

Hebrews 11:21-22

In these two verses in Hebrews 11, two men, Jacob and Joseph, gave deathbed pronouncements of faith. Their faith challenges each of us to consider how we will approach the most pivotal time in our life. Is your faith substantive enough to rejoice in God and His faithfulness on your deathbed? What can we learn from these two men of faith and impending death? Billy Graham's comment is appropriate "I have talked to doctors and nurses who have held the hands of dying people, and they say that there is as much difference between the death of a Christian and a non-Christian as there is between heaven and hell ("Amen" or "Oh my!")."

The hopelessness of the lost:

Voltaire: "I am abandoned by God and Man! I shall go to Hell! O Christ! O Jesus Christ!"

Edgar Allan Poe: "God have mercy on my poor soul."

Thomas Scott (wrote anti-Christian books): "Until this moment I thought there was neither a God nor a Hell. Now I know and feel there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty."

Thomas Hobbes (British political theorist and mathematician): "I am taking a fearful leap into the dark."

Sir Francis Newport (head of England's Infidel Club in the early 17th century): "You need not tell me there is no God for I know there is one, and that I am in His angry presence! You need not tell me there is no Hell, for I already feel my soul slipping into its fires! Wretches, cease your idle talk about there being hope for me! I know that I am lost forever! Oh, that I was to lie upon the fire that never is quenched a thousand years, to purchase the favour of God and be reunited to Him again! But it is a fruitless wish! Millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer to the end of torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity! Forever and forever! Oh, the insufferable pangs of Hell."

Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai lived in the first century A.D. He was in the city of Jerusalem when it was besieged by the Romans, but he escaped annihilation by being carried out of the city on a stretcher, as though he were merely a corpse. Following the city's destruction, with the Romans' permission, he began an academy at Jamnia on the Judean sea coast, and it was at this academy that the traditions of the Jews--the so-called oral Law and the traditional interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures were systematized.

But what was the learned Rabbi's dying testimony? Bernard Pick in his 1888 volume, *THE TALMUD: WHAT IT IS* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), pp. 35-6 records his death-bed scene--

"His disciples addressed him, 'Rabbi, light of Israel, thou strong rock, right-hand pillar, why dost thou weep?' He answered them: 'If they were about to lead me before a king of flesh and blood, who is today here and tomorrow in the grave, who if he were angry with me, his anger would not last forever; if he put me in bondage, his bondage would not be everlasting; and if he condemned me to death, that death would not be eternal; whom I could soothe with words and bribe with money; yet even in these circumstances, I should weep. But now I am about to appear before the awful majesty of the King of Kings, before the Holy and Blessed One, who is, and who liveth forever, whose just anger may be eternal, who may doom me to eternal punishment. Should he condemn me, it will be to death without further hope. Nor can I pacify him with words, nor bribe him with money. There are two roads before me, one leading to Paradise, the other to Hell, and I know not by which of these I go--should I not weep?'"

The victory of the believer:

D.L. Moody: "Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now!"

Mel Trotter, founder of more than 65 rescue missions: "I am in perfect peace., resting alone on the blood of Christ. I find this amply sufficient with which to enter the presence of God."

A.J. Gordon (famous Baptist pastor and scholar) awaking from a day-long coma was asked if he had one word for them before he departed. He lifted his head and loudly proclaimed "Victory!" and then died.

Catherine Booth (wife of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army) said: "Is this death? Why, this is glorious!" When someone objected that she was suffering she responded, "Oh, yes; the waters are rising, but so am I."

Sir Michael Faraday: "Speculations? I know nothing about speculations. I am resting on certainties. 'I know that my redeemer liveth,' and because He lives, I shall live also."

Apostle Paul: "For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:" Phil. 1:21-23

What is death/dead?

The world says it is ceasing to exist. Unfortunately, there are Christians who buy into the world's definition.

"If a man were dead, in a natural and physical sense, it would at once be readily granted that there is no further possibility of that man being able to perform any physical actions. A corpse cannot act in any way whatever, and that man would be reckoned to have taken leave of his senses, who asserts that it could. If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions."

Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, page 66

Often times the analogy of a corpse or stone is used to illustrate people in their lost condition spiritually. As a corpse and a stone is unable to do anything, so is the lost person who is "dead in trespasses and sins," Ephesians 2:1.

But, is this how the Bible defines death or dead? Absolutely not!

Acts 10:1 *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,*
2 *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.*
3 *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.*
4 *And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

Rob Congdon comments:

A careful examination of biblical passages relating to death, however, reveals a decidedly different definition or understanding of what it means to be dead, a definition that stands in stark contrast to the Calvinist definition. An inductive Bible study of the use of the word, "death," reveals that both the Hebrew word, *mawet* [מוֹת], and the Greek word, *thanatos* [θανάτος], give an entirely different description of death: It is not the commonly held idea that simply understands "death" to mean the opposite of "living",³⁰ or the absence of life, that for many signifies the end of existence.

In the Old Testament, the word *mawet* reflects death as "the consequence and the punishment of sin. It originated with sin. A grand theme of the OT is God's holiness, which separates him from all that is not in harmony with his character. Death, then, in the OT means ultimate *separation from God due to sin*" (emphasis by author).³¹ The total human individual is made of two parts: the physical (material) part and the spiritual (immaterial) part.³² The Bible uses the word, "death," to indicate what happens when an individual dies: the material and immaterial parts of the person are separated.

The material part (the physical body) is unresponsive, but the immaterial part (the spirit) is still conscious and aware; it is consciously experiencing either eternal life (obtained through Christ) or never-ending death (God's wrath and separation from Him). Death is the word used to indicate separation, *not the state of being unresponsive or inanimate*. It indicates the separation of the individual's two parts or the separation of the individual from God. Only the body is unresponsive as it awaits the resurrection to life (when the immaterial part of the saved individual is reunited with his or her material, glorified part) or to everlasting death (when the immaterial part of the unsaved individual is reunited with his or her material, unglorified part to be judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire, separated from God forever) (Revelation 20:6, 12-14; 21:8).

Robert Congdon, *Oops, I Thought I was a 4 Pt Calvinist*, pgs 17-18

As biblicists - not Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Catholics, Calvinists, etc. - let's make sure we understand death and dead from a biblical perspective, and certainly not a worldly perspective.

Death or dead means separation!

Spiritual death (sin) separates us from God.

Physical death separates the body from the soul/spirit.

Eternal death separates the unsaved person from the presence of God for ever.

Death or dead never means we are a corpse or a stone.

Genesis 2:17 *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.*

Isaiah 59:2 *But your iniquities have **separated between you and your God**, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. [bold added]*

Genesis 35:18 *And it came to pass, as her soul was in **departing**, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. [bold added]*

James 2:26 *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

2 Corinthians 5:8 *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*

Death is inevitable! All are called to prepare for that coming day of death and our appointment with God!

Amos 4:12 *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

Isaiah 38:1 *In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.*

Hebrews 9:27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

The blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh

Genesis 48

Vs. 1-2 Joseph and his two sons appear before a dying Jacob

Vs. 3-8 Jacob speaks to Joseph

Vs. 9-16 Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh

- Verse 16 - the Angel

"The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

Genesis 32:24-30 (see Hosea 12:3-5)

Judges 13:3,8-9,10-11,20-22

Vs. 17-18 Joseph is dismayed that Jacob reversed the blessing

Vs. 19-20 Blessing continued to Ephraim and Manasseh

Vs. 21-22 Joseph is blessed by Jacob

Two challenges as we near death

1. Bless your children

"By faith Jacob...blessed both the sons of Joseph"

Generally, there is a reverence and consideration given to those who are dying and close to death.

This will be the final time for you to communicate your greatest desire for your children.

What is your greatest desire for your children? A good job? A sound financial foundation? A faithful husband? All of these may be important but they pale in light of what should be our greatest desire - the spiritual salvation and faithful walk with the Lord for our children.

2. Worship your God and Savior

"By faith Jacob...worshiped"

His worship was based on the promises of God being sure. Jacob knew he was secure in the Lord.

His last act before death was worship! No wonder God said that "*Jacob was a plain man,*" Genesis 25:27, meaning "perfect, upright, moral." His desire was to please God and he lived a life of faith to his dying day.

Knowing he was near death, Jacob gathered his children together, Genesis 49, then worshipped God with them and finally, "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people," Genesis 49:3

Can there be a better way to leave this world than with your family around you and you leading in worship testifying to the reality of your faith?

- 22 **By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.**

Two additional challenges as we near death

3. **He remembered God's work and promises in the lives of the Jewish people.**

"By faith Joseph...made mention of the departing of the children of Israel"

Joseph believed the land promises to the Jewish people.

- Genesis 12:7 *"And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land..."*
- Genesis 13:14-15 *"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."*
- Genesis 15:7, 13-14 *"And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."
"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."*
- Genesis 48:21 *And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.*
- Genesis 50:19-20 *"And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."*

4. **Take care of your final arrangements - burial, financial, etc. - before you die, so it is not a burden on your children or relatives.**

"By faith Joseph...gave commandment concerning his bones"

Joseph believed the Jewish people would leave Egypt with great substance (Genesis 15:14) and so commanded that his bones also be brought out - Genesis 50:22-26.

Joseph's desire for his final arrangements was based on his unshakeable belief in the promises of God. His desire was that his final arrangements be in accord with the promises and reality of God. He didn't want to remain in pagan country and culture, even in death.

Our final plans should not be based on what is best for our children, or family, but for the glory of God. There may be a place for including children in the distribution of your worldly goods, but our primary consideration should be God's glory. How will your worldly possessions be best used for God's glory?

Four things to consider in preparation for death:

1. Bless your children
2. Worship God (with your family in attendance if possible)
3. Remember God's work and His promises to you
4. Take care of your final arrangements

1 Corinthians 15:53-58

- 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
- 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.*
- 55 *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*
- 56 *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*
- 57 *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- 58 *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*