

Preaching Funerals

by Wayne Goff

As a gospel preacher, I am asked to “preach somebody’s funeral” from time to time. It is always an honor to be asked to commemorate the life of one who has died, and I always take the privilege seriously. It also brings up some points to consider:

The Funeral Sermon

While the preacher is asked to preach the sermon, in reality the person who has died has preached his or her own funeral throughout his or her life. My task has always been to present a fair representation of that person’s life — their character, their goals and aspirations, their families, and certainly, their faith in God — and each life is its own special “package” of things that can never be duplicated by another person in life.

No preacher can “preach one *into* heaven” or “*out of* heaven” for that matter! Judgment is left to God and while it is a habit with some preachers to declare this one or that one “eternally saved,” none of us can say that for certain. Only God can proclaim one lost or saved, and according to the Bible, some will be surprised at the outcome (see Matt. 7:21-23 & Luke 16:19-31).

It has been said that if you want to die the death of the righteous, then you cannot live the life of a sinner. Judgment will be impartial because God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11), and it will be based upon “*the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Corinthians 5:10). “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31), yet so many ignore the inevitable judgment day with quiet indifference. It is bone-chilling to me to see how few truly believe and care about the Judgment Day.

Eulogy

The part of the sermon that we call “the eulogy” is defined as “a speech or piece of writing that praises someone highly, typically someone who has just died.” Notes from family, friends, and close acquaintances are used by me to paint a picture of that person’s life. Often, those who *thought* they knew the person well are surprised to learn *something new* about that person they thought they knew so well. It is right and fitting to mention the good that people have done while on the earth. Memories of loved ones sustain us in the hours of pain and suffering that follow.

Your Funeral

So, dear reader, realize that every day of your life you are writing your own eulogy. Imagine what a preacher would say about your life if it were to suddenly end today. Would he say that you had lived a good, clean, moral life? Would it be said that you put first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Would your close friends and family recognize the description being given?! (I am always pleased to see an audience nod their head in agreement when I am describing a loved one. That means that I have “hit the nail on the head,” and I am doing the job I have been asked to do.) At the end of every funeral, we should want the preacher to say, “To the best of my knowledge, this person died the death of a faithful Christian and therefore we have great hope for them in death (1 Thess. 4:18)”

Two Eulogies

Abraham gave two different eulogies in Luke 16 — one of the rich man and one of a poor man named Lazarus. Of the rich man and Lazarus Abraham said:

“Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented” (v. 25).

The rich man was both surprised and dismayed to learn that his **eternal** fortune was the opposite of his **earthly** fortune. Notice that the text said of the rich man that he “*died and was buried*” (v. 22). A more beautiful description of the death of the righteous Lazarus was that he “*died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.*”

Which will it be for you and me? “*Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matt. 25:34) or “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt. 25:41)?

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