

The Final Curtain

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[0 : 00] So for the last time, for a while, we're going to be looking at the life of David and coming to this end story, really, of his life and its quite a complex story in some ways.

But it's interesting, I think, in the society in which we live really struggles with the whole idea of death. People don't really talk about death very much.

And it's kind of paradoxical, really, because we watch brutal violence and death all the time in films, you know, or Netflix.

Death by entertainment, by death, or death by entertainment. It's a theme of lots and lots of films, isn't it? It's either the classic love story or it's a violent kind of story that's got lots of death in it. Sometimes the two come together. And you know, we put on the news every night and it's full of death and it's depressing.

[1 : 03] Maybe that's why people don't watch the news so much. But actually, although we're aware of it all the time and we sometimes just invite it into our lives by what we watch for entertainment, I think facing up to our mortality is something that society in which we live is not very good at.

Everything about death, questioning death is seen as something that's really morbid. We don't really want to do that. It's not something we're going to be involved in. We can deny the reality of it. And I think whether consciously or unconsciously, people have just come to the conclusion that death is natural and it's just the end of everything.

So often I think people haven't given much thought, at least not outwardly in a verbal way with others, have not given much thought to what death is and if anything happens after it.

And we'll have given very little thought to the concept of God as the author of life. Or the fact that we as Christians, we've just sung about it, that God in Christ comes to not only live but to die and it's a death that as Christians, we talk about all the time and we sing about it all the time.

[2 : 24] And that's because He rose from it and that's the hugely significant thing for us, isn't it? Because that changes everything. It changes our whole understanding and our whole perspective of life and death that we come to because there's this recognition that in Jesus Christ, Paul speaks all the time about the resurrection being so significant.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then His death was a waste of time and our faith and our worship and everything that goes with it is also a waste of time. And so there's this great recognition that His resurrection changes our whole perspective on life because it reminds us that there's life after death, but also more than that, there's death after death.

And in a sense, that's what we always think about or consider when we're considering issues of faith. And this story is the next, the last record of an old man.

We looked at an old and cold man last week and this is the last kind of bit we have about this old man who is about to breathe his last as we're told in that first verse.

And also a young man is son Solomon who's on the cusp of life and greatness. So if you're old tonight or if you're young tonight, it's okay because the message kind of covers all of us from God's living word and we recognize that.

[3 : 53] Sometimes I do feel that the more I understand from God's word, the less I actually understand, the less that I fully comprehend.

And that's by way of saying in a sense that I don't have all the answers for these old testament narratives, just thought I'd put that out there. And we're constantly battling and struggling with different elements that we find in the Scripture.

But there are two principles I want to tease out here from this passage, primarily for us to think about as Christians. I want us to kind of take the whole concept of death by the throat a little bit and

look at it from God's perspective in the light of what he's saying to David here, for David to say to Solomon, his son as he passes the baton over to him.

And the two things are we're called to live by faith as believers. And the second thing is that the best is still to come.

So we're called to live by faith and this is a passage where David gives a charge, as it were, to Solomon the son. And it's quite simple. It's really a call for him to live as an old testament believer and as God's representative as the king of Israel, a life of faith in his God.

[5 : 18] Verses two, if you say, you know, I'm going about the way of the whole earth, be strong, show yourself a man, keep the charge of the Lord your God, the command of the Lord your God, walking in his ways, keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, his testimonies, as is written in the law of Moses, that he may prosper in all you do and whatever you turn.

May the Lord establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, if your sons pay close attention to the way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.

So within the context of the shadows of the Old Testament, we have this great call to walk a life of faith.

It's the covenant language of the God who has redeemed his people, Israel, and who has put a king on the throne, a king that will point forward to, as we've seen over the last number of weeks, the great Messiah.

And it's a call to trust and obeys that old adage, isn't it? Trust and obey. And that's David as God's charge to Solomon.

[6 : 31] And it's to be in the light of grace. It's not a way of earning favor with God and trying to get into God's good books, but rather it's a recognition that God has already redeemed them as a people.

He is already their Lord. You know, the charge of the Lord your God. They were a rescued people. They were a redeemed people. They didn't deserve mercy, but they'd been shown mercy.

They were God's chosen people for whom He'd poured out His great love and His mercy. And they were called to respond to Him in faith and in love because of what He'd done.

Now Solomon would have known that. Solomon grew up in a home where that was evident. It was a really mixed up home. It was all kinds of things going on in that home, but he did know about grace.

He did know about forgiveness. He was aware of the covenant and the covenant truths, and he understood what was being said to him here, to follow in the way of his fathers and to recognize as God of grace the blessings that came from following God and from serving God and from living in reliance on God.

[7 : 45] And that's a call that, whether we're very old or whether we're very young or we're somewhere in between, we're always called to live by faith as Christians in the light of His grace.

It's never a call to live a ritualistic life of box ticking. It's never a way of living to try and earn our way before Him, but we're called to constantly recognize and remember His grace and live in the light of that and follow Him as a result of that.

We can get weary doing that. We can find the struggles and battles of life difficult. We can even be tempted to turn back from Him, but we've been rescued and we're called to live by faith.

And this life that is spoken of here that is kind of obviously developed in the New Testament as we see that in different places.

It's a strong life. Be strong, He says. Show yourself to be a man. And this is the reality of what we're called to do is as we walk in obedience to the living God as Christians, as we follow Him, it's a strong life.

[9 : 06] It's what makes us people, it's what makes us uniquely what we were created to be when we follow Him. You know, Mark 10, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

Love your neighbor as yourself. There's no commandant greater than these as we live, and I'll say a little bit more about that in a minute, we find great strength, His incomparably great power for us to believe that that power is the same as His mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead.

So the raising of Christ from the dead to life is the same strength that enables us to live this way and to be strong. And that life is a life of ongoing repentance, humility and change.

So when you face the searing heat of temptation or of opposition or of difficult circumstances, what is it that comes out?

What is it in our life of faith that comes out? Is it bitterness, thorns and thistles and an evidence of a heart that's far from the living God?

[10:16] Or is it fruitfulness? When the heat comes, is it fruitfulness? Because that is an evidence of where our roots lie, where we're gaining our strength, you know, from that great Jeremiah 17 picture, and it reveals that we can bear fruit whatever we're going through.

That's the strength that comes from following God and living this way as Solomon is commanded to do. It's an abundant life that's spoken of here. It's great that he speaks about if you live and follow Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

It's a great picture right in the middle of the Old Testament. It's the same great picture that we're given by Jesus and Mark. As Christ gave everything, heart and soul, so we're able also to give everything in our lives.

And that, I'll come back to that again. But it's a counterintuitive life where prosperity will come in the most unexpected ways.

But it always comes as we recognize the privilege of following and obeying the living God. And what we recognize about that, and I think it comes through here as well, is it always involves death, so we're getting back to the death subject again.

[11:46] To live this life of obedience and faith as Solomon was called to here, it always involves death. Now Solomon was well-acquaint with the sacrificial system in the Old Testament.

He was well-acquaint that it was through the sacrifice of, temporary sacrifice of animals, shed blood, the day of atonement, a life for a life, that that all pointed forward to something greater that was going to happen, but that without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness of sins. And so death was kind of built into everything that they understood about life and about forgiveness, the death of a substitute, the lamb, the bull, the goat, whatever it was.

All pointing forward, as we can see it now to the God Himself, the real strong man, okay, the real man of faith.

The only real man who ever lived as it were, the greater Son of David, who himself went into the Holy of Holies and faced up, as we saw earlier with the kids, to the divine wrath and the divine justice as God Himself to be the one who would give Himself in death as a substitute for us.

[13:02] And that's the great message, isn't it, of the gospel. The punishment that we deserve is the one that He receives and takes upon Himself. And the death of a substitute, crucial and critical to all our understanding of what it is to be a Christian, what it is to live the life of faith, a great Savior.

And the recognition of being separate from Him is a terrible reality. The separation that comes from death.

So it always involves the death of a substitute, but it also always involves, and Corey spoke about this last Sunday morning, really, when he was talking about the importance of fleeing and fighting. It's the death of sin in our hearts and the death of sin in the kingdom. And that's always part of our calling, is to recognize that if we're to walk this way of obedience and of wholeheartedness and of strength, it means that we have got a battle and a struggle and a fight to put to death the sin that's in our own hearts.

Now I think sadly David on many occasions failed to do that. And in some ways there's possibly a tacit acknowledgement of that in some of the more kind of brutal things he seems to say at the end about dealing with people from his past who had engaged in evil activity in the kingdom.

[14:45] Maybe he should have, as God's representative and as the King, dealt with that better in his own life. Of course we know his own personal life.

He rejected often the way of obedience and truth, even though he returned to the God of his father's for forgiveness. And it's the second section here is pretty tough where he basically says about three different people.

Solomon, make sure that they don't go down to death in their old age. Make sure they're dealt with. And it seems a bit revengeful and that he's settling scores.

And some will take that as being the interpretation of these passages. But I think it's deeper than that in the sense that in the Old Testament we recognize that God was establishing his kingdom.

It was a physical kingdom. It was God's kingdom. It was to be a kingdom that stood for justice and right and worship of the living God. And it stood against those who would seek to destroy it from within or to destroy it from outside because there was a rebellion against the living God and a desire for him to be overthrown.

[16:06] And we know in the case of each of these three characters that they had acted in really ungodly ways and had acted against the kingdom and would many ways if they were continued to have influence would destabilize God's kingdom.

And they were judged at this time and Solomon was to instigate that judgment on them. And there's a recognition that they're always in the Old Testament is that there's this dark spiritual undercurrent of opposition and a desire to destroy God and to destroy our God's kingdom. Now we are called today in a different way to be ruthless against sin and to be ruthless against idolatry and self-reliance.

There's a, I think it's very clearly stated in many ways in Colossians. I'm just going to read a few verses from Colossians chapter 5, chapter 3 and verses 5 to 10.

[17:08] Put to death therefore, so it's the same kind of strong language for us as Christians. Put to death therefore what is earthly in your sexual immorality and purity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, which is idolatry on account of these things that wrath of God is coming.

And these you too once walked when you were living with them, but now you must put them away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. Don't lie to one another seeing that you've put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

And so we've got that kind of very clear New Testament battle that we're to face against disobedience and against sin and we're to live this life of strength and wholeheartedness before the living God.

So there's this death that's involved in the death of a substitute in Jesus, the death of sin in their own hearts, and also ultimately the death of all who oppose God.

Matthew 13 says, as the weeds are pooled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age? The Son of Man will send out His angels, they will weed out His kingdom, everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

[18:20] That reality of spiritual death, the reality of us having to deal with what Jesus was willing to take on the cross and did take for all who put their trust in Him.

If it's not in Jesus Christ that that is dealt with, we have to deal with that on our own shoulders. And death therefore is never just the natural end of life, the natural extinction of life, it's the end of hope for all who are out of Christ.

I think that's a struggle for people today who we live with such entitlement, such a sense of presumption that this is all that is. And we have lost sight, I think, very often, I include myself in this, of the eternal justice of God and the great judge of all mankind and the priorities that we should have in the light of that, that Jesus didn't die for nothing, that Jesus' death wasn't cheap, that Jesus is God and the flesh who came with all His love and with all His grace and with all His commitment to take and to deal with what we couldn't deal with on our own and His kingdom is coming.

And that's what we recognize and that's what we believe. Whether there's this recognition that involves death, but also that... And that's the kind of negative side.

Also involves abundant life to be the ones who are strong, like Solomon is commanded here to give heart and soul, is abundant life. He gave everything so that we can have everything.

[20:02] And you know therefore, and I know therefore how unsatisfactory it is to be half-hearted in our Christian faith. You know what it's like to do anything half-heartedly.

It's not really great. It's unsatisfactory. You know, if you're trying to keep fit, for example, but you're half-hearted about it and you've got a stash of donuts so that you can really enjoy them when you're trying to keep fit, it doesn't really work for you to be like that or if you're doing laps of the track but you cheat on the numbers because you want to give the impression you're doing more than you are.

But actually we're only kidding ourselves when we do that because our heart isn't in it if we're not heart and soul and keeping fit. And I'm a really bad golfer.

I don't really play golf but I was out the other week with Joe, my son, and we had a scorecard. And you know what it's like if you're kind of half-hearted, you're not great at golf anyway and you try to

keep a score and you would look at it after you'd finished one of your holes and you know, I'll not count the three that I had to slash out of the long grass.

I'll just ignore them and I'll forget the fact that I ate potted on the green. And you just kind of really, you know, you narrow it down, you say, well, I actually got a seven there, that wasn't so bad. When in fact you probably got 16 or 17 strokes on that show.

[21 : 30] And you're doing nothing but kidding yourself, really, aren't you? And you're really half-hearted about or want to improve. And it's unsatisfactory therefore.

But it can also be dangerous to be half-hearted, isn't it? We were, a number of years ago, Katrina and Ross were in Nepal and we had the opportunity going paragliding, which is a marvelous thing to do.

But you have to basically run off the edge of a cliff with someone with you. But you really have to be completely wholehearted in doing it.

You can't kind of, you really have to be wholehearted. So you've got to, when he says run, you can't really drag your feet because probably the whole thing will collapse and you'll die.

So when you run, you've got to really run with them and go off the edge of the cliff and go for it wholeheartedly. Or if you're diving off a springboard, that's the kind, you can't do that half-heartedly when you're bouncing up and down to get a good height.

[22 : 37] You can't do that half-heartedly. If you do it half-heartedly, you kind of half fall off and your trunks get caught in it. And you hang in left, hang in, it's a nightmare. You've got to be really committed and wholehearted.

And so it is with, it can be dangerous to be half-hearted and really unsatisfactory. And I think that's what we often find, isn't it, in our Christian lives? You know, it's unsatisfactory and we feel far from God.

Often it's because we're just half-hearted and we're not really giving Him everything in response to all He's given us. And we don't enjoy the abundant life that is promised and is given.

So there's that reality that we're called to live by faith. And very briefly, we're also reminded, maybe implicitly in this passage, if not explicitly, that the best is still to come.

If you remember this book of First Kings, it was written primarily to the Israelites who were in exile many years later for their own rebellion and disobedience.

[23 : 44] They lost the promised land and they were enslaved by the Babylonians. And this was very probably written by Prophet Jeremiah and given to them as a reminder to them of not only what they had lost but also of the great hope that God would fulfill His promises, would return them.

And there was still a Messiah, there was still a people to come. And they were in exile, they were under God's discipline as it were, and it seemed grim, but there was hope for them, great hope as they considered God's purposes and God's future.

The covenant promise God, which we've looked at all the way through here is that there's the king is still to come, the great, the great or David, the great Messiah Jesus.

And for us, we're kind of on the other side of that, aren't we? But we're waiting for the king to return. He has come once in salvation, he will return as the king of kings and judgment.

And that's a great hope for us as Christians because it reminds us of a perspective we often forget. Because I think in this life, so often, the best seems to have passed.

[25 : 06] We've enjoyed the best, or maybe the best never was, or we don't know what the best might be if you're young.

But as those of us who are older, it's maybe just memories. And even when we do have the best, we somehow somewhere along the line, there's a shadow there because we know it's going to end, don't we?

Even the best of events we know it's going to end, or maybe it's unfulfilled dreams. And maybe the standard of, we think of what is the best is connected with youth and with vigor and with amazing pleasurable experiences or maybe amazing relationships.

But in Christ, we always have this great reality and this great truth that the best is still to come.

There's that great, I often quote this verse, don't I, sitting Corinthians, therefore we do not lose heart.

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day. So there's something big going on in our lives and the older you get, the better it is because we're enjoying it.

[26 : 21] There's a reality that outwardly we're struggling sometimes. We're becoming more alive and can become more alive despite our age, despite circumstances, despite our health, we can become greater fruit bearers the longer we live.

Our life is improving. That's great, isn't that great? Isn't that very hugely counter-cultural? And we always struggle with getting older, but there's this great seed of life that is growing within us as Christians.

And even our death is a different death. And I think the language of the Scriptures often reminds us of that. David, we're told here, rested with his fathers and first Thessalonians, four were told, for we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

That nice, brilliant phrase that reminds us that the sting has been removed from our death and that we fall asleep in Jesus.

It's the one great certainty, isn't it, for us all? It's the one great reality. But this perspective that as we take our last breath as Christians, it will be a breath that is taken in the presence of Jesus, and that we will be going into His company so that for us to die will be far greater, is a great comfort.

[27 : 50] And of course, the best is still to come with an unimaginably great eternity that we walk into, that we live into, that we will enjoy in all its fullness after Christ's return.

And I don't fully understand what it means that these Old Testament believers knew that, but Hebrews 11 speaks about that and says, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. So in some way, they also understood and knew and recognized that the best was still to come, and we far more can do so as we remember Him as the author of life, who will be the one that we will share life with, and the one who will wipe away every tear.

So there's challenges in reading some of these Old Testament passages. There's bits that are really difficult to make sense of, but I think the basic principles of living a life by faith and recognizing the best is still to come is a great way to finish looking at the life of David.

And the challenge is there for us all, isn't it, about who we serve and how we serve and how we live and what our perspective is. And this great call, which again was reiterated this morning, and balance as well is about our hearts, heart and soul, and recognizing that He, as we rely on Him, He gives us the heart to be wholehearted for Him and to serve Him, and therefore to know abundant life and blessing.

[29 : 23] Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would teach us Your ways, that we would understand Your truth, that we would be wholehearted in what we do for Jesus, not in our own strength, but as we rely on the Spirit of God who lives within us, and that we would live by faith and live in obedience, that walk of obedience which we often struggle with.

Forgive us when we fail to obey You because we are grumpy or we're selfish or we think we know better or we think it's hard and difficult or we're weary.

Lord, just help us to come back to You for the desire and for the change of heart and for the vision to see that the parameters You give us are there for our blessing, are there for our good, are there to make us strong and whole and to be what we were created to be, and remind us that sin is the cancer that destroys that vision and makes us insular and selfish and self-destructive and sometimes also destructive of others.

So Lord, we pray for Your wisdom and grace and joy and presence, and that we would help one another to live this life of faith and to remind ourselves that the best is still to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Thank you.