Facing Death Should Lead us to Live

Selected Verses

I want to start by saying “thank you” to Gavin and Rick for filling the pulpit for me these last two weeks. It has been a hard couple of weeks for my family and especially for my wife. Her brother Matt took his own life on Monday, September 26th. He battled with depression and alcohol for years and tragically he gave in to the voice of the evil one. It is a voice that most of us have probably heard. And it seems like some are more susceptible to it than others, but anyone who has heard it, knows that it is dark and it is hard to fight. His celebration of life is going to be on October 22 here at the church. When the October 22 date was chosen, it spiraled me to a place I didn’t want to be. October 22, 2016 was the death of my beloved friend Tim McCoy. This got me thinking about death, not my favorite thing to think about. But it reminded me that if we seriously face death, it should give us a desire to live the life we have to the fullest. Tim McGraw, a country artist, sings the song “Live Like You were Dying” and the lyrics are as follows.

Tim McGraw “Live Like You Dying”

He said "I was in my early 40's

With a lot of life before me

When a moment came that stopped me on a dime

I spent most of the next days

Looking at the x-rays

Talkin' 'bout the options

And talkin' 'bout sweet times"

I asked him when it sank in

That this might really be the real end

How's it hit ya

When you get that kind of news?

Man whatcha do?

And he said

"I went skydiving

I went Rocky Mountain climbing

I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu

And I loved deeper

And I spoke sweeter

And I gave forgiveness I'd been denyin' "

And he said, "Some day I hope you get the chance

To live like you were dyin' "

He said, "I was finally the husband

That most the time I wasn't

And I became a friend a friend would like to have

And all of a sudden goin' fishin'

Wasn't such an imposition

And I went three times that year I lost my dad

Well I, I finally read the good book

And I took a good long hard look

At what I'd do if I could do it all again

And then"

"I went skydiving

I went Rocky Mountain climbing

I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu

And I loved deeper

And I spoke sweeter

And I gave forgiveness I'd been denyin' "

And he said "Some day I hope you get the chance

To live like you were dyin' "

"Like tomorrow was a gift

And ya got eternity to think about what to do with it

What did you do with it?

What did I do with it?

What would I do with it?"

I know that this song doesn’t emphasize exactly what I am going to focus on today, but it gives you an idea.

I don’t like thinking about being dead. I don’t like dealing with the death of people I love. I don’t like seeing others hurting when they lose loved ones.

But what really discourages me is when Satan sort of steals parts of my life, or the lives of others, when we wrongly focus on our mortality or the lost lives of our loved ones.

If we could ask for advice from anyone who has died, what do you think they would tell us?

Do you think they would say, “You know I wish I would have lived with a little less zeal?”

Or, “I wish I would have spent a little less time with the people that loved me.”

Or, “I wish I would have been a little more selfish.”

Or, “I really wish I could have just numbed my feelings a little more.”

Do you think they would say, “You know, life isn’t that great, I don’t know why I tried to live and love so fully.”

No one is going to say these things on the other side of this life. Yes, it is true that for Christians, life after death is a good thing. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

13 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 NLT

And to the Romans he wrote:

“…we don’t live for ourselves or die for ourselves. 8 If we live, it’s to honor the Lord. And if we die, it’s to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”

Romans 14:7-8 NLT

For those of us who love Jesus, life in the here and now is a good thing!

This is what I am trying to focus on as I am thinking about the recent loss of my brother-in-law. It also helps me as I think about the loss of my friend Tim 6 years ago.

I don’t hear my friend Tim’s voice from the grave, but if I could he would tell me to live well and live with a zealous love for God, for the life He has given me and for others. Knowing Tim he might even suggest trying to skydive or ride a bull named Fu Man Chu.

I believe my wife’s brother Matt would give similar advice. It is universal, a proper view of our time here on earth should inspire us to live it to the fullest, but the Devil wants us to give up on our lives before they are over. As Jesus once said:

10 The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

John 10:10 NLT

Jesus came so that we could have life abundant in this world and the next, so when the Devil whispers to you, tell him that you are going to live NOW AND FOREVER, not just forever.

I’m not trying to minimize death. Dealing with death is hard. None of us are immune to it. But the proper way to combat death is to live life as fully as possible in the here and now. Our life is a gift from God and it is meant to be to lived for His glory. We bring glory to God when we live abundantly. We give credence to Satan when we hold back out of fear, doubt, despair and shame. I titled this sermon, “facing death should lead us to live.” I did so because whether we are considering our own mortality or mourning the loss of a loved one our response should be the same. We should make every effort to press on in the abundance of God’s saving grace.

Richard Rohr, a Francisican Friar,wrote a lecture called “Dying: We need it for life,” this is a summary of the 10 common lifestyles that were a result of a near death experience. People had…

1. **An amazing ability to live in the present.** Most of us live in the two places where nothing ever happens: the past and the future. But the present is all we have to work in. We can’t change the past and we can’t see the future.

2. **An abiding sense of deep confidence**. The untransformed person is inherently insecure and destabilized. The person who is gospel centered finds a strong and lasting confidence - a sense that things are all right - without this being based on your external circumstances at all. It is hard to explain where this confidence comes from and why you have it. But it is there.

3. **An immense decreased interest in material possessions**. Those who have participated in Christ’s death know that happiness doesn't lie in another trip to the mall, or a bigger house, or any external attainment.

4. **Spirituality becomes central and important**. People who have been close to death know for certain the reality of the spiritual world.

5. **A much higher natural compassion** - which extends to almost everything. There's a deep gratitude for everything. A forgiveness for everything. People who realize that they have been given multiple second chances, desire to give others multiple second chances.

6. **A strong sense of life's purpose - and that life has a purpose**. The purpose itself can't necessarily be verbalized, but there's a sense that life is going somewhere, it all means something, it all matters. How you interact even with the check-out girl at the supermarket has significance. And life is worth the courage of taking ownership and responsibility for who you really are.

7. **The sense that all life and love has inherent value**. In group/out group thinking stops. You see the connectedness of things, and the world becomes part of God’s sacred universe. As Rohr says "once you've embraced the demon inside, the demon outside can no longer hurt you."

8. **An amazing ability to enjoy a high degree of solitude and silence**. People who've faced death don't need to have the radio on all the time. They generally don't like loud or jarring music when they do have it on. In other words, noise just for the sake of drowning out silence is no longer as attractive.

9. **A desire to live a more social, communitarian, participatory form of life**. As much as this might seem to contradict the previous item, it doesn't. Those who have been transformed can sit in silence, and still feel connected. And they know that life is about servanthood. Leaving the old self behind, and living in the new self, you feel a sense of abundance. The new self knows there's nothing to lose, and that the more we give away, the more we discover who we are in Christ.

10. **A strong sense of wonder, a perennial sense of gratitude**. You're grateful, and don't even know why. You just have that quiet confidence, because of the gospel. The person who has been spared death has faith, seeks understanding and is grateful to God.

If we are thinking correctly about life and death we should be nurturing these lifestyles. Consequently, if we see ourselves going the other way, we might be listening to the voice of the evil one.

As good as my life is, I have had many a morning that I woke up and thought “what is the point.” That is the wrong voice to listen to. You know how I got past those mornings? By talking to God, by talking to people who love me, and here is the big one, by hearing them. If you are hearing anything other than the truth that you were created by God for His glory, you aren’t hearing the truth. I’m not scolding you for it. I am simply empathizing with you and maybe, just maybe you will hear my voice. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote a book called “Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures,” in it he wrote the following excerpts:

1. 'We must never look at any sin in our past life in any way except that which leads us to praise God and to magnify His grace in Christ Jesus.'

2. 'There is nothing more futile, when dealing with this condition, than to act on the assumption that all Christians are identical in every respect.'

3. 'Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you."'

4. 'This other man within us, has got to be handled. Do not listen to him; turn on him; speak to him; condemn him; upbraid him; exhort him; encourage him; remind him of what you know, instead of listening placidly to him and allowing him to drag you down and depress you.'

5. 'Physical conditions play their part in all this. It is very difficult to draw the line between this and the previous cause because temperament seems to some degree to be controlled by physical conditions and there are certain people who constitutionally, almost in a physical sense, are prone to this condition. In other words, there are certain physical ailments which tend to promote depression.'

He also wrote, the following, which is ultimately the true road to recovery when it comes to spiritual depression:

Deliverance from spiritual depression begins with an understanding of “justification,” not sanctifi-cation, as one might suspect. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). “This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent” (Jn 17:3). As a believer, are you truly enjoying God? Is He the center of your life? He is meant to be. If He is not, you are living in sin – that is the essence of sin. Remember the “good news” – God made Christ to be the propitiation for our sins – that is, God made Christ responsible for our sins; they were all placed upon Him and God dealt with them and punished them in His Son. So Christ is our salvation – we simply accept Him as our Deliverer and Savior by faith. God then imputed Christ’s righteousness to us – here is the great exchange: He took our wickedness and gave us His righteousness! To get rid of “spiritual depression” you must say farewell to your past! No matter how dark the stains may be, they have all been blotted out! It is finished! Never look back on your sins again! They will only “depress” you! If you focus on “your sinfulness,” you will only conclude that “you are not good enough!” And whether you believe it or not, nobody is good enough! The issue is not our goodness… the issue is God’s goodness.

The truth is that Jesus Himself is our peace. And He is the only one who can give us peace of mind, He is the truth that sets us free from the voices in our darkness.

You and I were created to live, this life, abundantly for God’s glory and His purposes. The scriptures give us His purposes.

9 Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. 10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. 11 Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. 12 Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. 13 When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. 15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

“I will take revenge;

I will pay them back,”

says the Lord.

20 Instead,

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them.

If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap

burning coals of shame on their heads.”

21 Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Romans 12:9-21 NLT

The world, the flesh, and the devil say that truly good life is what you do and what you accomplish. Jesus, instead, emphasizes how we do what we do and how we accomplish what we accomplish. Don’t measure your accomplishments, rather trust in Jesus and let His love, mercy, and grace for you lead you to demonstrate His glory in your failure and your success. Everyone of us is destined to die let that motivate you to live and love to the fullest.

Satan is a liar and a thief and if he wants to lie to us and rob the glory of our lives even as we live. Don’t let him do it.

Instead, metaphorically speaking, live your Christian life like you are dying. And by that I mean do the good you know you should do with all the passion and zeal you can muster!