

Genesis 195
Purposeful Living
Genesis 49:31-33
March 23, 2025
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Let us take our Bibles this morning and open them to Genesis 49:31. We are going to finish Genesis 49 today. We are coming to the tail end of the Book of Genesis in our verse-by-verse teaching. God has used Joseph in such a magnificent way in Genesis 37-50. Now we are at a section where Joseph's father, Jacob, is about to die. In the next chapter, we are going to see Joseph leaving the scene through death as well.

In Genesis 49, before Jacob passes he gives these incredible blessings to his sons—one of them being Joseph—who are destined to become the Twelve Tribes of Israel. As he blesses them (and we have studied those blessings which are really prophecies in depth), he has also given them a charge. This is a charge that Jacob gave to his sons, Joseph being one of them: "When I die, do not bury me here in Egypt; bury me in the land of Canaan."

- V. Jacob's Death (Gen. 49:29-33)
 - A. Charge (29a)
 - B. Announcement of death (29b)
 - C. Request (29c)
 - D. Place of burial (29d-30)
 - E. Others buried there (31)
 - F. Burial place repeated (32)
 - G. Jacob's death (33)

In Genesis 49:31, where we pick it up, there is a description of other people that were buried in the land of Canaan. This was a special piece of real estate that Abraham bought from the Canaanites in Genesis 23. A lot of the greats in Israel were buried there. Jacob says to his sons, "That is where I want to be buried."

Look at what he says there in Genesis 49:31:

"There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and their I buried Leah—"

It is interesting, when you look at all of these people that were buried in that special cave that Abraham purchased so long ago—Abraham and Sarah were both buried there; Isaac and Rebekah were both buried there; Jacob is going to be buried there (Genesis 50:13), as we are going to see; and Leah is buried there. What is interesting, though, is that Rachel was not buried there.

Rachel, you remember, was Jacob's other wife—Jacob's favorite wife. She was buried in the land of Israel as she was giving birth to Benjamin. Benjamin is one of the only sons

of Jacob that I know of, who was not born in Haran, up north; but was actually born in the land of Israel.

This is the only record we have of Leah's death. We have an in-depth record of Rachel's death, but this is the only place in the Scripture (Genesis 49:31) where we have a record of Leah's death and burial. Rachel is well-attested for. Genesis 35:16-19, speaking of Rachel's death as she was giving birth to Benjamin, says,

"Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor. When she was in severe labor the midwife said to her, 'Do not fear, for now you have another son.' It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin."

Rachel died and was buried on the way to Bethlehem. About Rachel's death we know a lot; but about Leah's death and burial we know very little, except for this reference right here in Genesis 49:31. This was a prominent tomb in the land of Canaan, where the greats of Israel—the patriarchs—were buried.

It is interesting to me that Leah, the unfavored wife, was buried in this special tomb, but Rachel was not. Arnold Fruchtenbaum makes this comment about Genesis 49:31:

"In verse 31, he listed those who were buried there: 'There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah, his wife; and there I buried Leah.' This is the only mention of Leah's death, which was not recorded as an event in the Book of Genesis as Rachel's death had been earlier reported. Yet it was Leah and not Rachel who was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Leah finally achieved in death what she was unable to achieve in life: to be the close one to Jacob."¹

Throughout her life she wanted to be the favored wife, but she was not—Rachel was Jacob's favored wife—but in death, Leah is the one that is actually buried near her husband, whereas Rachel was not. It is an interesting twist, if you will. The burial place is repeated there in Genesis 49:32. It says,

"The field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth."

This has to do with a long business transaction that took place between Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 23). In fact, that section reads with such detail, you would almost think that these events actually happened. Of course, I am saying that tongue-in-cheek—I am saying that facetiously. A lot of people look at the Scripture as if it is tall tales—Jack and the Beanstalk, Veggie Tales, if you will. They get this impression that somehow these things that transpired are just spiritual truths, because the real historians with the real PhDs have control of the interpretation of real history.

"You guys on Sunday, are just doing the spiritual thing. You are religious." It is what the world tells us, but as I have tried to emphasize over and over again as we have made our

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, 652-53.

way through the Book of Genesis, these are real people and these events took place in a very credible archeological setting. These are real events. This was an actual real estate transaction that Abraham engaged in to procure a burial plot for his wife, Sarah.

Abraham eventually was buried there along with all of these other people. Leah was buried there; Rachel was not. As we mentioned earlier, she is the one that was giving birth to Benjamin as she passed away near Bethlehem in the Promised Land.

As you drop down to the very last verse of Genesis 49, you have a description there of Jacob's death. Notice what it says here:

"When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people" (Genesis 49:33).

You will notice that Jacob finally dies, and I am not sure if I gave you the title of this message, which I usually give at the beginning—the title of this message is "Purposeful Living"—you will notice that Jacob only dies after God's purpose for his life has been accomplished.

He begat the twelve sons who are going to become the Twelve Tribes of Israel. He has been reunited with Joseph for about 17 years. He has given, under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, tremendous promises and prophecies to each of these twelve. Only after that purpose has been exhausted—only after that purpose has elapsed—is his death now recorded.

I find that over and over again with Bible characters. Yes, they die, but they die when God has fulfilled His purpose in and through them. Take, for example, the death of David (David, the second King of the united kingdom and the Nation of Israel, following Saul). It says of David in Acts 13:36:

"For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid amongst his fathers and underwent decay."

When did he fall asleep (a euphemism for death)? When was he laid amongst his fathers? When did his body start to decay? Only *"after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation."*

We can move into the New Testament and we can look at the life of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul had a price tag hanging over his life, constantly. People wanted him dead all of the time, but when did Paul finally die? He did die, but when did he die? He died after God's purpose in his life had been accomplished.

We read of Paul's parting words, before he says his life has been *"poured out as a drink offering"* and *"the time of [his] departure is at hand"* (2 Timothy 4:6). When did that happen? After God had accomplished His purpose through the life of the Apostle Paul.

In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 Paul says this:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which

the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and only not to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Translation: Paul left this earth by way of death, after God's purpose for his life had been accomplished. What a purpose that was! The apostle abnormally born; the one who went on the missionary journeys; the one who planted all of those first-century churches; the one who wrote 13 New Testament epistles; the one who disciplined so many people like young Timothy—after that purpose had run its course, then God said, "Okay, it is time for you to pass on. It is time for you to die."

I especially enjoy this part here, where Paul speaks of that crown of righteousness, a reward that is laid up for him, not to gain salvation or to pay Jesus back, but a reward that Jesus gives to people above and beyond salvation, who live their lives according to God's purpose for them. Not that they are sinless, but hopefully they are sinning less. Paul says, "It is not for me only, but it is to all who have loved and longed for His appearing."

I say to the Lord, "Lord, that is what I want my life to be. I want Your purpose for my life, whatever it is—or a collection of purposes—I want those to be fully accomplished. I want those to be fully executed before I leave this earth.

Most people do not live their lives like that. Most people look at their lives as an accident, the blind pursuit of self-interest. Most people, when they get on their deathbed (even Christians), look back and they have so many regrets of what should have been and what could have been. When I look at those types of people, I say to myself, "Lord, I want to be making decisions now so that when it is my time to go (if we are not the Rapture generation—I hope and pray we are), I want to look back on a life well spent. A life where You brought to fruition whatever it is You wanted to do through my life."

Most people look back on life and they cannot enjoy that. It is remorse and regret. When we talk about the deaths of important people in the Book of Genesis, I frequently give you this quote from Mark Twain in his autobiography. Compare this to what Paul said: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Look at what Mark Twain said at the end of his life. He says,

"A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them and infirmities follow; shames and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities. Those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned into aching grief. The burden of pain, care, and misery grows heavier year by year. At length ambition is dead, pride is dead, vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only un-poisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they are of no consequence; where they achieved nothing, where they were a mistake and a failure and a

foolishness; where they left no sign that they had ever existed—a world that will lament them a day and forget them forever."²

How different it was for David, of whom it was said, *"After he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep"* (Acts 13:36). How different it was for Paul, who said in 2 Timothy 4:7: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."* Whether we end up like this, or whether we end up like Jacob or David or Paul, is largely determined based upon choices we are making now.

Nobody likes to talk about death; nobody likes to think about death, yours truly included. The Book of Ecclesiastes says, if you think frequently of death, if you are in *"a house of mourning,"* rather than *"a house of feasting,"* you are in a very wise position (Ecclesiastes 7:2). It helps you recognize—particularly a memorial service when you see somebody that was alive and speaking to you days, weeks, or months before, and now their body in that state, dead, dying, decaying—it forces us to come to a realization that we are not going to be here forever.

We all understand that as Christians, biblically, doctrinally; but sometimes we have to come face to face with it. I think the Lord really impressed this on my heart in the year 2024 with a cancer scare; with the death of my father; the death of my father-in-law. All of us walk through these things and they are reminders by the Holy Spirit; they are reminders by God to us that we are not going to be here forever.

Psalms 90 teaches us to *"number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom"* (Psalm 90:12). "Lord, I want to leave here on a positive note. I want to leave with Your purpose, or purposes, in my life being fully executed."

This raises an interesting question. How do you find God's purpose, or purposes, for your life? There is only one entity that can give you that answer, and that is God. At some point you come before God and you say, "Why am I here? Why did You give me this talent, or that talent, or this opportunity, or that opportunity? Why did You give me this relationship or that relationship?" You will start to discover the mind of God as you seek His face; that there are all kinds of purposes that He has for us. We want to walk in those purposes as New Testament Christians, and not look back with regret.

Jacob's death occurred when he had finished charging his sons (Genesis 49:33). The prophecies are over; the instructions concerning his burial are largely over; the purposes have been executed, and now he is ready to die. What does it mean to die? You will be shocked at how much the Bible answers that question. It says in Genesis 49:33:

"When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into his bed and he breathed his last."

If you are reading this in the King James Bible, in Genesis 49:33 it does not say "he breathed his last"—it says, "[and] yielded up the ghost."

² Mark Twain, *Autobiography*, 2:37.

"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."

What does that even mean "he gave up the ghost"? One time I was trying something very hard in my life, and I was failing at it—trying again; failing; trying again; failing. Someone said to me, "When are you going to give up the ghost?" I am glad I did not give up the ghost, because I ended up succeeding, even though I had failed at something a number of times prior to that. That is probably one of the first times I had ever heard the expression "gave up the ghost."

It is interesting that it is a biblical expression, "giving up the ghost." The thing to understand about the Bible is that when God designed human beings, He gave them two components. There is the material side, the physical body; and then there is the immaterial side, that is the seat of somebody that you cannot see called the soul. "Psyche," in the Greek, is where we get the word "psychology" from—psychology originally understood as the study of the soul. What they are doing today in psychology is very different, but that is what psychology means—it is the study of the soul.

It is the part of us that is designed to live forever. We know from Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God has *"set eternity into the hearts"* of men. In other words, when God designed people, He designed them to live forever, but we are in a "soma" (body) that is decaying and dying because of original sin. Yet there is a part of us that you cannot see: it is the seat of someone's intellect, emotions, will, personality, temperament, conscience. When a person dies, essentially what happens is those two—the "soma" and the "psyche"—separate.

The body, until resurrection, goes right back into the dirt from which it came. God said that would happen because of original sin (going back to Genesis 3). The soul—or the "psyche"—continues to live either in a place of bliss if they are a believer, or in a place of torment if they are an unbeliever. Both groups are awaiting a physical resurrection.

That is what it means here when it says he "gave up the ghost." The two separated, which is what death is. The word "death," both in Hebrew and Greek, means "separation." Here I am speaking of physical death. There is a physical separation between the soul and the physical body. Resurrection is the opposite of death. Death is a separation between the two; resurrection is when the two come back together.

Let us say that I pass on. My soul, being absent from the body, is present with the Lord. Then one day, when it is time, we will have the Rapture of the church. (Let us assume this takes place after I die.) The soul that is in the presence of the Lord goes right back into the body, but you are going to look at me and say, "Wow! You look a lot better than you used to. What happened? It is still you; I can recognize you, but, boy, you look good. What happened?"

It is the body that God designed—it is still my body—but it is the body with the curse, which has affected the body, pulled out of the body. That is the future hope of the

Christian. The future hope of the Christian is that you are going to be reunited with your body as God intended. We enjoy eternity together in that state.

Jesus, of course, made the whole thing possible because of His resurrection. Paul calls Him the first fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20 and 23). It is harvest imagery going back to Israel's harvest cycle. First, Israel collected the first fruits. The first fruits are a wonderful thing because the first fruits coming in guaranteed that the general harvest would come. The first fruits were evidence of the general harvest.

It is the same way with the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Because He rose from the dead, being the first fruits of the resurrection program, it guarantees—just as the first fruits guaranteed the general harvest—that your future resurrection as a Christian will be completely and totally accomplished and fulfilled. Are you looking forward to that?

The groaning of the body that Paul calls it will not be a reality anymore. We are in bodies that are groaning, aren't they? That is why, as you get older, you have to drink more and more coffee to get yourself moving in the morning; you need more and more sleep. "Wait a minute, Pastor. I drink all that green stuff." "Well, congratulations. You have green stuff going through a decaying body, basically."

I am not against the green stuff. We have it in our house: green stuff, red stuff, orange stuff. My wife just keeps saying, "Drink this. Drink that. Drink this." What does all of that do? It is a good thing to do, but it postpones the inevitable—it delays the decay. It slows down the downward slide. I am already going over the cliff. Do you want to go over the cliff at 50 or 75? That is what the green stuff will do, because of original sin.

God told us that at the beginning. He said, "If you eat from the tree of knowledge, from dust you are; to dust you shall return." There is going to come a point where the body is not going to work anymore, and it is going to have to physically separate from the "psyche" or the soul.

The Bible teaches nothing about soul sleep. There is an active consciousness after death, but for the believer, it is great news. We go right into the presence of the Lord, which Paul says "*is much better*" (Philippians 1:23). At the point of the Rapture, that soul or "psyche" will be reunited with a body. That is still your body, but with the curse pulled out of it.

This is what Jacob is experiencing here. Of course, he is not a member of the church, the body of Christ; so his future resurrection, we are told, will be at the beginning of the Kingdom Age. Our resurrection is at the Rapture of the church. If this happens before we die (and I hope it does, although I cannot promise that), then our body will be instantaneously transformed. It will be an eternity fit with the eternal purpose that God has for us.

The truth of the matter is that people will be alive somewhere a hundred years from now—believers and unbelievers alike—a million years from now, a billion years from now; because that is the design of human beings. God has "*set eternity into the hearts*" of men (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This is the reason why the gospel is so urgent. We are all moving towards this eternity and we have to make a decision: am I going to trust in Christ for

salvation or not? That determines where my "psyche" or soul will go before it is resurrected.

Unbelievers tragically go into a place of torment. Luke 16:19-31 will describe it for you. They will await their future resurrection at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, where they will be placed in resurrected bodies; but they will spend eternity in the lake of fire in that resurrected body. What a terrible future awaits the unbeliever. Most of them are completely unsuspecting that it is coming. How different it is for the Christian who trusts in Christ for salvation now. If they die before the Rapture the "psyche" goes into the presence of the Lord, awaiting the Rapture, where they will be reunited with their body in its glorified state.

This is why this text says he "gave up the ghost." It says this kind of thing in a lot of places: Rachel's death, which I described a little earlier (Genesis 35:18). You have one of the greatest explanations of death in Genesis 35:18. Remember, she was giving birth to Benjamin, and she died. God said that would happen with women in childbirth (Genesis 3:16).

Many women have passed on because of childbirth. We are fortunate to be living in a time period with all of these technological advances where that is not as common as it used to be, but when you study that throughout history, you see many women dying in childbirth. I believe that that is something that was prophesied all the way back in Genesis 3:16:

*"To the woman He said,
'I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth,
In pain you will bring forth children.'"*

That is exactly what happened to Rachel in Genesis 35:16-18. As she is giving birth to Benjamin—as her body is failing—what was happening to her soul or her "psyche"? It says in Genesis 35:18:

"It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin."

It says very clearly there that "her soul was departing," which is the biblical definition of death.

This happened to Jesus in Matthew 27:50:

"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit."

"Gave up the ghost," so to speak.

The exact same thing happened to Stephen, the very first martyr of the Church Age. It says in Acts 7:59:

"They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'"

Sometimes the soul is called the "psyche," sometimes it is called the "spirit." It is that part of us that is designed to live forever. That is why, when you attend a memorial service or a funeral for a loved one who has passed, the whole thing seems like a shock—it seems unnatural. We say things all the time like, "I cannot believe they are not here anymore," or "I cannot believe a whole year has passed since they departed."

Why? Why is it so abnormal to us? It is abnormal to us because we were designed for eternity. Death is an enemy, an unwarranted, unapproved intruder into our lives that God wants to abolish one day. Until that happens, we are faced with this abnormality of death. The reason it is abnormal to us is because He has put eternity into our hearts.

I do not mean to get too far off on this, but every time I drive by this softball field and see, on a Sunday morning, the field is packed, it is almost like it is a competing church over there. I am not against softball; I am not against having fun; but I just have to be honest with you: every Sunday when they are doing their thing over there it strikes me as not right.

"We have to get our kids into sports," and they will skip church to participate in sports. When I was going through sports, sports never interfered with Sunday morning, ever. Now it is a big competition. Here is the 100% ironclad truth on all of that: your children and your grandchildren have probably a less than 1% chance of being a professional baseball player, or a professional basketball player, but they have a 100% chance of standing before the Lord.

Since that is the case, shouldn't they be over here? Or maybe we should go over there and invite them to come over here? Or maybe we can put our own softball team together and win the championship and win their respect and invite them over here; because softball and all that stuff is a fun thing, but it is temporal. What we are dealing with here is eternal.

It is interesting that when Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into his bed and he gave up the ghost—he breathed his last. Look at this next expression here:

"...and was gathered to his people" (Genesis 49:33).

We have gone into a little bit of detail on this in prior studies, so I will not belabor it, but people say that "gathered to his people" does not have any eternal ramifications. That means he was just buried with his family. That is all that means. That cannot be the interpretation, because burial with his family is in Canaan. He is in Egypt—that is 250 miles away.

If you go back to Genesis 49:29, it actually uses two expressions here. It says,

"Then he charged them and said to them, 'I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite.'"

"Buried with his fathers" is the 250-mile trip they are going to take from Egypt to Canaan, to the cave of Machpelah. That is an expression that is independent and totally different

from being "gathered to my people." Do not think that being "gathered to his people" means he is going to be buried in Canaan. He was not buried in Canaan that day; he was not buried in Canaan when he drew his last breath. He is going to be buried in Canaan later. Genesis 50 is going to describe it; it is going to take a 250-mile trip from Egypt to Canaan to bury him with his fathers.

If being "buried with his fathers" is the trip to Canaan, what in the world is it talking about here when, before it says he is buried with his fathers, it says that he is going to be gathered to his people? Do you know what that is a statement of in Genesis 49:33? It is the afterlife.

The expectation of Jacob is that, at death, he is going to go right into the presence of God; and he is going to see who? Abraham, Isaac, and Noah. He is going to see if Adam was saved. (I have a tendency to think Adam was saved). He is going to see Adam and Eve. Could you imagine going right in the presence of the Lord and seeing Adam and Eve and saying, "What were you thinking?"

It is a conscious experience. This idea that your soul just disappears or sleeps for a while until the final resurrection, there is not a word of biblical support to substantiate that doctrine. It is the active reality of the afterlife—a life that is just as real as this one; and has absolutely nothing to do with the 250-mile journey from Egypt to Canaan to be buried in the cave of Machpelah.

Commentators unite those concepts together all of the time. I am completely and totally against that kind of interpretation. The afterlife is real. The afterlife is something that you experience—believer and unbeliever alike—immediately upon death. He would die; he would be gathered to his people, which is not to be confused with buried with his fathers.

In other words, he went to a place called Sheol. Luke 16:19-31 describes it in detail—a section of the Bible that everyone is uncomfortable with because they want to turn that into a parable. That is not a parable. When Jesus teaches a parable, He will say, "Learn the parable of the fig tree or the mustard seed." He does not say that in Luke 16. Parables do not use personal or proper nouns. There is no parable of Jesus that uses a proper noun (a personal name of somebody). There you see three personal names. In Luke 16, the name of Abraham is used, the name of Lazarus is used, and the name of Moses is used.

It is a description of two people who, immediately upon death, went to two completely different destinations. Their soul, or their suitcase, separated from their body and their soul, or suitcase, went somewhere. For the unbeliever, he went to a place called Hades. This Sheol is divided into two compartments. The believer went to a place called Abraham's Bosom—Paradise. In between His death and resurrection Jesus took those in Paradise (Old Testament saints who died believing in a coming Messiah), and took them into God's presence. That is where they are.

Paul, when he suffered from a thorn in the flesh, talked about in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 about why he suffered from a thorn in the flesh: to keep him humble, because he was caught up into the third heaven. This is our word for Rapture—harpazo. This is Paul's

personal Rapture. Paul did not come back and write a best-selling book on the topic, as so many claim. He says, "Was I in my body? Was I out of my body? I do not really know. I just know that 14 years ago this happened to me. I was caught up to Paradise."

Where is Paradise? Paradise is where the departed who were believers in a coming Messiah went (Luke 16:19-31). Sheol had these two compartments: Hades, place of torment; and then Paradise, a place of bliss. Paul was caught up there; and in between Christ's resurrection and ascension, Jesus took those in Paradise and brought them into the presence of the Lord.

When we die (absent from the body, and present with the Lord), what exactly are we going to see? If we have access to Paradise, we are going to see all of the people in the body of Christ from over the last 2,000 years, because that also is in the third heaven. You might see Moses; you might see Daniel, or Isaiah.

What I am trying to get across is that this is not some ethereal "ooh" thing. This is reality. This is not mystical: this is reality. The afterlife is just as physical, and it is just as real as right now in this room, just as you can see people, talk to people, think, reflect backward. It is interesting how the man in Luke 16, when he went into Hades, could remember an awful lot. "I have five brothers. Someone needs to go back and warn them, or they are going to end up in this place where I am. I do not want that to happen." If unbelievers can have a conscious existence in the next life, why would that be different for God's people? This is the reality of the future, and it is a reality that Jacob experienced because he died.

If we are not the Rapture generation, every single person in this room will die. We had, at one point, a medical doctor in our flock. I remember him specifically saying that he has talked to countless people on their deathbed, or countless people that are in the process of dying. He says that every single one of them cannot believe it is happening to them. "Death. That is for other people, right?" Yet, when it is your time to go, everybody is shocked. "I cannot believe it is happening." Yet, the Bible tells you it is coming, does it not?

Going back to the original command in Genesis 2:16-17, it says,

"The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'"

Separation between God and man—your body is going right back into the dirt from which it came. In Genesis 3:19 God articulates the curse, and He says,

*"By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return."*

Why are we surprised at the reality of death when the Bible talks about it over and over again, and gives us the solution in Jesus Christ?

When I get a haircut, I am looking at the ground, and I am looking at my shirt, and I am seeing all this gray hair. The first thought that goes through my mind is, "That is not my hair"—but it is my hair. How did it get gray? "What happened to you? You are aged." It is what God said would happen.

There is evidence of death around us constantly. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 says,

"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die..."

Did you catch that? All die. The mortality rate is still 100%. Hebrews 9:27 says,

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."

There are no exceptions other than maybe the Rapture generation. There is a whole generation of Christians, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, that will not face death.

Anybody that has ever dealt with someone that has died—anybody that has walked that path, which we are all going to have to walk it one way or the other—knows that death is not an easy process. The movies make it look so easy, but you are dealing with a loved one that is suffering; you are dealing with a loved one that cannot breathe; you are dealing with a loved one that needs perpetual medical attention; when your memory of them is a marathoner, which is what my dad was, a marathoner.

Here I am looking at this marathoner in this dying, decaying state. He loved Jesus just like I do; and you look at this and you think to yourself, "This really cannot be happening." It is so unnatural because God has designed us for eternity; yet, the Bible is clear: something has interrupted the normal plan and program of God; and so I will die.

Romans 5:12:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—"

How many died? All died. At some point, I was embarrassed, second guessing everything—"Why is this happening to my dad, Lord?"—when the Bible tells me over and over again that it is going to happen to all of us.

Romans 6:23:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This verse I've given to you here, Hebrews 9:27:

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once..."

That is the general rule. We can carve out exceptions—What about Enoch? What about Lazarus, who came out of the tomb and died a second time? We believe it is not dealing with every potential exception. It is just stating a general rule. The general rule is this: it is appointed, meaning it is a decree of God. When did He make this decree? When original sin happened. Genesis 3 is when it was appointed.

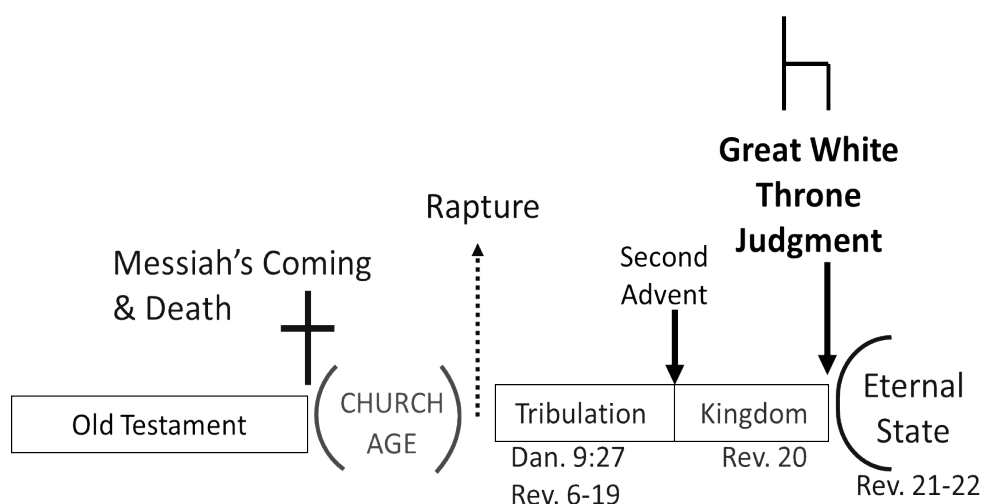
"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once..." and after this they go into soul sleep for a thousand years. No. "Then comes the judgment." This life ends in judgment. This life ends in judgment for the unbeliever—immediate conscious torment. This life ends in judgment for the believer, because after we are taken into the presence of the Lord at the Rapture, what is the first thing we experience? The Bema Seat judgment of Christ, where we are rewarded, or not rewarded, based on how we allowed the Lord to express Himself through us during this earthly sojourn. That is a true statement.

I think it was Webster, one of the brilliant people that helped found America—Webster's Dictionary and all of that comes from him—who was asked the question, "What is the greatest thought you have ever had?" Wouldn't you like to know the answer to that question? That is like asking Albert Einstein "What is the greatest thought you have ever had?" This is the way Webster replied: "The greatest thought I have ever had is my accountability to God."

We are living in a generation and in a society where these kinds of things that we are dealing with here are the furthest thought from people's minds; yet, if you can grasp this, you can fit into your purpose. Eternity is at stake. "Help me, Lord, to fit into my eternal purpose—eternal destiny. Put me in a position where I can help those who cannot see this is coming, as Your ambassador."

All this talk about death, though, I got some really good news for you. There is coming a time period when there will be no death. Did you know that? The eternal state.

Prophecy Panorama



This is how John the Apostle describes this eternal state. It says,

"and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

What are the first things? The first things are the world that we are traveling under now, contaminated by original sin and its consequences. Those things will be done away with by fire (2 Peter 3:10); and then what will replace this "cosmos" (world) is a new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21-22). Jesus' conquering of the grave made all of that possible. It is a done deal; it is coming; it is on the horizon; but you have to get on the right side of God. Amen.

The only way to get on the right side of God is through the gospel. The gospel is good news because Jesus did it all. He entered history to fix a problem, which I am trying to describe here, that we cannot fix. This is unfixable. Philosophy cannot fix this; religion cannot fix it; wealth cannot fix it; education cannot fix it; self-help programs cannot fix it; but Jesus can fix it. Jesus loves us so much that He came into the world to fix a problem that we cannot fix, and a lot of times we do not even know it exists. His final words on the cross were *"It is finished"* (John 19:30).

He asks us to trust in what He did in our place. Do not work this out on your own. John 6:28-29:

"Therefore they said to Him, 'What must we do to do the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'"

That is the gospel. It is as simple as I know how to make it. It is simple enough for a child to understand, but it is deep enough for a theologian to drown in. You will spend your whole life trying to understand all the ins and the outs of it; yet, it is a free offer—it is a free gift. Our exhortation is anyone within the sound of my voice would take Jesus up on this offer. The offer is this: receive what He has done, as a gift, by trusting or believing in what He did for us 2,000 years ago. That fixes the greatest problem you have.

Today there is a focus on felt needs. What about the need that I have that I cannot feel? What about that one? Jesus says, "I have got it covered," because He is not just the Lord and God, He is the Savior. Are you happy about that? I sure am.