

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Are You Ready For Death? (Part 2)

I Samuel 20:3

Having considered some introductory thoughts on the subject of death, we now turn our attention to some of the verses that deal with death. In our text verse, I Samuel 20:3, David mentions death. The verse reads, “*And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*” What truly immortal words David spoke. It is from this verse that I take the first point of the message—**The Closeness of Death**. It does not matter how much we try to deny it, or put it off, death is close at hand to all of us. We could wake up one morning, feeling great, and die before the sun sets to close that day. It does not take long to read the paper or listen to the news before you read or hear about someone who died that day. Some of those are tragic murders and some are terrible accidents, but it remains true that death is closer than you think.

In pondering the closeness of death, consider The Realization. David begins his statement, “[There is].” (The words are in italics in the King James to indicate that the actual words are not in the Hebrew text. They are supplied to make good English. This does not change what I am trying to emphasize from the verse. I normally italicize verses that I quote and leave italicized words in regular script. Because I am singling out these italicized words, I put them in brackets above.) David knew from his own experience how close death was. He had narrowly escaped death on three occasions when Saul threw a javelin at him. He had heard about and seen soldiers fighting in battle who died around him. He himself had killed

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hundreds of men in battle. He probably had family members who died of disease. David knew how close death was, and at this particular moment, the thought was truly made real to him. Now I know that David had been anointed king, and we know the end of the story, but that does not lessen the statement that David made. In David’s mind, and because of the attack that Saul had made and was about to make, David realized that death was close at hand.

Has the realization ever struck you that death is near? Has someone close to you died, and made you realize that you could be next? Now I am not trying to make us afraid to do anything, nor to be afraid to walk out of the house, nor to be afraid to get in a car, because we might die. But we must realize that we could die at any moment. More importantly, we must be ready for what happens after death.

David, at this particular moment, realized the closeness of death. In the previous chapter, Saul had thrown a javelin at David. Saul also sent messengers to kill David in his house. David fled and in chapter 20 meets with Jonathan. Perhaps one could criticize David for a lack of faith because of his anointing to be king. You might criticize David for his lack of faith, but that does not change the truth of what he says. Death is close at hand for all of us. We could die at any moment. Are you ready for death?

There is the realization of the closeness of death, but we can also see The Reality of the closeness of death. Notice the terminology that David uses. He says “There is *but a step*.” Perhaps we wish the analogy was a marathon or journey or anything that would describe a long period of time. But David does not use something that indicates a long period of time. He uses something that everyone knows and something that everyone uses—a step. There are some units of measure that David could have used that are smaller than a step, but they would not have had the same impact as the word step does. We can all imagine taking a step, and that step be the last one that we take on this earth. We can imagine taking our last step here,

and then stepping into eternity.

Some may wish that David said “There is a lifetime between me and death,” but that would not have been any better because no two lifetimes are the same. We do not know how long a lifetime we may have. Some will wish that David used anything but a step because a step is so small, but that is the reality of how close death is. We do not know how long we have before death comes. We must be ready at any moment.

Many will say that they wish they knew exactly how long they would live, so they could plan better, but that is not how God works. No one likes to plan out details any better than I do, but this is one event that I cannot plan. No one on earth knows the time that they will die, so we had better be ready at any moment. Scripture abounds with many verses that tell us why we must face death. It is because of the sin that Adam and Eve committed in the Garden of Eden. Scripture also tells us how to be ready when death comes—by believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. Death is real. We must face the reality that it is *“but a step.”*

There are those that may read this message or hear a similar message who will say that only the old have to worry about death. But as we saw in the statistics at the beginning of the message, people of all ages die. I just recently read in the newspaper of a young girl that died in a swimming accident several years ago. Her family had taken her to a swimming pool in the summertime to have some fun. Unknown to them, it would turn into tragedy. I cannot explain all of the details, but she was sucked down by the drain that was in the pool. Before anyone could do anything, she was dead. Her family has spent several years now trying to pass and enforce a law to cover these drains, so more children do not die. This is a terrible story, and I would never want anyone else to have their child die because of the drain in a swimming pool, but the truth remains—we do not know when we will die. We must be ready for death.

Others will say, “I am in great physical shape, so I do not have to worry about death right now.” That is a lie. It does not matter how much you exercise, or how great a shape your body is in, you could die at any moment. Think about a few examples. In 1990, Hank Gathers was a young man in his 20's and was playing in a college basketball game. He had led all collegiate players in scoring the year before. He was an exciting and great player, and many expected him to have a great career in professional basketball. During one game, he experienced some physical difficulties, but after being put on medication for an abnormal heartbeat, he continued to play. He played several more games and seemed to be doing well. In his conference tournament, he made a terrific dunk. As he was heading back up the court, he collapsed at mid-court and died. It turns out that he had a heart- muscle disorder. He looked and played as if nothing was wrong, but he was literally a ticking time bomb. He died before anyone could help him. The greatest of all physicians could do nothing to help him. He died with a great future ahead of him. He died while in great physical shape. But his athleticism, great basketball skills, and his physical exercise could not prevent his sudden death. He died when he was not expecting to die. He died doing what he loved doing—playing basketball. Most of us are not in the physical shape that Hank Gathers was in. He died while looking like he was a physical specimen—the envy of many young men. I wonder if he was ready for death. Are you?

There are other examples of athletes that died suddenly. Darryl Kile was a pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals. In 2002, he was found in his motel room dead of heart disease. He had just pitched a few days before. Upon examination, they found there was over 90% blockage in two arteries. He was 33 years old, in the prime of his career, with several good years seemingly ahead of him. But he died.

Reggie Lewis was a basketball player with the Boston Celtics. In the summer of 1993, he died of sudden cardiac death while practicing. He was 27 years old. Upon examination, they found that he had a structural heart defect. Here was a man in seemingly great

shape, but who had a physical problem that no one would know about until he died. Sadly, in this case, looks were deceiving. He looked great; he was a professional athlete, but his athletic ability could not help his heart. He died. Was he ready for death?

Two other men that I want to mention were older than these. One, Pete Maravich, was a retired basketball player. He was the highest scoring college basketball player in history and was a good professional player until injuries forced him to retire. In 1988, while playing a pickup basketball game, he collapsed and died. When they examined his body, they found that he had a congenital heart defect. He died at the age of 40. That is not old. That is my age now.

The last man that I mention is Jim Fixx. He began jogging in his 30's and wrote several books about how jogging could improve life and even prolong it. In 1984, at the age of 52, he died while jogging. After his death, they discovered that 3 arteries were 95%, 85%, and 70% blocked. All of his exercise could not provide a long life. He died when he was not expecting to die. Was he ready?

I mention these athletes not to minimize exercise, but to prove that even with exercise, we can still die. There is a small step before death. We can try everything to put it off, but death will come. There is more to say. We will continue next month.