

McCabe United Methodist Church

Peace with God (Part 2)

(Based on Billy Graham's book *Peace with God*)

Hebrews 9:24-28 * John 14:1-7: March 15 & 16, 2014

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There's a verse in Psalms 89 that asks a haunting question. **“What person can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?”**

The answer is no one. Billy Graham put it this way, **“All humankind is sitting on death row. How we die or when is not the main issue, but where do we go after death.”**

I was talking to a friend one night. He wasn't known for his wisdom, but this night he was pretty wise. He said, **“Rick, we don't know the hour or the day, but we can count on it.”** He was talking about death.

In the middle of life, we see death all around us. Open any newspaper and you'll see accounts of people dying . . . some people before their time and some not. We hear ambulance sirens warning us that all is not right. We drive by funeral homes and cemeteries and they all carry a similar message, **“We don't know the hour or the day, but we can count on it.”**

Today, is message number two in a series I'm calling *Peace With God*. The series is based on Billy Graham's book of the same name.

Throughout this Lenten series, I'll be using the Billy Graham's preaching formula. The formula works this way:

1. God has a plan for us
2. We don't follow God's plan
3. God has a solution for us when we don't follow God's plan
4. Our response to God's solution

There's a chapter in Mr. Graham's book, *Peace With God*, called *'After Death - What'*. I'll be focusing on that chapter today.

Have you ever thought about death? It's not exactly the most pleasant subject. Most of us would rather avoid talking about it. Yet, we can't avoid it? Death won't go away.

Oscar Wilde, writer, once wrote, **“One can survive everything nowadays except death.”**

We can try to put death off for a bit, but we can't avoid it.

There's an old fable about a man who made an unusual agreement with Death. He told Death that he would go with him peacefully when his time came to die, but only if Death warned him in advance.

Death agreed.

Weeks turned into months, and months into years. Then one winter evening, as the man was sitting by his fireplace, Death suddenly walked into the room, tapped him on his shoulder and said, **"It's time."**

Surprised, the man cried out, **"What! You can't do this! We had a deal. You were supposed to warn me first. It's not fair!"**

Death replied, **"Hey, I kept my part of the deal. I warned you. I warned you plenty of times. Get up and look in the mirror and see for yourself."**

The man got up and looked in the mirror. Death said, **"Look at your hair! It was once thick and black, now it's thin and white. And look at the way you tilt your head to listen to me because you can't hear very well. And look how close to the mirror you have to stand because you have trouble seeing. And look at the cane you have to use because your knees ache."**

"Oh, I've warned you, alright," Death said. **"I'm sorry you're not ready, but the time has come for you to leave."**

Seldom does death come at a convenient time, but it comes. We don't have to like it, but it comes. **"We don't know the hour or the day, but we can count on it."**

Of course, we can and we should try to avoid death for as long as possible. We try to eat healthy, get plenty of rest, watch our stress levels. We exercise and see our doctors on a regular basis. And thanks to advances in the medical field and new technologies, we can now live a few extra years, but everyone still has a time when they'll have to leave.

"It's strange," Mr. Graham writes, **"human beings will prepare for almost everything except death. We prepare for education. We prepare for business. We prepare for our careers. We prepare for marriage. We prepare for our vacations. We prepare for retirement. We prepare for everything except what happens after we die."**

Yet, **“we don’t know the hour or the day, but we can count on it.”**

God has a plan and it’s summed up in our passage from John. Jesus was talking to his disciples about a place called heaven. He told them, **“I’m building you a mansion or a home. A place where you will go once your life in this world has ended. You know the way.”**

Thomas, one of the Apostles, didn’t understand. **“Lord,”** he said, **“We don’t know the way. How will we find you again?”**

And Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. Believe in me and you will find your way to heaven.”**

This is also our promise. Jesus has built a mansion for all who believe and the way for us is clear. **“I am the way,”** Jesus said, **“and the truth and the life.”**

For Christians, death, although not easy, is similar to walking out one door and through another door or walking out of this life and into a new life. It’s called heaven.

The problem is this: For some people today, Jesus isn’t the way or the truth or the life. They might go to church, but Jesus still isn’t their way or their truth or their life. They might have a Bible or two sitting on the bookshelf at home, but Jesus still isn’t their way or their truth or their life. They might even remember some of the rules they’ve been taught like *“thou shalt not kill or steal or covet or slander or commit adultery or lie,* but still Jesus isn’t their way or their truth or their life.

Billy Graham, in his book, wrote about two kinds of death. One is physical and the other is eternal. Jesus warned us to fear the second kind of death more than the first. He described the second death as hell, or for Billy Graham he calls hell, **“a separation from God.”**

I think that’s a pretty good definition of hell: **“Hell is separation from God.”**

Maybe the whole idea of heaven and hell has fallen out of fashion for many people today. We just don’t like thinking about it, or worse, we don’t care. C’est la vie! Whatever will be will be.

But, the bottom line is this: There is either going to be a heaven or there isn’t. If there isn’t a heaven, than our Christian religion has some serious flaws

and we have nothing to worry about. But, if heaven is real, do we really want to risk missing it?

An atheist once said, **“I know there ain’t no heaven and I pray there ain’t no hell.”**

We’re not meant or made to live forever in this world. It’s not part of God’s plan. But, God does have another, better place waiting for us once this life ends and we’re all invited.

A man was dying and he asked his doctor to tell him something about the place where he was going.

The doctor fumbled around for a reply and then he heard his dog scratching at the door. He was an old time doctor with an office in his house. **“Do you hear that scratching,”** the doctor asked his patient? **“It’s my dog. He’s never been in this office. I keep him outside. He doesn’t know what’s in this room, but he wants to come in because he knows I’m here.**

The doctor went on, **“We don’t know what heaven is like either, but we know that God will be there and that’s enough.”**

Jesus said, **“I’ve built you a mansion, a place where you can go once your life in this world is over.”**

We have a home waiting for us beyond this one. I can’t tell you heaven’s address, but I do have the directions. **“I am the way,”** Jesus said, **“and the truth and the life. Believe in me and you’ll find your way to heaven.”**

During our final hymn today, *Just as I Am*, I’m going to ask Julie to play through the first verse. I you invite to remain seated during that first verse. Use that time to say **‘yes’** to Jesus and **‘yes’** to heaven because **“We don’t know the hour or the day, but we can count on it.”**