

Euphemisms for Death

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Ecclesiastes 7:1-2

Solomon said the day of one's death is better than one's birth. Why? He knew that life here was vanity, but we have something better awaiting us (Ecclesiastes 12:7-8, 13-14). The Bible uses several expressions for death (euphemisms). A euphemism is a milder word or phrase used in place of a stronger one (ex: "passed away"). The euphemisms for death in the Bible can teach us some lessons. We should "take it to heart."

Going the Way of All the Earth (1 Kings 2:1-2)

- Before David died, he encouraged his son Solomon to be faithful to the Lord – "As David's time to die drew near" (v. 1); "I am going the way of all the earth" (v. 2)
- This phrase indicates that death is common to all people – "it is appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27); common bond we all share (Proverbs 22:2); we will not live forever (Psalm 90:10); our lives are uncertain (James 4:14-15)
- All of us will "go the way of all the earth" – unless we are alive when the Lord returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Breathed His Last (Mark 15:37)

- When Jesus died on the cross, Mark said He "breathed His last" – Greek word (ekpneo) means to breathe out; related to pneuma (spirit – Matthew 27:50)
- This phrase shows us that death occurs when our spirit leaves our physical body – "The body without the spirit is dead" (James 2:26); pneuma
- When God created Adam, He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7) – all people have this life (Acts 17:25-26); at death, our spirits return to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7); after death comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27; Ecclesiastes 12:14)

Gathered to His People (Genesis 25:8)

- When Abraham died, he "breathed his last" and was "gathered to his people" – does not refer to his burial (Genesis 25:9); "his people" were buried in Ur and Haran (Genesis 11:28, 32)
- This phrase tells us that there is life after death – though not explicitly stated, the Old Testament faithful understood the concept of an afterlife (cf. 2 Samuel 12:22-23); Jesus cited God's implication that there is life after death (Matthew 22:31-32)
- After death, if we are faithful, we will be gathered to the people of God in paradise (Luke 16:22) – after the Lord's return, we can be with Him and His people (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1)

Fallen Asleep (John 11:11-14)

- Jesus used this phrase to refer to the death of Lazarus – His disciples did not understand at first; this may be the most commonly recognized euphemism for death in the Bible
- This phrase reminds us that death is temporary – many live as if this life is all there is (“you only live once”); it is not wrong to enjoy life, but we must remember that we will be judged (Ecclesiastes 11:9); the resurrection will be for either life or judgment/damnation (John 5:28-29)
- Those who die in the Lord have “rest from their labors” (Revelation 14:13) – when the Lord returns, the dead will be raised and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-54); if we are faithful, we can have eternal life (Romans 6:23; Matthew 25:46)

Conclusion

- Death is a sad reality of life – but it is good for us to consider it (Ecclesiastes 7:2)
- We need to live in such a way that the day of our death is better than our birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1)
- How can we do this? – fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)