

Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church  
Knoxville, Tennessee  
May 20, 2018

Dr. Steven P. Eason

*Six Bad Words in the Bible: 6. "Death"*  
**Acts 2:22-24**

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Go back to the Creation story. God creates humanity and then says, *"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day you eat of it you shall die."* (Gen. 2:16-17)

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*<sup>22</sup>"You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – <sup>23</sup>this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. <sup>24</sup>But God raised him up, having freed him from **death**, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.*

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We are all going to die. (And on that happy note, have a good day!) But it's true, and it's OK to talk about it. It's a strange thing to know that your life on this earth will one day come to an end. We don't know when or where, but we know it's going to happen. It's an odd thing.

You know the part when the stewardess gives you all the instructions before a flight?

*There are several emergency exits on this aircraft. Each door is equipped with an inflatable slide which may also be detached and used as a life raft.*

*In the event of a decompression, an oxygen mask will automatically appear in front of you. If you are traveling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your mask on first, and then assist the other person.*

*In the event of an emergency, please assume the bracing position. (Lean forward with your hands on top of your head and your elbows against your thighs. Ensure your feet are flat on the floor.)*

*A life vest is located in a pouch under your seat or between the armrests. When instructed to do so, open the plastic pouch and remove the vest. Use the whistle and light to attract attention. (Also, your seat bottom cushion can be used as a flotation device. Pull the cushion from the seat, slip your arms into the straps, and hug the cushion to your chest.) Thank you for flying American. Enjoy your flight! (Google)*

Right. If we don't all die! It's always a possibility.

\*

There's something about death that bothers God. That may sound strange since death seems to be a part of life. But Paul wrote, *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* (1 Corinthians 15:26) Peter preaches on Pentecost that God has defeated death in Christ, bringing life in the Holy Spirit. So even though death is normal, death is a problem.

Go back to the Creation story. God creates humanity and then says, *"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day you eat of it you shall die."* (Gen. 2:16-17)

That's not a threat, that's a truth. In other words, *"Seek status with God and you cut yourself off from life. Don't let that happen."* Any good parent will warn their children of danger. The Bible starts out with a warning about death. The rest of the Bible is about God grappling with humanity in an attempt to salvage us, to deliver us from death.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, a wealthy leader of the Jews;  
*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

That's an anti-death statement. God wishes for no one to perish.

God has gone to a lot of trouble to insure that we do not die. Yet we do! These moral bodies are perishable. Paul calls them, *"tents."*

*"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* (1 Corinthians 5:1)

\*

I have stood over many graves and claimed there to be life after death. This is not the end. My first funeral was a two day old infant. I said it on that day and every day since.

Are we foolish to believe there is life after death? And if there is, what's it like?

- Is it "up there" somewhere?
- How far up?
- Does it look like here, or do we float on clouds wearing white robes? (*Sounds boring!*) What do we do all day? Is there a "day?"
- Are there "streets of gold" and wouldn't they be slick when it rains? Does it rain?

- Are there golf courses? (*No, there are not! If there are golf courses, you are in the other place!*)
- Will we recognize each other?
- Do we all get our 20 year old bodies back? What about the infants, children and youth? Do we age or stay the same for all eternity?
- There are a million questions, because we do not know. No one knows.

\*

Some years back, a child asked me about heaven after his mother died. He wanted to know where she was, what she was doing, could she see him. Here's what I told him.

*"Do you remember being your mommy's tummy? You don't, do you? Well it was dark in there and you were tied to her with a cord. You didn't breathe air, but fluid. You were fed through that cord. No one else was in there but you. It was warm and safe and you heard your mother's voice all day and night. But you don't remember any of that.*

*What if we could put a microphone in there and ask what you thought it was going to be like out here, after you were born? What do you think you would have said?*

*I bet you would have said, "It will be dark, and warm, and safe. There will be a golden cord and lots of fluid. I will always here my mommy's voice. It will be just like in here, except better."*

*And then you are born! There were lights and people, hospitals and cars, trees and sky, music and television. There's sunshine and moonlight, birds and animals, University of Tennessee football and Duke basketball! Pizza, ice-cream, Xbox and cellphones.*

*Could you have imagined all that when you were in your mommy's tummy? No way! Neither can we imagine what heaven is like. It will probably be totally different from anything we have ever known. Whatever it is, it will be creative and wonderful, because God loves us, just like when we were in our mommy's tummies!"*

I have used that illustration many times since. We don't know what we don't know. We know we will die, but we don't know what happens to us when we do. We know "death" is a bad word in the Bible, and the good word is "life." We know God has a problem with death, and we know that's a good thing for us.

\*

The universe does not operate on our understanding. We don't understand death. We don't understand eternal life. We have to take somebody's word for it.

What if we were to take Christ's word for it? He said;

*"I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)*

Is that a fairy tale or truth?

Or Paul's word?

*We believe that Jesus **died** and rose again; and so it will be for those who have died in Christ. God will raise them to be with the Lord forever. Comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:14, 17-18)*

Or Peter's word on Pentecost?

*"But God raised him (Jesus) from **death**, because it is impossible for him to be held by its power." (Acts 2:24)*

The antithesis to death is life. Life is more than these physical bodies, more than days on a calendar.

We who are baptized live in hope and faith with these words;

*"If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we **die**, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8)*

\*

Like an infant in the womb, we await something which we could never imagine! May the Spirit blow in upon us, and give us this life, that we may truly live in the fullness of God's eternal love and grace!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: **Amen**