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How to Die Triumphantly

(7 Sayings)

Death is the greatest fact of life. We are not here to stay; we are here to go. There is nothing more certain than death, and nothing more uncertain than the time of dying. We must therefore be prepared at all times for that which may come anytime.

“The day of death is better than the day of one’s birth,” proclaimed Solomon the wise (Eccl 7:1). “Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom,” prayed Moses (Psa 90:12). “It ought to be the business of everyday to prepare for our last day,” penned Matthew Henry (1662-1714), the Bible Commentator. And Spurgeon (1834-1892) preached, “He who does not prepare for death is more than an ordinary fool; he is a mad man!”

As Christ was, so are we in this world. The Scriptures teach us that we must live like Him. If Christ is the pattern for our living, so is He for our dying too. It of course does not mean that we also must die at thirtythree on a Roman cross near Jerusalem! But the principles which governed Him in both life and death are for us to follow. His seven sayings from the cross are guideposts for us to a triumphant death.

1. Carry no bitterness.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk 23:24).

Jesus could so magnanimously pray for the forgiveness of His executors and torturers because His very life was

characterized by forgiveness throughout. If a man lives right, he will die right. Even when Jesus rebuked or whipped people, it was out of purest love. Stephen followed his Master ditto (Acts 7:60).

Someone said, “In a world where death is, we should have no time to hate!” Let us be as kind as we can today; tomorrow we may not be here. Paul warned the Ephesian Christians, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26). Let not our life end with anger, bitterness and grudges. We are heading towards a land which people entered just because they were forgiven. Shall we leave people behind us here on earth hurt and unforgiven? Jesus would not have anyone offer his gift at the earthly altar without reconciling with his offended brother (Mt 5:23,24). Will He demand less when we appear before Him in His literal presence?

Only a life of love today can guarantee us “boldness in the day of judgment” (1 Jn 4:17). “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (Js 2:13).

Rush to the offended at once. Embrace the hurting. Reconcile with the wronged. Restitute matters. Return whatever does not belong to you. Withdraw court cases. Apologise freely. Forget the past. Owe no one forgiveness. Die debt-free!

2. Concern yourself with the lost.

“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43).

Soulwinning was the overriding business in the life of Jesus. He asserted again and again that He had come

primarily to seek and save the lost. He sacrificed rest and sleep in order to help earnest enquirers. He changed itinerary in order to minister to sincere seekers. He was a Friend of Sinners everywhere, even on the cross.

“Jesus was not crucified in a Cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two criminals — on the town garbage heap, at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in three languages — Hebrew, Latin and Greek — at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died, and that is what He died about, that is where churchmen ought to be, and what churchmen should be about!” (*Pulpit Helps*, April '94).

No man is ready to die until he has believed on Christ. After he has believed, he has no greater and nobler job than to stop unbelievers who are rushing to Christless eternity.

It was his sin of omission that landed the rich man in hell. He had not been concerned about the needy and suffering. His indifference towards missionary work during his days on earth is understood distinctly from his desperate cry to Abraham to send Lazarus to his five unconverted brothers! (Lk 16:27,28).

□ Beloved, invest your *time* to pray continuously for the perishing souls. George Muller (1805-1898) prayed for his two drunkard friends for nearly 40 years. They got converted only at his funeral service but went as overseas missionaries. Our prayers and tears are not wasted but kept in God's book and bottle (Psa 56:8).

□ Invest your *talents* to proclaim zealously the message of Christ. Consecrate your skills, studies and strength for the service of God. Go wherever you can to bless people, and do whatever you can to bring them in. D.L. Moody (1837-1899) desired, “After I die, I want a monument of two legs carrying the Gospel!”

□ Invest your *treasure* to pay generously for the material needs of the work of God. That's how you can stockpile treasure in Heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars (Mt 6:20). At death we leave behind all we have and take with us all we gave!

Those faithful in stewardship responsibilities will be greeted hilariously with the Master's Welldone and Welcome! (Mt 25:21,23,34).

Let's keep ourselves reminded of the Poem by C.T. Studd (1862-1931), the famous cricketer turned missionary —

*Only one life;
It'll soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ
Will last!*

3. Care for your family.

“*Woman, behold your son!... Behold your mother!*”
(Jn 19:26,27).

In his concerns a Christian must give high priority to his family. The Bible establishes, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8). Jesus' concern for His widowed(?) mother as the eldest son grew out of this conviction.

Though Joseph's brothers had meant evil against him, he made ample provisions for them and their families in Egypt before he died (Gen 47:5,6; 50:19-22). So also did David for his father's house even though he was the last son (1 Sam 22:1-4).

For the dead it is just a promotion into the glory land, but for the bereaved it is gloom and loss — especially for the spouse and the children. God is so compassionate towards them that He is called the Defender of the widows and the Father of the fatherless (Psa 68:5). Do not wait to reach your seventies to start making provisions for the family. Even as you earn daily bread now, prayerfully work out means to provide for the future of the family. A careless attitude that God would take care of your dependents is anti-Biblical (2 Cor 12:14; Prov 19:14).

A word about dividing the properties will be appropriate here. Bitter fights arise among brothers and sisters after the passing away of parents because of partiality in partition. In India the worst affected is girls. It is illegal and un-Christian. God is displeased with such step-motherly treatment given to them. In fact the weaker sex must be given stronger support to survive in this male-dominated society (1 Cor 12:24,25).

When God blesses you, realize your responsibility for the wellbeing of your poor relatives also. Do not become too selfish to look beyond your closest family circle. Use your status and position to bring up your underprivileged kinsfolk. God honours this largeheartedness (Esth 4:13,14). Saul made his cousin and David his nephew as commanders in their armies (1 Sam 14:50; 1 Chr 2:16; 2 Sam 8:16). Such sincere help to the deserving is not nepotism.

4. Cry to God.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

(Mt 27:46).

Jesus was perfectly divine as well as fully human. Nowhere is the combination more evident than on the cross (2 Cor 13:4). His absolute identification with man is the absorbing inspiration for us.

Though death is a blessing in so much as it puts an end to all temptations and sorrows, it is still an enemy that every human being dreads (1 Cor 15:26). The God-given instinct in man is a desire to live than to die (Psa 118:17). The “fear of death” is therefore natural, but Jesus delivers us from the “bondage” to this fear (Heb 2:15). He tasted the sorrow of death and death itself, so He may uphold us while we walk through the “valley of the shadow of death” (Mt 26:37,38; Heb 2:9; Psa 23:4).

King Hezekiah wept bitterly when prophet Isaiah announced he would die in his sickness. God saw his tears and mercifully added fifteen years to his life (Isa 38:1-5). God's general promise is that He would satisfy us with long life (Psa 91:16). Therefore we can pray, “O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days” (Psa 102:24). But in comparison with endless eternity, thirty years or ninety years here make no difference. John, Jesus and James died at the zenith of their career; but who can say they died too early?

Most of what Jesus spoke from the cross was quotations from the Old Testament. He prayed the actual Scripture verses (Psa 22:1). We too are admonished to be filled with the word of Christ so our prayers may be meaningful and

our praise graceful (Col 3:16). Make memorisation of Scripture alongwith its meditation a regular practice. The Holy Spirit will remind us of the appropriate passage at the hour of darkness.

“Every man must do two things alone: he must do his own believing, and his own dying,” observed Martin Luther (1483-1546). This is referring to human companionship. But the Lord Himself has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you...I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Heb 13:5; Mt 28:20).

5. Convey your desires.

“I thirst!” (Jn 19:28).

Death has snatched away thousands before they communicated to the family and friends their desires and wish. One reason for their failure was that they never realised that death could be sudden and unexpected.

The Bible records excellent speeches of God’s men delivered at the eve of their death. Study these passages: Gen 49; 50:24-26; Dt 29-34; 2 Sam 23:1-7; Jn 14-17; Acts 20:17-38; 2 Tim 4; etc.

Christian leaders must prepare the nextliners even as they are developing their own ministries. Jesus, Paul and many apostles trained secondliners from the very start of their public ministry (Mt 4:17-19; Acts 16:1-3). It is such a loss to the Kingdom when pastors and preachers keep everything to themselves until they become bedridden. Jesus spent more time with His select men than the masses.

Without regular and meaningful communication we cannot leave precious legacy behind. It is an excercise of faith (Heb 11:22).

God requires of parents to teach and instruct their children to continue the godly traditions and never sell their heritage for a short-term appetite (Gen 18:19). Before apportioning properties and jewels to the children, set aside a sizeable portion for God. Make endowments for the Kingdom needs. Hear Solomon’s wisdom: “There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt...As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return” (Eccl 5:13-15).

Several of our organs like eyes can brighten and lengthen the life of our fellowmen. Why bury them to become dust and ashes? Register with the nearest eyebanks and such institutions and instruct your family what to do in the event of your death. Kingdom-minded people cannot waste money on expensive cemeteries. The great missionary Amy Carmichael (1861-1951) instructed her associates not to build a tomb for her but just make a bird-bath where she would be buried. Burying or burning makes no difference. It’s all the same. The spirit goes back to the Creator, but the body becomes dust for dust and ashes for ashes (Eccl 12:7). Don’t tell your spouse to remain unmarried (Mt 22:23-33; Rom 7:2), or instruct your grandson whom to marry!

6. Concentrate on completing your work.

“It is finished!” (Jn 19:30).

God expects each of us to finish whateve work He has assigned to us. In His wisdom He has granted us sufficient

space and strength. Even before going to the cross, Jesus testified that He had finished the work His Father gave Him (Jn 17:4). Missionary Paul declared the same thing: “I have finished the race” (2 Tim 4:7). There are certain underlying principles for such accomplishment—

□ Don’t procrastinate! “Do not boast about to-morrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Prov 27:1). Be brisk. Work hard (Eccl 9:10).

□ Don’t overcommit! Know your limitations. Don’t try to do everything. Prioritize your life. Don’t extend your borders beyond God’s gifting and enablement (Rom 12:3; 2 Cor 10:14,15; Eccl 3:10,11).

□ Don’t be a soloist! Delegate responsibilities. Share the work (Mt 26:19; Eph 4:16).

□ Don’t be a perfectionist! Our work must be neat and tidy, but somewhere we must stop, because except what God does, everything will be less than perfect. Perfectionists make their lives and those of others miserable (Eccl 7:16). Also they accomplish less.

□ Don’t sidetrack! Stay in your calling. Don’t shoot rabbits while going for deer-hunt. Trivial things leave us exhausted. It is said, If you have two aims you have one too many! “David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep” (Acts 13:36).

7. Commit your spirit.

“Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit”

(Lk 23:46).

*Perfect submission, perfect delight!
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love!*

“If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:8). Only God decides the time of our death (Jn 19:10,11). We will not die before the appointed time. Let us therefore relax. “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God ... My times are in God’s hand” (Psa 42:11; 31:14,15).