

You Have Been Sentenced To Death Luke 12:16-21

The news has been full of the execution of Saddam Hussein lately. I saw the video of his execution, and I saw that he was rebellious to the very end. He had known for a while that this time was coming. I wondered what kind of thoughts went through his mind. How would a person feel to know he only had a certain time to live?

We all deal with death each day of our lives. We go to funerals, read about people dying, and witness death all around us, but there is something about human nature that leads us to believe it will always happen to the other person, but not to us. We just don't seem to comprehend that we too will die.

There was a character in the Bible that thought the same thing. Let's look at his story in **Luke 12:16-21** ;

(16) And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

(17) And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

(18) And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

(19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

(20) But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

(21) So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Here we see a well-to-do farmer who had a very fine crop. In fact the crop was so bountiful that he didn't have storage space enough for it. So he said to himself, **"I will pull down my barns and build bigger barns in which to store my earthly goods."** But about that time a voice within whispered to him. His soul said, **"What are you going to do about your spiritual life, about your relationship to God?"** And the man answered, **"Oh, soul, don't worry about that. I'll attend to spiritual matters later. In the meantime eat, drink and be merry."** Then God spoke. Notice what He called the man. **"Thou fool,"** God said, **"this night you're going to die and leave all these worldly things behind."**

Then Jesus made the application. **"So is everyone,"** he said, **"who thinks only of things down here and leaves God out."** But the tragedy is that so many people are doing this today. They are not necessarily rich — they may never be rich. Yet they are giving all of their time and energy and attention to this world and forgetting God.

This man had been given notice; he was going to die tomorrow. Yet he spent those hours as he had lived, grasping the things of the world, and not looking up to God. He

thought of gold instead of God, of pleasure instead of people, of ease instead of eternity.

This morning I want us to look at our own lives as if we are in the same situation as the rich farmer. Except with one change, suppose that you knew for sure that you were going to die sometime this year, 2007 what would you do?

I. I would suspect that the first thing you would want to do is to be sure of your salvation

Are you sure that you have been really and truly saved? Are you certain that you are a child of God? Do you know that you have had a saving experience with Christ?

Can you truly say with Paul, **“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”** (II Tim. 1:12).

He was not trusting in his church membership, his baptism, his preaching, his good works, but he put his trust in the One who said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6).

If we had to trust in our own goodness or our own works we would be on the road to hell. But putting all our trust in Him we can say: **“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”**

Are you sure you are saved? Certainly lots of church people I know don’t live like it. If they would only judge themselves by their fruit they would have reason to doubt their salvation.

What are the conditions of salvation? **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”** (John 5:24).

We are told here that if a man hears the Gospel, turns from his sin and trusts Christ, he will have everlasting life. He will not come into condemnation but has passed from death unto life. And surely such an experience will bring about a change in that man’s life. He’ll know that he is saved and he’ll live like it.

You don’t go to hell because you fail to live the Christian life and carry out your Christian duties. You fail to do these things because you have never met Christ and therefore you are on the road to hell.

The only thing that will matter when you get to the end of your way is your salvation. It won’t matter how much you’ve made or where you have lived or how many friends you have.

The only thing that will matter is your relationship to Christ. If you knew you were going to die in 2007 you would want to be sure of your salvation. Well, you may die tonight, so why not make sure of your salvation right now.

II. The second thing I suspect you would want to do if you knew for sure that we were going to die this year is you would want to be an active and faithful member of a New Testament church.

Some people come to Christ in one place — they become members of a church in that place, then they move to some other place and live out of the church for years. When you ask them if they have been saved they say, “**I hope so.**” They are really telling the truth. They have gotten so far away from God that they have lost the assurance of their salvation.

I believe that you can't keep a person out of a church fellowship if he has been really and truly saved. They will know that Christ saved them to serve in and through His church and they'll get in one as quickly as possible when they move from one place to another.

Do you want your life as a Christian to count for Christ? Then you should plant your life in a New Testament church. How can you know which church is a New Testament church? Just read your New Testament and see what the churches back there believed and practiced. Then find the church that believes and practices the same thing and join it. Approach the subject with an open mind, and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He will direct you.

The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, had an apple orchard. One day he looked out of the window and saw his neighbor slipping into the orchard and stealing several apples. He sampled one or two apples, made a bitter face and threw them away. Giving up in disgust he went home. Then Spurgeon went out into the orchard, filled a basket with apples and carried them over to the neighbor. The man was embarrassed. He confessed that he had already sampled the apples and found them too bitter to eat. “Yes,” said Spurgeon, “I planted some sour crabapple trees there at the entrance to the orchard to scare off anyone who wanted to steal them. But I planted the best trees in the center of the orchard and this basket is filled with the sweet apples from these trees.”

In like manner we can find some sour crabapple around the edge of the church, but you'll also find some sweet and wonderful Christians in the center of it.

In the Bible there is the story of tares and wheat growing in the same field. And Jesus said, “**Let them alone until harvest time. Don't tear up the whole field now. The tares and wheat will be separated at harvest time.**” So we are not to shun the church because there are some sour apples in it. They'll be taken care of at harvest time.

III. The third thing I suspect you would want to do if you knew for sure that we would die in 2007 is make restitution for your wrongs

I am sure each of us can think of some restitution which we should make if we are leaving this old world.

If a man really wants to get right with God he must make things right with others. One day Zacchaeus, a publican and a sinner, met Jesus. This experience completely transformed his life. How do we know that? Listen to him, **“If I have taken anything wrongfully from any man I will restore it fourfold.”** He was just beginning to live, up to that time he had simply been existing. If you are not right with your fellowman you are not really living.

Would you like to go out into eternity at an unspecified time this year knowing that you had cheated someone? That you had put over a fast deal on someone? That you had hurt someone with your gossip? No, you would be as busy as could be trying to straighten out these matters before going out to meet God.

Is there even the least thing between you and anyone in the world? Then let me urge you to make matters right now. Keep your heart clean, so that if you died tonight **it** would be well with you.

IV. The fourth thing I suspect you would want to do if you knew you were going to die in 2007 is get all your finances in order

Now you are saying, **“Wait a minute, preacher, with maybe just hours to live, this isn’t any time to think about money, is it?”**

Just think about it. Do you owe anyone money that would not be paid if you died suddenly?

How about your insurance policies? What about the financial liabilities you leave behind for your loved ones to have to worry about? What about your church and the financing of God’s work?

There was prominent doctor in Seneca that as far as I knew he never went to church. Being a doctor, he knew his time was drawing near. He told his wife to make a very large donation to the church. I don’t know what was on his mind, but on his death bed he knew he had been negligent in his support of the church. Most of us will not have that opportunity. If we don’t support the work of the church while we are doing well, I’m afraid we won’t get the chance when it is time to go.

Every Christian ought to make a will; he ought to provide for his obligations to be taken care of.

A preacher went into a hospital room to see an elderly man who was recuperating from a very serious operation and heard that man angrily arguing with his doctor. The doctor explained to the preacher that the old man owed a small sum to a local merchant. He was trying to get the old man to sign a check in payment of this small sum. But the old man thought the doctor was trying to trick him out of his life's savings. The doctor asked the preacher to intercede. The preacher looked at the check, saw that everything was all right, and persuaded the old man to sign.

Do you get the point? A few days before the old man had been near death and he was glad to trust his life in the hands of the doctor. But now he was not willing to trust him with a check for a few dollars. There are many Christians like the old man. When they were lost and on the way to hell they were willing to turn their soul's eternal welfare over to Jesus Christ and trust Him to save them. But now they are not willing to trust Him with the few dollars which He asks of them.

You know God is going to be fair. You know He will keep His promise. You know He blesses the cheerful giver. The one who can save you and take you to heaven can surely take care of you in this world.

V. The fifth thing I suspect you would want to do if you knew for certain that you were going to die in 2007 is witness to someone about Jesus Christ

You can think of someone right now who is lost. If you knew that you had only a few hours to live you would surely want to hasten to them and try to win them to Christ.

In the early years of my ministry I knew a man who lay on his deathbed. He was a Christian and a faithful church member, but he had never been a strong witness for Christ. He ran a grocery store on the main street of a small town and was highly respected by the other businessmen in town. Knowing that he was soon to die he called these men to his bedside, one by one, and pled with them to give their hearts and lives to Christ. His testimony during those last hours was more effective than all the sermons preached in that town that year.

Do you expect to meet anyone in heaven who is there because of your efforts? If you are faithful in your living and in your giving perhaps someone will meet you on the streets of glory and thank you for what you did to bring the Gospel to him. It may be someone you've never seen or heard of.

Well, if you knew you had only twelve hours to live, surely you would want to straighten everything out and do the best you could for Christ and others. Do you know for sure that you will live through 2007? Can any doctor on earth guarantee that you are going to live even one more hour?

Sixty-five people boarded a plane in Chicago for a flight to New York. They were laughing and talking and joking. The plane crashed just outside of New York and

everyone on board was killed. Did they know that they were going to die when they boarded that plane?

We read each year of several hundred people who are killed on the highway during the Christmas holidays. When they left home, looking forward to the trip and to a reunion with their loved ones, they did not know that this would be their last trip.

I read where thirty-eight miners perished in the bosom of the earth. When they went down the mine shaft in the elevator they were teasing each other, laughing and joking. They didn't know that would be the last elevator ride they would ever take. I knew a woman who slumped over and died as she finished eating her breakfast. When she sat down at the table she didn't know this would be the last meal she would ever eat.

You sit in your comfortable pew in your church on Sunday morning. You don't know whether you'll ever sit there again. So now is the time to get everything right with God and man so you'll be ready to go when the summons comes from on high.

Now, after you get ready you can wait in peace as Paul did. See him yonder in that cell. He knows he is to die the next day. The ax is sharp, the executioner ready to swing it. What does the great man of God say? **“I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand.”** The word “departure” carries the meaning of a ship leaving the dock, a ship that will soon sail into some other port.

So it was with Paul, so it can be with us. We simply sail out from this old earth to land in the port of eternal joy. So let us give our hearts to Christ, let us live at our best for Him every minute. Then if we go out anytime within the next year we can say, **“Lord, I am ready. I am glad that I can come home to be with Thee forever.”**

OK, 2008 comes along and you didn't die – Great! If you truly lived 2007 trusting in Christ, serving Him and His church, and laying up treasures in heaven? You were always ready to die. What better way is there to live?

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