

#38 Northside Natter

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Today, I'm taking a brief look at **Death**.

No-one likes to go to funerals. No-one likes it when someone dies. No-one is happy to endure the lonely nights and empty days without the person they love to share it with. Yet, death is a fact of life. It is certain that if we are born, we are going to die. It is also certain that we cannot stop it from happening, it's part of the cycle of life.

Death is something that God never intended for man to have to endure. When he created Adam, he created an immortal man. Someone he would commune with, walk the cool evenings in the garden of Eden with, someone who would love him as unconditionally as he loved. This is what God had in mind.

We know that Satan, that slithery, silver-tongued serpent, changed things by corrupting the heart of man. In doing so, he changed his intended path. He introduced man to disobedience. But God is not to be outsmarted by a dim-witted slitherer who can't seem to understand that if you take on God – you lose.

Now mortal, man struggles to exist in an unfriendly, inhospitable and dangerous world. Since the eviction from the garden, man has been doing a justifiable job of it and even made life much more comfortable for himself.

The price of man's disobedience in the garden of Eden was death. His lifespan gradually decreased over the millennia to finally be capped at 120 years. Someone I know recently lost their Gramma at the age of 105. She was a vibrant and happy sort and I'm sure she would have said she had had a happy life; for the most part. Would she have wanted to continue living if given the choice?

Choice is an interesting thing. When life is going well for us, we'd all vote for a long continuation. When life is hard, desperate and helpless, we'd vote for a quick and painless end. That's human nature. We don't want to go through the tough stuff. We don't want to have to struggle so hard in any part of our life.

When someone dies, what do we say or do to comfort ourselves? In the worldly sense, people tell each other that they will be with them again, someday. Or they tell their children that the deceased person has become a star in the heavens and is now looking over them. Or they tell them that they are in heaven with God and are very happy.

Of course, the bible tells us that none of this is the truth of the matter. The truth is that those who have died are as if they are asleep. They unknowingly wait for the Saviour of the world to return. That's the truth.

There is no purgatory, no limbo, no sudden trip to the pearly gates. There is only a place without thought, without breath, without consciousness. Time passes without notice.

What of the memories of that person's life? Do the living care that they existed at all?

Ecclesiastes 2:16

For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever; seeing that which now [exists] in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dies the wise man? As the fool.

We know that the body of man, once expired, will return to the dust. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 3:21, also says: *who knows the spirit of man that goes upward and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?*

From this we know that the body has no hold over the spirit of man. It is only a vessel to contain the man while in his earthly form. This means that there is hope after death of another life. One that takes a different shape. The whole world seems to understand this concept, regardless of which god they believe in. I find that interesting.

King Solomon felt that if there is no continued remembrance of a person, and that a wise man dies in the same manner as a fool – whether rich or poor; what sort of life should he live?

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I say that it was from the hand of God.

This reminds me of the scripture: *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (Phillipians 4:11).*

If man can enjoy the life that God has given him, then he can die a happy man. And yet, we know that there is so much more that God offers.

A mere remnant of mankind will take up the offer of another life in that other shape. How incredibly sad that is for mankind, and how very disappointing for the Lord. Yet it is about choice.

For most of mankind, death's sting will be final. For the remnant, such as ourselves, death has no triumph because Christ has already won that battle.

1 Corinthians 15:55

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

The sting of death comes from sin and its strength lies in the law of God, which no man can fulfill. Christ fulfilled the law for us when he atoned for our sins. Praise the Lord that death cannot hold his children.

So, while the wise and simple, the rich and the poor, the saints and the godless all have one death, it is the saints who will be remembered forever. It is the saints who will inherit an eternal life in that other shape. It is the saints who enter death with hope of resurrection.

So, when a saint dies, what do we say to comfort ourselves? We say, praise the Lord, our brother or sister has made it. They can never fall from grace. They remained steadfast to the end. This is the hope of glory that Paul the apostle speaks of to the Ephesians. This is the reward for trusting in the word of truth, in the gospel of salvation, to the point of being sealed by the holy Spirit of promise and in obedience to baptism.

When those we love die without the Lord in their lives, we grieve not for their loss but for their refusal to trust the word of truth and to make God the king of their hearts. It is difficult to find comfort in their choice to ignore the salvation message. However, everyone is given the same choice in life. If nothing else, it should give us the resolve to stay the course because we know what's on the other side.

Our job is to spread the word of truth so all may come to salvation and enter death with a hope of eternal life. We cannot say who will and who will not accept the challenge. All we can do is live in hope that they will listen and act on the words we speak. We cannot be disheartened to the point that we stop speaking the truth. For we know that the Shepherd's sheep will hear his voice. We just have to keep going until we find them, even if it takes us a lifetime.