yet it remains, by divine appointment, the inevitable issue of human life and the inescapable reality that demands careful consideration. It is thus the purpose of this tract to consider death under three distinct views: (1) as a sudden visitation (Luke 12:15-21); (2) as a judicial sentence against sin (Rom. 5:12);