

Hymns: 13 In the Garden 9 His Eye Is on the Sparrow 31 Victory in Jesus
Grace That Is Greater Than All Our Sin Because He Lives
Psalm 23; 104:24-31

Benjamin Franklin said:

Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.

As we consider what's happening and what has happened in Washington D.C. in recent decades, Franklin's concern regarding the permanence of our Constitution was warranted. But our focus today is on that last phrase:

*... in this world, nothing can be said to be certain , except **death and taxes.***

From a secular point of view, that idea has a lot of merit. With the income tax deadline rapidly approaching, we're very familiar with the certainty of taxes. Today though, we want to look at that other certain thing, and that is death.

We've said goodbye to many of our friends this winter. I attended a funeral service for a neighbor just a few weeks ago. Both of my parents passed away years ago in the month of February. From the time of our birth, the specter of death hangs over us. As we grow older, it draws **ever** nearer as one-by-one loved ones and friends pass on to eternity -- leaving us more alone with each passing year.

The Bible says:

...it is appointed unto man once to die, then the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

But it wasn't always that way. In the beginning, the Bible says, God made a perfect creation. But man disobeyed God. This led to the fall of man and the curse of death. Man became mortal. Here was God's promise:

Genesis 2

[16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

*[17] 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.***

In Genesis 3 we read that God followed through with His promise:

Genesis 3

*[17] And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt **not** eat of it:*

***cursed** is the ground for thy sake;
in **sorrow** shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;*

*[19] In the **sweat of thy face** shalt thou eat bread,
till thou **return unto the ground**;*

*for out of it wast thou taken: **for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.***

In Romans we read the following:

*...the **wages of sin is death**; ... (Romans 6:23a)*

That's pretty clear. Death came by sin. That is, failing to meet God's righteous standard. As Betsy read earlier, the Psalmist recounts God's greatness even as the earth careens downward in this fallen state.

As man was created to live forever it's not surprising that death is a very unnatural event. When we lose a good friend or loved one, we can become heartbroken and even devastated. Grief overwhelms us.

Grief

Psalm 31

*[9] Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with **grief**, yea, my soul and my belly.*

*[10] For my life is spent with **grief**, and my years with **sighing**: ...*

And with grief comes tears.

Tears

God sees our sorrows and remembers.

Psalm 56

[8] Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

God gives healing from our griefs and lifts **us** up from the depths of sorrow.

Psalm 116

[8] For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.

God turns sorrow into joy.

Psalm 126

[5] They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Jesus explained it this way to His disciples as He moved ever closer to His death on the cross.

John 16

*[20] Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall **weep** and **lament**, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be **sorrowful**, but your **sorrow** shall be turned into joy.*

Tears are unnatural. Someday, in heaven tears shall be a thing of the past.

Revelation 21

*[4] And God shall wipe away all **tears** from their eyes; and there shall be no more **death**, neither **sorrow**, nor **crying**, neither shall there be any more **pain**: for the former things are passed away.*

Resurrection

But what happens when we die? There will be a judgment, followed by a new creation. If there is death and an afterlife, that implies some sort of resurrection or return to life. The Bible says that there will be **two** resurrections. Let's see what they are:

John 5

[28] Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

*[29] And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the **resurrection of life**; and they that have done evil, unto the **resurrection of damnation**.*

That identifies the **two** resurrections and **two** fates, but we need to clarify things here.

Matthew 25 puts it this way:

*[46] And these [that is the **unrighteous**] shall go away into **everlasting punishment**: but the righteous into **life eternal**.*

In the resurrection chapter, the apostle Paul illuminates further:

I Corinthians 15

[42] So also is the resurrection of the dead [referring to the righteous dead]. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

[45] And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [speaking of Jesus Christ] was made a quickening spirit.

*[50] Now this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood** cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

*[51] **Behold**, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

[52] In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

*[54] So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this **mortal** shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory**.*

Okay. we've learned that we will all face death.

I have an appointment to meet my Maker. You have an appointment to meet your Maker. It is a specific date and a specific time.

Years ago, my Mom and Dad kept their appointments to meet their Maker. We will be keeping ours as well. Are you prepared for that ultimate appointment? How can we be prepared? We must be born again by believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 3:16).

Resurrection

The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is *the firstborn among many brethren* (Romans 8:29) as He conquered the grave and became the first to rise from the dead in a perfect body. In that resurrection

chapter Paul both summarizes and elaborates:

I Corinthians 15

[20] But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

[21] For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

[22] For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

[23] But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Which coming of Christ is this? Paul elaborates further in

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

[13] 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.

[14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

[15] For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

[16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

[17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

*[18] Wherefore **comfort** one another with these words.*

What about pets?

What does the Bible say about pets? Is it possible that we will see them again?

Do you remember the story of David and Bathsheba? The LORD sent Nathan the prophet to David with a story. Let's consider that for a few minutes.

II Samuel 12

[1] And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

[2] The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

*[3] But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him **as a daughter**.*

[4] And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

[5] And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

[6] And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

[7] And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

Perhaps you too had a pet as close to you as the lamb in that story. We did. Our little girl was a sweet black dog we named Grace. She knew us as Mommy and Daddy. She brought so much life and joy into our home. We loved to say her name as it reminded us of God's great gift of *grace* to us. But at nearly twelve years of age, Grace contracted a liver infection. She tried to fight it, but even with antibiotics her pain and weakness increased.

Analysis of her blood confirmed she was dying. The Bible is clear on this point, *the life of the flesh is in the blood* (Leviticus 17:11). As her fever pressed to the danger level, we chose to end her suffering and let her go as we said a very sad "Bye Bye" to our dear little girl. We're thankful for the years that we enjoyed with her and that the time of her suffering was less than a week. Let me share with you a few memories of daily life with Grace:

As soon as I would finish eating and begin cleaning up the dishes, Grace would look at me and do her chomp-chomp (commonly called air snaps) to demand I come and play with her right then. I told her to wait, and she obediently did so until a few minutes later when I would join her for playtime. I remember often saying to Grace, "You're a whole lot of company." I remember too that Grace was a "good eater" her whole life -- until those last few days. I remember she would park herself in the kitchen at our feet to let us know that she would please like **us** to *share* some of our food with her. As she lay very patiently underfoot, I would speak **for** her saying, "everybody's got to be somewhere." So where is Grace now? She's safely with the LORD. He has her soul and spirit. Likely, she too awaits a resurrection with a new and perfect body. How do I know this?

Well, first we know that she has a spirit – that immaterial thing that makes her a Border Collie / Labrador mix. She was born with that. She also has a soul – that unique set of characteristics that distinguishes her from every other creature that ever roamed the earth. Her soul is what makes Grace Grace. Both spirit and soul are immaterial. Since they are not material, they are not subject to the limits of physical bodies. However, to be expressed, the spirit and soul must be plugged into a body. I believe God can and will do this for her and for us as when the time is right. But is God able to give Grace a new life in glory?

Genesis 18

*[14] **Is any thing too hard for the LORD?** At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*

Jeremiah 32

*[17] Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and **there is nothing too hard for thee:***

Matthew 19:26

*[26] But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is **impossible**; but **with God all things are possible.***

Clearly God is able to do it, but is He willing? Yes, He wants to bless us.

Philippians 4

[19] But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Romans 8

[32] He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Psalm 23:1

[1] The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Matthew 7

[11] If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Will we ever see Grace again? We hope so. We know our God is great enough to preserve her soul and spirit and good enough give her a new perfect body and restore our love relationship. We also know He will do this too for every man and woman who accepts His free gift of grace. And there's more:

Romans 8

[20] For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly,

Animals had no choice. The curse was not their fault.

but by reason of him who hath subjected the same

God cursed all of creation as a result of man's sin.

in hope,

But God also provided hope. What is that hope?

*[21] Because the creature itself also shall be **delivered from the bondage of corruption** into the **glorious liberty of the children of God.***

God promised that animals will be delivered and made free from the curse which God will lift. Death was a big part of that curse. Death will end. God will restore peace to the animal kingdom.

*[22] For we know that the **whole** creation **groaneth** and **travaileth in pain** together until now.*

Innocent animals continue to struggle and suffer until God lifts the curse.

*[23] And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even **we ourselves groan** within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

God will redeem His children from our corrupt bodies and give us glorious immortal bodies. I will see Mom, Dad, and expect to reunite with our innocent little friend Grace in glory.

Benediction

[20] Now unto him that is able to do **exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think**,
according to the power that worketh in us,

[21] Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.
Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-20)

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