

**~Other Speakers A-F: Richard E. Bieber:**

One day before long, unless the Lord comes back in the meantime, each one of us will arrive at the moment of our death.

Perhaps we'll sigh with relief, "At last, this thing that I've been dreading all my life, has finally come. Let's get on with it"

Or maybe we'll be overwhelmed with dread.

Or we will welcome it with joy,

And thou, most kind and gentle Death,  
Waiting to hush our final breath,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!

We're going to die. And, for all of us, the fear of death is in our bones. And, for that fear, there is only one cure:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

Hebrews 2:14-15

In those early days, believersâ€”people like us---lived with awesome power, because for them, the fear of death was gone! They had been delivered!

They went out into the world and broke through those gates of death and set the captives free. They lived with boldness, as they manifested the kingdom of God .  
What did these people have that we lack?

1) They received the gifts of the Holy Spirit and exercised them to a degree we have not reached.

2) They lived in unity with each other to a degree beyond our experience.

What made this possible?

They were free from the fear of death, and from the lifelong bondage that fear brings.

Without that freedom from the fear of death, the gifts of the Spirit and the unity of believers becomes shallow and empty.

These people had come to know a Jesus who was worth dying for.

Choosing to die for his name â€” it now became possible for them to live for him. By comparison, modern evangelical Christianity, of which we are a part, is not free from the fear of death, and this is manifested in many ways:

For instance, we rarely talk about death â€” our own death.

We talk about the rapture ... we talk about the return of Jesus, but we don't talk about death.

We may think about somebody else's death ... we'll even go to their funeral ... but we rarely think about our own death .

And who of us chooses to die for the name of Jesus?

Somebody says, " We are living in a time and place where there is no danger. Who's going to kill you for following Jesus? In this country? This day and age?"

When Peter, Andrew, James, and John brought their boats to land and forsook everything and followed Jesus,

it was a sunny day, the sky was blue, everything was glorious, and there was no threat of death on their lives. They had no conception of what waited for them down the road.

But very soon they found themselves so taken up with their Master, so in love with Jesus that they were willing to die for him.

Jesus taught them that following him meant death.

Following him would put your feet on a path that would take you to your cross.

Tradition has it, that every one of the apostles died a violent death for the name of Jesus, with the possible exception of John, whose very life was a sacrifice.

As men and women began dying for the name of Jesus by the handfuls, and by the dozens, and then by the hundreds, and then by the thousands, the church didn't fall apart, the numbers grew.

Following the Jesus who was worth dying for, it was now possible for them to live for him.

The word of the Spirit to us comes in the form of a question:

Do you love Jesus enough to die for him?

Are you willing to put your feet on a path that will take you to a cross?

When we say "yes" to that question we find ourselves breathing the atmosphere of heaven. We are now able to live with a power and a boldness and a freedom from heaven, from the world on the other side of death. Being willing to die for Jesus, we are now able to live for Jesus.

Jesus makes clear that this death that we have chosen is the doorway to fulfillment of every promise, the place where our hope really lies, the source of our power even now.

When Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him to death, he also teaches that on the other side of death

... is a reckoning, there are rewards, and there is a resurrection – and Jesus is the center of it all.

So Jesus keeps calling us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, because on the other side of death there is a reality which waits for us....

"There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades[the region of the dead], being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom.

Luke 16:19-23

The rich man was very religious, he went to church, he got 'saved' at an early age, he knew everything about the plan of salvation, read his Bible ... but he also picked up a different creed from those TV commercials that rooted itself in his heart. The creed that really governed his life was, 'you only go around once, so get all the gusto and pesos you can.'

And this became the creed of his life: I'm going to get it all now. I'm going to hold onto it for me and mine.

What a shock when he comes to the end of the road, passes through the door of death, and discovers, you don't go around at all, you straight on through, and keep on going.

Now what's he going to do?

Meanwhile, here's Lazarus the beggar. This man is so beaten down, and so lonely, and so in pain, and so

desolate, and so hungry, that it's easy for him to believe there's got to be something better on the other side.

So when he dies, it's no big shock to be met by these angels who carry him to Abraham's bosom.

What Jesus is telling us in this parable is there is a reality on the other side of death instantly – immediately, and it's connected with what we do over here.

And there is a reckoning,

"And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Luke 16: 24-31

When the rich man gets to the other side he remembers:

I do remember that I did go to church and I did get saved, and I know all about salvation, so what's the deal, Abraham? Don't you remember the time I went down to the front and asked Jesus into my life? And over there is Lazarus – this guy never even went to church! What's the deal?

There is a reckoning, and the basis of the reckoning is this: Those who receive no mercy from man, on this side of death, can expect mercy from God on the other side of death.

And those who show no mercy on this side of death to their fellow man, can expect no mercy from God on the other side of death.

"Wait a minute! What are you talking about? What about the cross? What about the blood of Jesus? What about salvation? You've ignored all that..."

No.

The center of it all is the cross of Jesus.

Jesus came into this world, and laid down his life to open the door of mercy, so that even in this world the mercy of heaven can flow like a river. And everyone who receives that mercy can experience heaven even on this side of the grave.

But if I open my heart and receive the mercy of God now through the blood of Jesus, and then walk right past Lazarus saying, 'Sorry, buddy,' then I better ask myself what kind of salvation I have.

There is a reckoning.

There are also rewards .

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6:19-21

Rewards? What happened to salvation by grace alone through faith?

Listen again to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world:

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' 'Take your bill quickly and write fifty.' He said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence; for the sons of this world are wiser in their generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by the means of the unrighteous mammon, that when it fails [at your death] they may receive you into eternal habitations.

Yes, we are given salvation as a gift — salvation is Jesus living in us.

"He who has the Son has life: he who has not the Son, has not life."

And when Jesus lives in us, this means we live in mercy. And every time we show mercy — every time we take some of this unrighteous mammon, money and things — to help someone, Jesus says it registers on the other side.

"Watch out for works righteousness!"

The salvation we already have, we don't have to earn, we've already got it. It's a gift.

But we have to live it!

And Jesus promises that we will have rewards on the other side ... as we live mercy.

But if we fail to live mercy, the gift of grace evaporates.

"Maybe I didn't show much mercy ... maybe I didn't give a dime away ... maybe I didn't stop to help people, but I am still saved."

Are you? Why is Father Abraham shaking his head?

Finally, there is a resurrection on the other side.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation."  
John 5:28-29

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or your rich neighbors, lest they invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Luke 14:12-14

There is a resurrection of the just. Jesus himself is the first fruit of that resurrection. And Jesus in his mercy comes into you with the light and power of that resurrection now.

"If the Spirit of him who that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken [give life] to your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Romans 8:11

And that life comes not only after death, but even before. So, by the quickening power of the Spirit, the resurrection life of Jesus enables us to manifest God's kingdom now.

Of course, if we share in Jesus' resurrection life now, we can also expect to share in his suffering. Are we prepared?

**"That I may know him in the power of his resurrection [Hallelujah!], and in the fellowship of his sufferings [Hallelujah!], and be made like him in his death." Hallelujah!**

**So today, the Word of the Lord to all of us is:**

**Do you love Jesus enough to die for him?**

**Are you willing to put your feet on a path that will take you to a cross?**

**If we can say yes to that, we expect the power of the resurrection to begin to work in us. And we will begin to experience the power of heaven, the boldness of God, and the liberty of the Spirit such as we have never known it.**

**And when we come to the end, and face the moment of our death, we will be able to welcome it with unspeakable joy!**

**And thou, most kind and gentle Death,  
Waiting to hush our final breath,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!**