

Defining Moments:
Defined by Dying
2 Corinthians 1:8-10 and 2 Corinthians 4-5

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Text Introduction: We are concluding today a series of messages that we have called “Defining Moments.” Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments.

We have talked about such topics as our births—both our physical births and spiritual births, baptism, and marriage. We even talked about how historical moments are defining moments (wars, hurricanes, etc.) On Easter Sunday we talked about “The Most Defining Moment of all of History”—the resurrection of Jesus. We have since been trying to isolate other defining moments. We have talked about such things as failure, crisis, and parenting. Last week in an effort to prove that most anything can be a defining moment, we talked about how defining moments can come through the ordinary trials and triumphs of life.

Today we conclude by considering the defining moment of death. It seems appropriate that since we started with birth that we conclude with death. Now, being keenly aware that no one likes to talk about death, I simply impress upon us that since death is defining, that makes it all the more reason to talk about it.

Consider the text in 2 Corinthians 1.

Text: ⁸For we don’t want you to be unaware, brothers, of our affliction that took place in Asia: we were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life. ⁹Indeed, we personally had a death sentence within ourselves, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and He will deliver us. We have put our hope in Him that He will deliver us again

Introduction: I attended a couple of graduations this week. One was the kindergarten graduation of our own school, First Baptist Christian School. We have a tradition at our kindergarten graduation to allow every graduate to go to the microphone at the end and say what they want to do when they grow up. It is really a sweet time. Innocence. Creativity. Dreams. Those are all words that come to mind as I listened to each student. The first little girl said she wanted to be a principal. I was astonished that four said they wanted to be preachers. There were those who wanted to be singers, artists, models, and veterinarians. I voiced a prayer for all that they would continue to allow God to shape them, dream big, and be who He wants them to be.

As they went to the microphone I could not help but think about an old story that I heard many years ago. In fact, I heard it so long ago, I don’t remember the exact specifics of the story or if someone rather well-known is the central figure of the story. The story then went something like this.

A preacher (sounds like it could have been Billy Graham, but I don’t remember) asked a high school graduate, “So, what do you want to do?”

“Well, I think I will go off to college.”

“Then what?”

“Well, right now, I think I want to go to graduate school of some kind—maybe law school.”

“Then what?”

“Well, somewhere along the way, I want to get married, have a family, and all of those kind of things.”

“All good, but then what?”

“Well, I want to be successful, you know, maybe even make a lot of money.”

“Then what?”

“Well, maybe I will retire one day?”

“Then what?”

Eventually, the high school students has to say, “Well then, I guess I will die?”

“Then what?”

Though we don't like to talk about death, life does indeed always come down to the “Then what, doesn't it.” We can avoid talking about or thinking about it, but eventually life comes down to the “Then what?” Even Steve Jobs, Apple computer pioneer, said about death, “Death is the greatest invention.”

We are here today to talk about the “Then what.”

The Purpose of Death

We start out in chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians. To be honest, 2 Corinthians is an unusual book and therefore a difficult book at times to interpret and apply. If we were to summarize the whole book of 2 Corinthians in a singular phrase we could simply say, “Paul defends his earlier letter.” The whole reason for 2 Corinthians is that the people of Corinth resisted the straightforward answers Paul had given in the first letter. In fact, we could go so far as to say that the Corinthians even questioned Paul's authority to speak as an apostle. The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians are particularly filled with a defense of his character and position. But as he defends his position, he always comes back to defending himself by defending the Gospel. Because of this, we revisit some of the things that are crucial to the Gospel. This is for our reward.

So, as he begins, Paul really is addressing how difficult things have gotten for him personally. He refers to death. This is where then we get this excellent word about the purpose of death.

Ultimately, the purpose of death is

So that we would trust in God, not in ourselves.

We trust in ourselves for so much. We figure things out. We work hard. We rely on self. But when it comes to death, here is that one thing that we can't figure out. Money won't help. Position won't help. Hard work won't help. We all die. Death is the great equalizer. As such, part of death's purpose is to cause us to trust in God.

The Promises of Death

As we move to chapter 4 and 5, we learn some promises of death.

1. We will get a new body. (4:16, 5:1-4)

¹⁴We know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you. ¹⁵Indeed, everything is for your benefit, so that grace, extended through more and more people, may cause thanksgiving to increase to God's glory.

¹⁶Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day.

5 For we know that if our temporary, earthly dwelling is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal dwelling in the heavens, not made with hands.² Indeed, we groan in this body, desiring to put on our dwelling from heaven,³ since, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴Indeed, we groan while we are in this tent, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

Our bodies are decaying, but they do not in Heaven. The analogy is a tent. We understand that tents are fine for a while, maybe to some even fun for a while, but nobody wants to live in a tent forever.

2. We will gain an eternal perspective. (4:17-18)

¹⁷For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. ¹⁸So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

We will gain an eternal perspective about our affliction and our things. We exchange the temporal for the eternal.

3. We will have a guarantee about the things that have required faith. (5:5-7)

⁵And the One who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment.

⁶So, we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight,

Even the person of greatest faith, walks by faith in this life. In heaven, that changes. The things that you have believed simply by faith will be real—be seen. You want need faith in heaven.

4. We will gaze at the face of Jesus. (5:8)

⁸and we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord.

I am often asked where is that verse that tells us to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Right here!

5. We will give an account. (5:9-10)

⁹Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the tribunal of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or worthless.

The Persuasion of Death

¹¹Therefore, because we know the fear of the Lord, we seek to persuade people. We are completely open before God, and I hope we are completely open to your consciences as well. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who take pride in the outward appearance rather than in the heart. ¹³For if we are out of our mind, it is for God; if we have a sound mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. ¹⁵And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.

¹⁶From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know Him in this way. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. ¹⁸Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." ²¹He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The persuasion of death is that we would be reconciled to God.

The Pleading of Death

Those who have been reconciled to God join Him in reconciling others. The purpose statement of life ought to be: My purpose is to go to Heaven when I die and bring as many people with me as I can.

Here is the "so what" of this message. Those who have been reconciled to God become reconcilers.

Another one of Paul's writings becomes a fitting place to close when we talk about being defined by death. To the Philippians, Paul said, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain."

When we started this series on January 18, I closed that message with this statement: So, just how defining is your birth to the rest of your life. If you miss what God was doing when He created you, you will miss everything that He wants to do in your life.

Let me close this message by saying, "If you miss what God is doing in your death, you will miss everything that He wants to do in your life.