

The Fear of Death (*Hebrews 2:14-15*)

11/3/06

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Death is a fearsome thing- when we're not trusting in Christ. The subject of death is one that produces so many opportunities for evangelism. Are you taking advantage of those opportunities? Constantly we're hearing in the news about death, or we're hearing of someone's relatives dying- and there are opportunities for evangelism. Solomon noted, "A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth; better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men and the living will take it to heart." (*Ecc 7:1*)

Are we alert and prepared to use the topic of death to introduce an evangelism conversation with a coworker, family member or friend? Simple questions can probe for an open door, after a conversation has proceeded about someone who died- are you using the most of these opportunities?

My friend Chris spoke the eulogy at his nephew's funeral. It wasn't known for sure whether the nephew was saved. His nephew had mocked Christianity up until a few months ago, and then made changes in his work schedule so he could go to church. No one is sure whether he made that commitment to Christ. Over 200 teenagers were there as Chris gave the eulogy and talked about death. Chris broke down in tears a few times, cut to the heart over what had happened, but he pressed on and asked the listeners whether they were ready for the day they die, for it can come so unexpectedly- did they have Christ as their Lord and Savior?

Solomon wrote, "No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war." (*Ecclesiastes 8:8*) With many people I share with out on the streets, I get to the point where they acknowledge they're sinners deserving hell, they acknowledge Jesus is Lord and Savior, but aren't ready to make a commitment to trust Christ. Death is the trump card I often bring up. No one knows the day of his death. On 9/11, many kissed their spouses goodbye in the morning, with happy thoughts of seeing them that night, and it wasn't to be, as 2 planes crashed into those twin towers. Let no unsaved person fool you who says he/she isn't afraid of death- God says otherwise in His word. Why do men fight so hard to stay alive? The power and reason for death is sin. Ray Comfort says that if there were someone pushing you closer and closer towards a cliff, wouldn't you turn around and see what it is that is pushing you? Step by step we're all approaching that cliff called death. There's been an inescapable sentence pronounced on all of us- death, for our sins. We're on death row and our prison is this earth and one day we will receive the result of our sentence- execution. "The soul that sins shall die" (*Ezekiel 18:4*) Everyone dies, thus all have sinned, and it should bring us to a realization of our need to address the issue of death in all seriousness and make sure we know where we will go when we die. Ask people about death, "If you were to die today, how sure would you be that you'd go to heaven?" Their answer may reveal what they're trusting in for their salvation and open an opportunity to show them through the Law that they can't possibly measure up to God's righteous standards and thus need a Savior.

The fear of death- I just shared about the fear of physical death, and how to use that in evangelism. I'd now like to take some liberty with the text of *Hebrews 2:14-15* and talk about another fear of death scripture frequently talks about- the death of self. All of us have experienced the fear of death to self. We don't like humiliation or discomfort. We desire to be approved of by others and go to great lengths to avoid being thought of as some Jesus freak. It's one of the main reasons we are timid about sharing our faith. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it... For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory..." (*Luke 9:23-26*) Notice how Jesus links lack of evangelism to death to self, self-denial. Let us each search our own hearts and admit to God the many times we've been ashamed of Jesus, because we didn't want to die to self. I'll be first in line to admit the many times I've kept silent when there was an opportunity to sow seeds of the gospel. Let us repent and realize His grace cleanses us of our sins, and then press on for all that He has for us in evangelism.

Paul spoke of evangelism and death as well, as he talked of the resurrection, "I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'" (*1 Corinthians 15:31-32*) He was chased out of town and almost was killed in Ephesus for preaching the gospel. Are we truly living and betting our lives on the resurrection we will receive? (John Piper notes that this passage isn't referring to drunkenness and partying, but just normal, routine, everyday living- nothing extreme- just normal eating, drinking and going about our daily business. If Christ hasn't risen from the dead, just live a routine life, going to church, living that comfortable lifestyle and not doing anything radical- avoiding the extremes). But if Christ is risen from the dead and we too will rise with Him and be delivered from condemnation, shouldn't we sacrifice greatly for the opportunity to share the gospel with many souls that they may escape the eternal flames? Will we consider spending and being spent- physically, emotionally, financially and in every way in our love for the lost?

Jesus spoke in a parable of three men who made lame excuses for not coming to a great wedding supper, "They all with one accord began to make excuses." (*Luke 14:18-20*) All the excuses were lame, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it." (If you've bought it, haven't you already seen it???) "I've bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them." (Again, haven't you already seen the oxen? Is work that important?) "I have married a wife, and therefore I can't come." (Why not bring her along? Does marriage exclude you from responsibility?) The parable is about the Great Supper, the Kingdom of God- we are so prone to excuses why we won't receive Christ and then sell out for Christ. We're too busy with our possessions (the piece of ground in the parable) or we're too busy with work (the oxen) or we're too busy with marriage and our inner circle of comfortable Christian friends. We're too busy with things that aren't as important as Jesus Christ and advancing His kingdom. It is time we each examine ourselves- what time, talents and treasures are we wasting here on earth that could be redirected to the gospel?

Are we willing to face humiliation and embarrassment to share the gospel? One of my friends one time was with me in Broad Ripple and got the courage to preach on the amplifier there out by the bars on a Friday night. He was so uncomfortable preaching there- much more comfortable downtown. The reason was that Broad Ripple, before he committed his life to Christ, was his hangout- he used to drink and pick up women there, and it wasn't all that long ago- just a few years. Wouldn't you know it, while he was

preaching, one of his old flames, a foxy young lady dressed to kill, came out of nowhere and came right up to him while he was on the microphone and called out his name in disbelief, "Is that you!?!?" He was undone by it and never preached in Broad Ripple again.

I was encouraged by a story about one preacher; I believe it was Charles Wesley. His wife was his thorn in his side. While he was preaching, she would ride by on a horse and mock him, "don't listen to him!". Can you imagine that humiliation? It didn't stop him. How about Hosea in the Old Testament, preaching while everyone in the crowd knew his wife Gomer was whoring about. You can be sure they let Hosea have it. It didn't stop him from preaching.

The fear of death. I have it too. Lord, help me. Deliver me from those fears that I may boldly preach the gospel wherever you call me and to whomever you call me to preach it to. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." (*Romans 1:16*)