

The End Marks the Beginning

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of this lectureship, “Then Cometh The End - A Study of Subjects Pertaining to the End of the World” is one that is often discussed and seldom understood by many in our world. As long as man has recorded his thoughts the last days have been the center of discussion and controversy. Some feel as if there is nothing beyond this life, while others believe in a hereafter that will not make a distinction between good and evil. The serious nature of this study cannot be over emphasized. Every individual will spend eternity in one of two places. Those that have sought the Lord on earth shall be with him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17), while those who have turned away from him shall be turned away from him forever. The punishment will be everlasting banishment from his presence (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

The Hebrew writer makes a clear and powerful statement concerning this subject; “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27) The penman of this epistle is in the midst of declaring the tabernacle as being a shadow of things to come. He shows that Christ is the reality of that shadow (verses 23-24) and that He was different from other sacrifices in that He was offered but once (verses 25-26). Now notice verse 27 which explains the reason Christ came and died. This text shows at least four great truths: 1) We are given life; 2) All men will die; 3) Every individual will face judgment; and 4) Everyone will exist for an eternity.

With the above thought before us we will discuss our topic: “The End Marks The Beginning” in which we will observe the age old question, “If a man die shall he live again?” (Job 14:14) People throughout the ages have pondered this question and have thought about life after death. The Egyptians, as well as other civilizations buried their worldly possessions with the dead so those possessions could be used in the hereafter. In this study we will look at what the Bible has to say concerning the end of all men, the judgment and an eternity spent in one of two places.

ALL MEN WILL FACE DEATH

The entrance of death upon mankind became a reality with the sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). The word most often used for death in the Greek language is THANATOS. Vines translates this word as the separation of the soul (the spiritual part of man) from the body (the material part), the latter ceasing to function and turning to dust (Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 11:13; Hebrews 2:15; 5:7; 7:23; James 2:26). It is also described as an escape from the confines of this physical world. Ecclesiastes 12:5-7 states; “... man goeth to his long home, and

the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." When we die our soul continues to exist while the body returns to the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). The death of man is different from that which occurs with the animal kingdom. When animals die they cease to exist in any form, for they have no eternal spirit and the body decays. Ecclesiastes 3:21 teaches, "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" Death in humans is the change from the physical body to a spiritual one (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Death is certain, it is a fact that no individual can escape. Just as our text, Hebrews 9:27 affirmed, "It is appointed unto man once to die." We all try to delay it and seek the best medical care available, but there will come a day when all precautions will fail and death will separate us from this world. A man may live 20, 40, 60, 80 or more years, but he will one day die. Again, Hebrews 9:27 declares that all have a Divinely declared appointment. It cannot and will not be cancelled and to say otherwise is to dismiss clear Bible teachings on this subject. We may try to ignore the fact, we may live as if we do not believe the divine declaration but the day will come when God's word will be verified. God declared to Adam in Genesis 3:19, "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.

Death can be described as an end to life as we know it, but not the end of man's existence. It marks the end of trials, temptations and the troubles of this world (Job 14:1; Revelation 21:4). There are many benefits associated with death when one is faithful to the Lord. Sometimes these things are overlooked when death is viewed through human eyes. But in God's sight it is a blessing when one dies and is in the right relationship with Him. In Psalm 116:15 the Psalmist tells us what God sees when he writes; "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Since it is precious in His sight, obviously it is not the end of man's existence. God regards the occasion with special interest. It is of value or importance in His eyes because it marks the moving of another of the redeemed ones to the glorious reward which has been promised, it marks the addition of one more child to the happy hosts, and it is a new victory obtained by the sacrifice of Jesus for man's redemption, showing the power and the value of Christ's blood and of the gospel.

JUDGMENT

The Bible clearly teaches the fact that there will be a judgment for all of mankind. In his sermon on Mars Hill, Paul ended his speech with a reference to the day appointed "in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). There is a sense in which men are judged already in this life (John 3:18) but there will be a day of final judgment. The final judgment will be the day in which men will be sentenced to one of two places (Matthew 7:13-14). We may not know nor understand every facet of judgment day (just how it all will be carried out) but we can be certain that it will be the most colossal day ever recorded in the annals of history. Keep in mind that there is a great difference in human trials and the Divine trial associated with the final day. In a human trial it is made up of probing questions by which both judge and jury are trying to come to the knowledge of truth in a legal matter. Whereas, in the Divine judgment, God already knows

the truth concerning our guilt or our innocence, He will announce our condition and execute the sentence which we have achieved by our lifestyle (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:5).

The Day of Judgment will usher in the second coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). The time of this occurrence is unknown to all but the Father (Matthew 24:36) and will come at His choosing. The Bible does reveal that it will come at the end of this “present age” at which time the heavens and the earth will be completely destroyed (2 Peter 2:7-14). It will be an event that every person shall witness (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

On that notable day Jesus will judge all of mankind (John 5:22, 26-27; Acts 17:31) even the secret things of men (Ecclesiastes 12:14). He will judge the angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and every human being that has ever been upon the face of the earth (Romans 2:4-6; 3:6; Revelation 20:12-13). Every word spoken, every deed done, every thought will be brought to judgment (2 Corinthians 5:0; Matthew 12:36-37; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Timothy 5:24-25). Can you imagine? Jesus will pass judgment upon all of us based upon what our lives were about! The judgment will be just because Christ will be our judge and the Bible will be the standard which will be used in that judgment (John 12:48). We must remember that the standard and the judge are not flawed and the proclamation of “guilt” or “innocence” will be correct and without partiality.

Having observed the above things let me hasten to say that God desires the salvation of every individual (2 Peter 3:9). He has made every provision for the saving of our souls. Remember that our souls will spend eternity in one of two places. God sent His Son to die for the sins of mankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:8), His commandments and admonitions were revealed through inspired men who penned the message of salvation so that all might be saved (2 Peter 1:21). The hope of our salvation is revealed in the final judgment scene found in Revelation 20:11-15. It requires that our names be written in the “Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27). When we obey the gospel we are added to the book of life and we must live godly lives so that our names are not “blotted out” of that book (Revelation 3:5; Titus 2:11-14). Men are made just by the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:8-9) which comes by having our “sins washed away” (Acts 22:16; 1 Timothy 3:4-7; 1 Peter 3:21). The judgment will be wonderful for those who have been faithful (Revelation 2:10) and will be terrifying for those who “know not God and that obey not the gospel...” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Remember how our Lord said there are two roads. One leads to life while the other leads to destruction. And that place of residence will be eternal.

ETERNITY

How can we define eternity? The ablest minds have sought to capture its full meaning and have come woefully short of its definition. Webster says it means without beginning or end; everlasting; endless. It is impossible for the finite mind to imagine something eternal. This just may be why it is often overlooked or dismissed. It is like trying to imagine the largest number you can name. But no matter what number you think, it can be doubled and doubled again and doubled again, (and so on). But even if I cannot fathom and understand the concept of eternity, I still am faced with its reality! I must come to grips with the fact that I AM and I ALWAYS WILL BE!

David spoke of that time frame when he spoke of his relationship with his dead son. He reasoned, “But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go

to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:23). The apostle Paul said, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). Jesus said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also...Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:3, 19). It is easy to see that there will be an eternity even if we cannot comprehend the concept.

How long will it be? I cannot imagine nor comprehend such a length of time. Maybe I should not say “length of time” because time will have no meaning in that realm. But this one thing I do know about eternity, once I step through the door I will be there forever more. There will be no coming back and there will be no end to the place which I have chosen as my eternal abode. The here and now determines the then and there!

CONCLUSION

Let us think carefully about our lives, the judgment and eternity. The end of life here as we now know it will cease with death. The end of our lives here marks the beginning of our eternal home. It is not IF we die then go to our “long home.” It is WHEN we die WHERE will we set up our abode for eternity? Many talk about life after death, but the wise man will carefully consider his life BEFORE dying (Matthew 7:24-25). Hell is a place prepared for the unprepared (Matthew 25:41) while heaven is a place prepared for those who have carefully prepared for it (John 14:1-7; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Two important questions must be asked. Where will we live in eternity? Where will our children and loved ones spend eternity? Too often we consider this life with no thought of the next. May God help us all to take a serious look at the fact that THE END MARKS THE BEGINNING!

Works Cited

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