



Sermon Discussion Questions

August 27, 2023,

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT...PREMATURE DEATH?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1. Opening Discussion Questions

- a. Since the topic of premature death is so painful to many, we will forgo the normal opening discussion questions this week and provide a serious subject for reflection and sharing instead.
- b. The recent fire in Lahaina is just one more of a seemingly endless string of events we can all recall when sudden, unexpected, and often massive loss of life occurred. Shooters at Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Columbine; tsunamis in Japan and Indonesia; earthquakes in Haiti, Nepal, and Turkey/Syria; genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia, Congo, and Cambodia; diseases like cancer, heart attacks and even Covid-19; automobile accidents, drownings, plane crashes – the list could go on, and on and on. Some affect entire communities; others are more individual, but ultimately, they are personal. Think about your reaction to such crises, what most influences that reaction and where you first turn for solace and help. If you are in a group, share your views.

2. Discussion Points:

- a. *The Sermon's Key Points*
 - i. Every death is premature. God did not create man so he could die.
 - ii. No death is premature. God is sovereign and He determines when.
 - iii. For Christians, death is the entry into God's presence. It is not an end but a new and glorious beginning.
 - iv. Sadly, for those who don't know Christ as Savior death, premature or otherwise is the ultimate tragedy. We must share the Gospel before it is too late.
 - v. One day there will be no more death. Our enemy will be destroyed, and death will be no more.
- b. **Monday** – *Every death is premature.*
 - i. Read Genesis 1:27-30, 2:15-17, and 3:22-23.
 1. What evidence do you see in these verses that God never intended that man would die?

2. What restriction did God give Adam and what did He not restrict him from doing?
 3. Notice that the last half of verse 17 does not contain the word “if”. What does its absence suggest?
- ii. Of course, we know what happens – Adam disobeys. Read Romans 5:12 and 6:23 for the consequences.
 1. How does 5:12 show us that the death we experience is premature?
 2. How would you relate 6:23 to the absence of the “if” in Genesis 2:17?
 - iii. Playing a blame game is usually counterproductive, but in this case it is important. Who is to blame for death?

c. ***Tuesday – God is sovereign.***

- i. Any discussion of the timing of death should (must) start with the sovereignty of God.
 1. What does it mean to you when you hear “God is sovereign”?
 2. What would it mean if He were not sovereign?
- ii. Now read these verses and describe the aspect of sovereignty they demonstrate:
 1. Deuteronomy 10:14, Job 41:11 and Psalm 24:1
 2. Psalms 47:2 & 7, Jeremiah 5:22, and Ephesians 1:11
 3. Psalm 135:6-7, Psalm 147:15-18, Job 37:11-13, and Job 38:25-27
 4. Genesis 41:28, Psalm 33:10-11, Proverbs 21:1, and Acts 17:26
 5. Proverbs 16:33, Esther 3:7 & 9:1-2, and Jonah 1:7
 6. Genesis 45:8 & 50:20, Psalm 2:1-6, Acts 2:23, and Acts 4:27-28

d. ***Wednesday – No death is premature.***

- i. How do Matthew 10:29-31 and Psalm 139:16 connect death to the sovereignty of God?
- ii. Focusing just on the sovereignty of God can lead to a warped view of Him. How do Psalm 116:15 and Ezekiel 18:32 provide balance? What attributes of God are demonstrated in these verses?
- iii. There are several passages in the Bible that show us reaction to premature death. Read these three and consider/discuss what we can learn about how we should respond:
 1. 2 Samuel 12:15-25
 2. Job 1:18-22
 3. Matthew 14:3-13a. (Why do you think Jesus went to a solitary place?)

- iv. Yet sometimes there is just no explanation we can understand – the deaths are just part of God’s perfect plan. Consider Matthew 2:16-18. Is there any value in asking why?

e. **Thursday** – *Our hope; Into God’s presence.*

- i. John 16:33 provides a Biblical basis for our hope – even in the face of premature death. Consider how these passages reinforce or supplement this verse:
 - 1. Romans 8:37
 - 2. 1 John 4:4 & 5:4
 - 3. Romans 12:11
- ii. The focal passage, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 provides a beautiful description of why we should view death (even that which we would consider premature) differently from the rest of the world. Read the passage aloud.
 - 1. First, how did Paul characterize the nature of death in verse 13, 14 & 15 and why is that important to our response to death?
 - 2. What was Paul’s foundation for the beliefs he is describing?
 - 3. Why do you think Paul felt it important to point out that “the dead in Christ will rise first”? How does that reassure us in the face of our own losses?
- iii. Not all the benefits of this hope are in the future. According to Hebrews 2:14-15 what is an immediate benefit we receive and should embrace daily?

f. **Friday** – *Hope for the lost*

- i. The most recognized verse in the Bible is John 3:16, but we do a grave injustice if we stop reading before verse 18.
 - 1. Why should verse 18 be so important to us? What tends to happen in our belief system if we don’t emphasize verse 18b equally?
 - 2. What does “condemned” mean to you? When does the condemnation occur?
- ii. A closely related verse is John 5:24.
 - 1. What two activities are necessary to move from death to life?
 - 2. What two benefits does a believer receive?
- iii. Romans 10:14-15 neatly places a large degree of responsibility for the unbeliever’s future hope on us.
 - 1. Where would you place yourself in the chain of responsibility Paul describes?

2. Some have responded to this passage by saying that God has not “called” them (sent them) to preach so it doesn’t apply. In what way does Matthew 28:19-20 make such an argument meaningless?
- g. *Saturday – Death will be destroyed.*
- i. According to Isaiah 25:7-8 and Hosea 13:14 what is the ultimate future of death?
 - ii. Conclude by reading and rejoicing in the message of Revelation 21-22.

3. Application:

- a. A character in one of C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* novels makes a statement we should all take to heart: “*I’d rather be killed fighting for Narnia than grow old and stupid at home and perhaps go about in a bath-chair and then die in the end just the same.*” With over 3,400,000,000 unreached people in the world who have never heard – and in all probability will never hear – the Gospel’s message of salvation we cannot afford to “play it safe”. Consider how a wrong view of death may be holding you back from serving the Lord.
- b. Death separates us from those we love and leaves those left behind to grieve. It is important to know how to comfort those suffering loss and how to meaningfully share the Gospel with them if they are not Christians. Consider taking training (like GriefShare) or reading books on the subject to prepare yourself for such a role when it is presented.

4. Prayer Points:

- a. **A**doration – Praise God
- b. **C**onfession – For our personal sins
- c. **T**hanksgiving – For all things
- d. **S**upplications – Our specific requests
 - i. That God will provide opportunities for each of us to share the Gospel with someone this week.
 - ii. For suffering grief from the loss of a loved one in the recent fires in Maui.
 - iii. The family of Astrid Blakemore, who passed away on Monday 8/21
 - iv. Students, teachers, and school administrators as they start a new academic year – especially in Rockledge and Occoquan Elementary Schools.
 - v. The Wednesday night Awana program for children which starts this week.
 - vi. Start of the new “Grow Deeper” Discipleship program.