

A Divine Appointment You Will Not Miss

Psalm 39:4-7; Psalm 116:15

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If you knew you were going to lose your job next month, wouldn't you prepare for that loss by beginning to look for another job? If you were making a trip across country, wouldn't you chart out how to arrive at your destination and plan where you were going to stay before your travel date? If even temporary changes/moves in our earthly lives are wisely prepared for by thoughtful planning, how much more death—a move from this world into eternity? And yet how few truly prepare for death—funeral arrangements, yes. But preparation for eternity, no.

Planning for our death is not a morbid, gloomy exercise for the Christian. We prepare for death so that it will not terrorize us. Preparing for our death actually helps us to enjoy Christ, our families, and all the gifts of God in this life. For we know there is no time to waste in serving God and one another. To the degree that Christ consciously becomes our life and our reason for living, our death will not be a loss, but will be a gain to us (Philippians 1:21).

Let us consider this Lord's Day the words of David as found in Psalm 39:4-7, wherein he prays for understanding and wisdom in facing the reality of: (1) The Certainty of Death; (2) The Nearness of Death; (3) The Weakness of Man; and (4) The Hope of Man.

I. The Certainty of Death

A. "Lord, make me to know mine end" Psalm 39:4.

1. David wrestles in Psalm 39 with the reproach of the wicked against him. He was chased like a wild animal. He was shamed for standing for the truth. He was tempted to vent in words to others what were in his thoughts, but David determines to guard his mouth in silence, so that he does not murmur against the providence of God and bring dishonor upon the Lord in the presence of the wicked (Psalm 39:1-3).

2. David had given wise counsel in a previous Psalm as to how to respond to the wicked who use their power for evil purposes (Psalm 37:1,7,8). As right is David's counsel in Psalm 37, David yet wrestles within his own heart in following it. God is merciful to allow us in Scripture to see the struggles of the righteous that we might see they were just like us in need of a Savior.

3. Within David's heart a passionate fire was burning against the power and influence of the wicked to pursue him, even to the grave (Psalm 39:3). Finally David gives expression to his inward reflections, which proceed in the form of a prayer which we find in Psalm 39:4ff.

B. David prays first that the Lord would cause him to understand and reflect upon THE CERTAINTY OF HIS OWN DEATH ("Lord, make me to know mine end" Psalm 39:4). To "know" means to be intimately acquainted with his death (not a general knowledge which is never considered). David wants to see his own mortality. He does not want to shield himself from thinking about his death. "God help me to be intimately acquainted with the fact that I am going to die."

1. There is a threefold death that is the result of man's fall into sin: SPIRITUAL DEATH (which is the separation of man from God due to sin), PHYSICAL DEATH (which is the separation of the spirit from the body), and ETERNAL DEATH (which is eternal separation from God in hell). The Christian is graciously delivered altogether from both spiritual death and eternal death. However, the Christian will yet experience physical death (not as a curse or punishment for sin, for Christ became a curse for us; but like illness, poverty, and other trials in this life, the Lord uses death as a means of sanctification in the life of the believer). In fact, for the Christian, physical death has become the door to heaven. It is physical death that David has in view.

2. Physical death is divinely appointed for all people (whether male or female, whether great or small, whether rich or poor, whether young or old, whether Christian or non-Christian). We may be late for appointments here upon the earth. But there is one appointment for which we will not be late: death (Hebrews 9:27). To those who have not embraced Jesus Christ as their only hope of eternal salvation, death is the end of earthly pleasure and the beginning of eternal suffering. To those who have received Christ and His free gift of eternal life by faith alone, death is the end of earthly sorrows and the beginning of eternal joys (Psalm 16:11).

3. What benefit is there in becoming intimately acquainted with the certainty of our own death, rather than just a general knowledge of death? Remember that David prays, “Lord, make me to know MINE end.”

a. The first benefit is that it humbles our proud, self-sufficient hearts before the everlasting God. We see we are mere mortals and that God is from everlasting to everlasting. The certainty of our own death crushes our vain pride and casts us upon Christ who is the resurrection and the life.

b. A second benefit of knowing the certainty of our own death is that it shows the futility of all our hypocrisy in which we play games with God. For there is coming a time when all acting the part of a Christian will fade away, and we will either enjoy the heavenly blessings of having had a living faith in Christ, or suffer the hellish curse of having had a dead faith which trusted in our own works and outward religion.

c. A third benefit of being certain of our own death is that it is impressed upon us that we not only need life through Christ, but that our loved ones and friends also need to eat of the Bread of Life who came down from heaven in order to give life to sinners who are perishing. In light of the certainty of death, we should see the eternal significance of pressing home to our dear children their need of Christ, of earnestly praying for God to draw them to Himself, of spending more time in that which will promote their spiritual well-being than that which will merely promote their earthly pleasure. We have brought death to them. Should we not desire above all desires to lead them to Jesus, the resurrection and the life? Just as we are going to die, so will all those around us. Their death should drive us to pray and to bear a faithful witness of Christ in word and deed to others.

II. The Nearness of Death

A. “Lord, make me to know mine end, AND THE MEASURE OF MY DAYS, WHAT IT IS” Psalm 39:4.

1. Here David prays that the Lord would ever place before him the realization of the shortness and brevity of this earthly life. Not only did David pray that he might truly know the certainty of his own death, but also how near his own death was. It is one thing to know that you will certainly die in the future, and yet another thing to think of death as being near. Many people know they will die sometime, but they tend to look upon their death as not occurring before 70, 80, or 90 years. They may think, “Death will come, but I’m in good health, and my death is yet many years away.”

2. Consider the following ways that the shortness of life and the nearness of death are portrayed in Scripture: life is as a “handbreadth” (Psalm 39:5); life is as “sleep” at night (Psalm 90:5); life is as “grass” that grows and suddenly withers under the scorching heat of the sun (Psalm 90:6); life is as a “tale” or story that is told by a storyteller (Psalm 90:9); life is as a “vapor” or mist that soon vanishes when the sun appears (James 4:14). We are here today and gone tomorrow.

3. I can remember when I was a teenager that 70 years old seemed ancient. Well, now that I have reached that age, I’m here to tell you time grows wings and flies with great speed to the very end of life (and we cannot stop it). You have no guarantee or promise from God that you will live to be 50, 60, or 70 years old. People die in their youth and in the prime of life all of the time. People die unexpectedly every day. This truth ought not to cause us to press the panic button (for it is God, our loving Father, who has ordained the

days that we should live for His glory). Our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15; Job 14:5). This truth ought to bring us out of fantasyland and back to reality, if we have allowed the cares/pleasures of this life to blur our spiritual vision.

B. What benefit is there in becoming familiar with the nearness of our own death?

1. First, although a realization of the certainty of our own death will surely help us to look at the big picture in making certain decisions in our life, a realization of the nearness of our own death will help us to see the smaller picture—that every day is important and has a sense of urgency to it. Because we have no guarantee that we will be alive tomorrow, we cannot waste the time, the talents, and the resources that God gives us, but must rather redeem everything in our life for Christ’s use to promote His kingdom (whether time, talents, or treasures). You may not see yourself as possessing any great abilities to be used in Christ’s kingdom, but the Lord has blessed each of you with certain gifts and abilities to be used for His glory (as demonstrated in the Parable of the talents in Matthew 25). There is one thing that we all have the same quantity of: 24 hours in each day. Do you give each day to the Lord in prayer and use it for His glory or does your day simply happen? Is there a divine purpose in your day or merely human pleasures?

2. A second benefit is directed to the children and young people in the congregation. Listen to what King Solomon, the wisest mere man who ever lived had to say to you (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Dear children, don’t wait to make your life count for Christ at some future time. Become a mighty warrior for Jesus while you are yet young (like David and Daniel), and you will find that when it is time for you to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will fear no evil, for the Good Shepherd will be with you to comfort you. Don’t waste the years of youth and strength, but devote every day to God as if it were your last day.

3. A third benefit to us in knowing the nearness of our own death is in helping us to appreciate every blessing we receive from God (whether our family, the measure of health that we enjoy, our food, clothing, and shelter, or every spiritual blessing). In light of the nearness of our death, we should learn to be content with whatever God blesses us, and to take nothing for granted. We should use our tongue to praise the Lord, rather than to murmur against Him and His providence, or to sinfully criticize one another.

III. The Weakness of Man

A. “Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; THAT I MAY KNOW HOW FRAIL I AM” Psalm 39:4.

1. Death, more than anything else, reveals to us our helplessness to rescue ourselves from our desperate situation. We are not in control—God is. Quests for the fountain of youth are all ultimately doomed to failure (Psalm 39:5-6). All is vanity without Christ.

2. The most powerful leaders of the ancient world led armies and conquered nations. The wealthiest have accumulated vast amounts of riches and possessions. However, they all had one weakness in common: they all died. They could not take their power or their riches with them. They could not conquer death—neither can we.

B. A sincere confession of our own vanity and weakness to rescue ourselves from death should will lead us to cast off all confidence in the flesh and to cast ourselves upon the strength of Jesus alone to save us (Psalm 118:8-9). I remember when my father was a very strong, active man. No one could outwork him. And yet the realization of his human weakness was made clear as we laid his helpless, lifeless body in the grave this past Thursday. He was weak, but Jesus was mighty to save him, carry his redeemed soul to glory, and shall raise him up on that final day.

IV. The Hope of Man

A. “And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee” Psalm 39:7.

1. David was brought to see once again that his only hope was in the Lord. There is no hope in anyone or in anything in this world (Psalm 73:25-26). "I am the resurrection and the life." Our faith is not in a dead Savior, but in a resurrected and living Christ, who was gloriously raised from the dead and ascended into heaven to reign forever.

2. So you see, the question is not, "Will you die?" That is a certainty. The question is not, "Is your death near?" That too is a certainty, for life upon the earth is short. And the question is not, "Can you rescue yourself from death?" No mere human has ever been able to do so. The only question is this, "In whom is your hope of eternal life?" Is your hope in yourself, in your works of righteousness, in your parents, in your church, in your baptism, or in your minister? If your hope of eternal life is in any of these, you will suffer, not only physical death upon earth, but also eternal death in hell as well. But if your hope is in Christ and if your faith is in His righteousness alone to save you, you will live forever in heaven, even though you will die here upon the earth.

3. Your sin does not disqualify you from coming to Jesus by faith alone, but actually qualifies you to come to Him for forgiveness and life. He came to save sinners (even the chief of sinners).

B. Because Jesus lives, we need not fear wars and rumors of wars. We need not fear the collapse of the world around us. If we need not fear death, then we need not fear the miseries of life. If He has overcome the last enemy (death), we need not fear any enemy. Just as He can breathe life into a dead soul, so He can breathe life into a broken marriage, into a slumbering church, into a forgotten covenant, or into a broken relationship. Our hope is in Him—the resurrection and the life.

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