

WHEN A GOOD MAN DIES

Text: II Samuel 1:23,25

This morning I cannot think of anything but tragedy that is being experienced by my son-in-law, daughter and the whole Matthews family. I am writing this on the eve of our Couple's Retreat. We were hoping that Jared and Heather could have come down for our retreat, but now we realize that was not meant to be. Jared's younger brother, Matt in his early thirties, father of four beautiful children, suddenly died yesterday while on a bike ride with his beloved wife, Jessica. I loved Matt. He was gifted as all the Matthews are with music. He served the Lord faithfully in his local church in Missouri. Trent and Laura (Jared's precious parents) have four children, all of them serving the Lord with all their hearts. My wife and I are trying to get our minds and hearts around this sudden passing wondering what Trent and Laura must be experiencing. We are wondering what Jessica is experiencing, as she awakens this morning without the great love of her life by her side. We are wondering what the children must be thinking as it all would seem so confusing for these little children who are surrounded by such invigorating life. We are wondering what our son-in-law is experiencing who was as close to his brother as a brother could possibly be. I always admired how much they had in common from video games, sports, but most of all, in their one hundred per cent dedication to the Lord. I was deeply touched that both of these young men led the choirs in their respective churches and last year they did their choir cantatas together. Jared's church joined Matt's church and Matt's church afterwards joined Jared's church. Nothing brings a family closer together than the Lord Jesus and this bond is intensified when we serve the Lord together.

Today I want to talk to you about love and death. We may not like to see those words together, but believe me they go hand-in-hand. Yesterday we ended our couple's retreat, but we do pray that the love that was accelerated in the hearts of minds of all who left Galveston will intensify, not diminish. And with the Lord's help, I'm going to ask the Lord to let young Matt help me bring a message to you.

1. None of us know when we are going to die.

Often times young people live like they are going to live for a thousand years. The Bible says, *"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"* (Proverbs 27:1). *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that"* (James 4:14,15). *"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle..."* (Job 7:6a). *"Now my days are swifter than a post (a runner): they flee (run) away..."* (Job 9:25a). *"My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass"* (Psalm 102:11). *"...All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass"* (Isaiah 40:6b, 7). While yet in his youth David said to his friend, Jonathan, *"...But truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death"* (I Samuel 20:3b).

Suffice it to say, we all need to be ready, when the Lord calls us home. My late friend and church member, Colonel James R. Cain used to say nearly every time we were together, "We should live as though every day was our last day because one day it will be." I still remember Colonel Cain's last day. We talked, he smiled and told all his daughters he loved them and we prayed. He left this earth with love in his heart, a smile on his face and a prayer in his heart. What a way to go!

2. The believer has nothing to fear.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). Wherever there is a shadow, there has to be a light causing the shadow. Jesus, the Light of the World escorts every believer through this valley. A little boy who asked his father if he was dying was told by his dad, "Son, the doctors say you are. Does that scare you?" The young boy replied, "If God is like you are, Daddy, then I am not afraid." If Matt's first understanding of what God was like was learned from his father, Trent, then I can assure you, he was prepared to go into the arms of his Heavenly Father. Psalm 23:6 promises, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."* Goodness and mercy follow the Christian to the very day of his or her home-going. God doesn't take goodness and mercy from us. He gives us the largest dose on the day of our death, for Ecclesiastes 7:1 says, "A good

name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"* (II Corinthians 5:8). As soon as we breathe our last terrestrial breath and breathe our first celestial breath, we can rejoice for we are with our Savior! No wonder Paul could say, *"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."* (I Thessalonians 4:13,14).

I want to bring to your attention a great truth. The Bible says in Genesis 2:7, *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* I love the thought God revealed to me recently; man's first breath was God's breath! Then quoting again from Isaiah 40:6b, 7, *"...All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass."* The word for "spirit" is the same Hebrew word for "breath." God blows upon the flower and it folds itself in death. In this comparison, God blows upon His child at the point of death and takes his or her breath away." Sometimes to save a life, a person will give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to the dying person and sometimes their life is restored by a most intimate method. I am comforted to know that God Himself leans down to take our breath away here and places the very breath of Himself within us in the "heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6). Solomon says it like this, *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit (breath) shall return unto God who gave it"* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Our daughter Heather called us before Matt was pronounced dead and said, "Please pray; Matt has not been breathing for ten minutes." No doubt at that very moment, unseen by the eyes of the paramedics, the Lord was leaning over our young friend with loving comfort to exchange earth's air for heaven's. God gets up-close and personal when He brings His child home.

3. Good people die.

Often people equate death as punishment. But listen to the Bible: *"The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come"* (Isaiah 57:1). To paraphrase this verse, God is saying that people made righteous by His grace and are actually living a righteous life die. And those who don't know Him cannot understand that He takes good people, who are good

to others, to heaven because He see something worse than death in their future. And for the person who knows and loves Him, death is not a cessation of life -- it's the first step into a life that shall never cease. So if He takes someone before you are ready to say good-bye, trust Him; this is all part of the good that He has in store for the ones who love Him.

Another unusual verse says, *"And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam"* (I Kings 14:13). Although Jeroboam and his house were living wickedly, God decided to deliver his young son from this life, not because he was wicked but rather because, *"...in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God...."* God declared this child is going to bring more good to my already good and glorious heaven. The Bible records, *"And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him"* (John 9:2,3). The man was not born blind because he did wrong, but Jesus told us, in essence it was for His glory. God is never arbitrary in His dealings with His own! He has a purpose, although it may be hidden for a time from us. *"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"* (I Corinthians 13:12).

4. Express all the love you have for those you love NOW.

Before I walk out of the house or out of the car to catch a plane, I always tell my wife I love her. I close every conversation with my wife or children with, "I love you." I want the last thing my loved ones to know is that I love them. If there is something nice we can do for someone or something we can give someone that will benefit them; do it and give it now! *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest"* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.