

“Terminally Ill” – A Message of Hope

This lesson has been stirring in my spirit for a long time. To be honest, the title scared me a bit. The phrase *terminally ill* elicits personal, even raw, emotions for many. This is one of those *bad news – good news* scenarios. I needed to make certain I could approach this subject in a way that communicated truth with big doses of compassion and concern. If timing is everything, as the saying goes, the Holy Spirit’s timing of recent events, circumstances, and a meeting coalesced to bring confirmation to move forward. But as the late southern *philosopher*, Andy Griffith, used to say, “Ain’t nothing easy”.

Even though I spent most of my adult life in healthcare, I have never been directly involved in areas associated with terminal illness. Like many of you, I have walked through it with family and friends. Whether by routine exam or symptomatic changes inside or out, the process typically goes as follows.

1. **Diagnosis.** That for which we anxiously await. When we receive a good one, we are both glad and relieved. When we receive one we hoped or prayed against, reactions differ. Many seek second opinions. Some of us are numbed and not sure how to process the information. Others fall into denial, despondency, or depression. Bad news is hard to take; the truth hard to accept.
2. **Disease.** Given the diagnosis we did not want, reality of a sickness that could render us *terminally ill* sets in as the doctor(s) discusses a proposed treatment regimen. Again. Reactions differ. Some face this process with great courage, eager to fight. Others are overcome with fear and trepidation. It is not so much the battle ahead. For many, it is the forward-thinking that wonders what happens if it does not bring about a cure. And that leads us to the third, and final, part.
3. **Death.** Not many sit around and contemplate our passing. Yet it remains the one common denominator of all people; the contract with no “escape” clause. I assume all reading this have attended or been part of a funeral or memorial service. Most of them mourn the loss and try to find something good to say about the deceased. Some celebrate his or her ‘good’ life. But at the end of the day (or life), there are those left hopeless and those who remain hopeful. We will examine why.

In the few weeks since you received the January lesson, [In the Beginning God](#), I attended a memorial for a wonderful Christian man who succumbed to disease that rendered him *terminally ill*. I also had the wonderful opportunity to spend precious time with a friend with very advanced cancer. And, as part of a strong prayer ministry at church, I had the privilege of praying for a number of people considered *terminally ill*. We never cease to pray for absolute healing, but ultimately defer to the sovereignty of God. That said, the suffering these diseases can bring leaves us wondering, at times, the *why* thoughts.

With regard to the meeting with my friend I referenced, it was more of a reunion. We lost touch over the last few years as his family had moved out of state. The only news I heard was that he had been diagnosed with an advanced stage of cancer. We met over lunch and caught up on life, families, and, most importantly, his battle with cancer that puts him in the category, *terminally ill*.

My friend has endured around fifty radiation and chemo treatments during this hard season. Yet I have never seen anyone handle this kind of adversity with such amazing grace and a demeanor reserved for someone walking closely with our Lord, *living in the present of His presence*. My friend’s blessing and encouragement to write this lesson provided final confirmation. As he put it, these words “need to be received by many, if not all.” Let’s go deeper to understand how God turns bad news into Good News.

Bad News. Despite your clean bill of health, stellar physical fitness, and positive outlook on life, I have bad news. You are terminally ill. We all are. 100% of all people die at some point. We are going to examine what the Bible says about our death, both of them. I will explain ‘both’ as well. For most readers, these words are not new nor are you reading them for the first time, perhaps just the *right time!*

Physical Death

Unless the rapture of the Church takes place in our lifetime or God translates us straight to Heaven as He did Enoch and Elijah, we are going to die physically. Jesus died a physical death. Most people do not believe the biblical path to physical death as told in Genesis 3, but they know the story. Christians refer to the sin of Adam and Eve as the *fall of man*. It could also be called the *death of mankind*. For reference, here is a link to a video teaching time that discusses this in more detail. ([From the Cradle to the Cross](#))

Genesis 3 teaches us that **sin** makes everyone *terminally ill*. We are all guilty of sin, although most people do not like to talk about it or hear they are 'sinners'. "That sounds so negative." It is! It's deadly. The Apostle Paul said it this way,

"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." Romans 5:12

You do not have to be a theologian to understand that verse. That is bad news, and it gets worse before we get to the message of Hope people are *desperate* to hear. Many ask how it can get worse after death. That does not make any sense UNLESS there is something after death more foreboding than death itself. The writer of Hebrews added a phrase to what Paul said that troubles the hearts of men to our core.

"...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment," (from Hebrews 9:27)

That phrase, the use of the word *judgment* and what it means, absolutely sets off unbelievers from every religion or credo outside biblical Christianity. As Christians, we are more often accused of being "judgmental" than any other verbal assault. The fact that we hold fast to the truths of the Bible and salvation in Christ alone (John 14:6) is offensive to those who walk in darkness, blinded to the Truth. The Apostle Paul pointed that out.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1: 18)

[For more detail, you can read about the **two** judgments in 2 Corinthians 5 and Revelation 20.]

Spiritual Death (from bad to worst)

In that verse from Hebrews, God confirms there is *life after death*, i.e., physical death is not the end. Many religions teach that. *Reincarnation*. *All good people go to heaven*. *Our spirits wander around the earth doing whatever*. Many religions-many beliefs. One Truth. The Bible teaches sin not only caused *physical* death, it also brought about *spiritual* death. Jesus' ominous words of warning speak directly and clearly.

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

"I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the one who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!" (Luke 12: 4-5)

Jesus went further than teaching there is *life after death* and *judgment* in these verses. He interjected an even bigger issue for those who disdain Christianity: Hell. Real place, fire, eternal suffering. This is what is meant by *spiritual death*. Those who experience this death never lose consciousness of their surroundings. It is beyond horrific and unimaginable, and why Jesus spoke so much about it. He warned people of the reality of its existence. Unfortunately, for the lost person, the easiest way around judgment and hell is simply to reject it as false teaching. Call it a lie and today it is. Right?

GOOD NEWS. Finally we get to the good part. Now we will see how Jesus planned to deal with death and give us **hope**. He did not stop with those foreboding words of Hell and judgment. Jesus said ***"He came to save sinners."*** (Mark 2: 17). He offered a way out – an *escape clause* from a binding terminal contract.

Jesus' death for our sins provided complete payment; restitution to Holy God Who demanded the death penalty for our sins. This was the ultimate Gift, offered to all who acknowledge we are *terminally ill (sin)*, repent, and receive His Gift of salvation. Yet most people rejected Him then, most still do.

Sadly, a gift is only a gift if the one to whom it is offered accepts it. So many *terminally ill* people walk away because they do not like "the terms of the deal." They remain determined to find an easier path or continue to call the Truth a lie, unaware they have been deceived by the ultimate liar, Satan. He deceived Eve then Adam. He worked hard to deceive Jesus Himself. Only an arrogant man or fool would believe Satan does not come after us or we are too smart to be deceived.

HOPE. For Christians, physical death is just the beginning. While physical death is certain, so is life after death. We will experience the same resurrection as Jesus. *Spiritual life* for Christians is eternal life spent in the presence of God, occupying one of the *mansions* in Heaven Jesus said He was going to prepare for us; the amazing place John tried to describe in Revelation. Consider the words of Apostles Paul and Peter.

*"For since by a man came death, by a Man also came the **resurrection** of the dead."* (I Corinthians 15:21)

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (I Peter 1: 3)

Christians have victory over death. That gives us *living hope*. Unbelievers search for a hope that better fits their lifestyles; something comfortable and convenient. Death is neither, but it is inevitable. During His life, Jesus offered hope to hopeless captives, the Jews. His offer stands today. He is the only hope for all who are *terminally ill*, physically and spiritually.

How should we put a wrap on this lesson? I assume we agree 100% of all men die, including us. So let me close by asking three pivotal questions.

1. **How much longer do you have to live?**

"Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come." (Ecclesiastes 9: 12)

Solomon wrote this answer that has troubled the hearts of men since Adam was escorted from the Garden. **"I don't know."** We do not know *how or when*. *"Live like there is no tomorrow"* is both a secular mantra and biblical mandate. The difference in those lives is HOPE eternal.

2. **Have you accepted the Gift that alone can cure your terminal illness?**

*"Surely He (Jesus) bore our pain and suffering...He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds **we are healed**. We have all, like sheep, gone astray...and the LORD laid on Him all of our sins."* (Isaiah 53: 4-6)

A matter of life and death. If you have not settled this once and for all time, I implore you. Please do so right now. We just agreed death is inevitable and the time unknown. God loves you and is waiting.

3. **If you have been made alive in Christ, are you living a HOPE-FULL or hopeless life?**

*"Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to **give the reason for the hope that you have** with gentleness and reverence."* (1 Peter 3: 15)

God is faithful in life and death. Then why do so many Christians live as the hopeless? We were made alive forever in Christ. Our living Hope should produce **joy** evidenced by our *attitudes* and *actions*. People are attracted to the Living Christ in us. Our hope gives them hope. I want to live like that.

Walter

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