

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Death and taxes

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Introduction

They say there are two certainties in life – death and taxes. Very few of us successfully avoid taxes. A great industry exists to help us minimize and reduce tax. It helps but very few of us avoid the inevitable. Sure there are some / the very rich/ who seem to pay so little, but fortunately most of us pay our tax and benefit from the services a government supplies.

But what about death? There is no avoiding that! Sure there are pills and potions ; there is cosmetic surgery to pretend we are not aging - but the reality is that each one of us is on a collision path with the greatest enemy of all death. We can deny it – we can pretend it will only happen to someone else – but maybe it would be wiser to acknowledge death and have a plan. For in God’s plan there is an eternal solution.

Part 1

Do you have one of those places at home where the bills and papers accumulate? I have one and it has become, of late, a bit of a mess. Normally I am reasonably efficient at keeping the pile down but lately it has grown. So last Sunday I determined to clear the rubble. Fortunately the rubble is now cleared but what I found in the pile was a little disturbing.

My driver’s license renewal was in the bottom of the basket and the renewal date was two weeks ago. I have been driving with an expired license. The notice read that driving on an expired license could render me a fine of between \$350 and \$2200. I was shocked and a little embarrassed. I rushed off to the motor registry and you will be pleased to know I am now legal again.

But there were two more things that really hit me. Firstly, in this part of the world our licenses are for five years. Is it really five years since I last renewed my license? Where did those five years go? What happened to that young guy in the last photo? It is bad enough when the new years fly by but a lot scarier when five years pass so quickly.

So I was feeling a little embarrassed at a late renewal and a little shocked at the passing of five years but there was one more jolt still to come. Now I am being asked whether I am prepared to donate my vital organs in the case of my death. In theory I think that organ donation is a great idea. So I sign over my heart, lungs, liver, eyes, skin and I not sure what is left. This was starting to feel like a near death experience. Simple things like renewing my license make me face the reality of my human frailness. I am not permanent. My life is a passing show.

The old book uses a metaphor to confront us and to shake us out of our false security, “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

The simple solution to my near death experience is to get busy, have a good time and get on with life – and pretend we are here forever. The truth is to face our creator, accept the peace he wants to give us and to love life between two great truths. Firstly, this world is a ride and we should try to enjoy every corner, slope, straight and bend. But secondly we need an exit strategy and our only hope is to go to the maker and seek his eternal solution. Faith in God is not stepping away from reality; it's a step towards the way, the truth and the life.

Part 2

Some time back in church one Sunday night there was a new couple I had not seen before. I spoke to them on the way out, at the door, and they seemed quite upset. The church service had not to my knowledge been particularly emotional, so I was surprised that they seemed so emotionally affected. After talking I discovered the reason. This couple had just returned from working overseas for a number of years. The last two years they had been working in Madrid. They had traveled regularly on the suburban trains. They had friends who were personally affected by the terrorist tragedy that struck Madrid. We did not go into the details but their pain was very real.

The responses to terrorism like Madrid or Bali are diverse. We will firstly be outraged at those who perpetrate such harsh and senseless violence. We will be confused at what they are trying to gain. We may be sad that our leaders have made decisions to make us more or less of a target. We may be frightened to travel and tempted again to fear. We may be deeply saddened that the “war on terrorism” seems an impossible war to fight; let alone win.

Years ago a Christian singer in Australia wrote a hauntingly beautiful song which included the line, “Nothing is safe”. It sounds negative and bleak but we are reminded again in the face of terrorism \ that the security we cling to in this world is not secure at all. The wealth we accumulate and admire is not real and can lose its value or be stolen. The relationships that we rely on so much are never permanent. The train we think is safer than driving, is safer than driving; but still never secure. The one body we are given is a wonder and a miracle but is not exempt from the decay of time.

To many, any thought of religion or God is a crutch for the weak or the needy. But maybe the point is that we are all weak and needy. We pretend we are not; we pretend that we are immortal and untouchable; and then when disaster strikes we are shocked and say, “I never thought it would happen to me.” God is our only eternal security described in the old book as our rock:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7: 24-27).

Part 3

I cannot really put into words how sad I was some time back at the tragic death of David Hookes. David Hookes, one of my favourite ever test cricketers, was killed in a brawl that occurred outside a hotel in Melbourne. Hookes was celebrating a state cricket victory of the team he coached, Victoria, over the team he use to play for, South Australia. For whatever reason , a bouncer (security guard) punched Hookes outside

the hotel and Hookes fell to the ground crashing his head on the gutter. He died instantly and though revived for a while he never really had a chance.

Hookes burst onto the cricket scene in 1977 Centenary Test Match against England. His test debut was at aged 21 (when I was 17) and he was a hero to many in my generation. He smashed 5 boundaries off one 'over' while Tony Greig was bowling. It was an innings that in many ways changed the course of the match. Sadly his test career never quite lived up to that start, but he was still one of the greats of Australian domestic cricket. In the days of World Series Cricket, Hookes suffered a devastating injury when he was cracked in the face with a bouncer (a short pitched delivery by one of the fierce West Indian bowlers). How strange and how sad that Hookes' life was cut short in a most stupid and senseless way.

Of course, there is another shock in this tragedy that frightens us all. When death steals one who we admire for his strength, his skill, his flair and his flamboyance we are undermined. Humans are weaker than we thought, death is nearer than we normally acknowledge and the questions about life, meaning, purpose and eternal destiny matter to everyone – even to the ones we hold up as invincible gods.

In Australia, and in much of the western world, the view in many circles is that we simply don't need God. Our hero's, cultural, sporting, celluloid and financial seem to satisfy us. But then we are shocked that they are not gods; they are mortal just like us and face the same destiny. The hope for all those who worship the true God is that this life is not the match but only the first innings. For all who put their hope in the risen saviour Jesus – there is a resurrection hope that changes the way we live now.

Death remains a tragedy and loss, which is hopeless without God! With God we still weep , but for all whose ultimate hero is the risen saviour Jesus, we remain full of hope

“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Conclusion

I will always remember finishing up as the pastor of a wonderful church in early September 2001. It was just a few days before the terrible disasters that we saw unfold with the World Trade Centre in New York. Do you now what was the last song we sung that Sunday.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name

On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.

Lord thank you for the eternal security we have for all who put their trust in Jesus our risen Saviour. Help us to love life with joy ever preparing for our eternal destiny secured by Christ alone.