

## Engaging with Aging Seminar

January 25, 2025

Christ Presbyterian Church New Haven

### Biblical and Theological Vision of Aging, Dying, and Death

#### Where We All Start From: Our Culture's Vision

1. *Idolatry of Youth* - What age is Frodo in "Lord of the Rings"?
  1. Youth live in the epicenter of our culture's attention to the point that we feel like we have to apologize about being old or having "old-fashioned" opinions.
2. *Idolatry of Health*
  1. Combine expressive individualism, atheism, and modern medicine, and we end up with some version of this vision of life—"The good life could *only* happen when you're healthy, so you have to do everything you can to get and stay as healthy as possible, and if you don't, you're a terrible person. If you do get chronically sick, then your life is over and you should consider physician-assisted suicide."
  2. These two idolatries—of youth and health—are twins of the same mother, they come from the same source and reinforce each other to produce a feeling of a **fleeting life**, out of which I have to be manic to suck all possible experiences. It is no surprise, then, that our culture doesn't know how to handle or experience death.
3. *Blindness to Death* -
  1. **Absolute denial:** Not apart of life - we pretend it doesn't exist or won't happen
    1. Keep those cemeteries out of sight!
    2. Will never happen to me!

3. Modern medicine allows us to live *as if* this is true, even if we know intellectually it's not, it is our lived experience for many of us to never really encounter death until late in life.
2. **Absolute acceptance:** Simply apart of life
  1. Death is just “slipping away into the next room” or becoming a different part of nature.
  2. This “offers hollow comfort. By itself, without comment, it simply tells lies. It is not even a parody of Christian hope. Instead, it simply denies that there is any problem, any need for hope in the first place.” (NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 14)

### **Death Be Not Proud: The Christian Vision of Death**

[Note: There is much more to be said here, but I'm largely assuming these claims as a foundation for the next part]

#### **1. Death is Evil - Death as a Product of the Fall**

1. Humans were not created with death in mind; like sin, it is a foreign enemy that has invaded, yet one that we cannot escape (except in Christ's return). See Gen. 3 and Rom. 5.12

#### **2. Jesus & Death - Jesus totally transforms our perspective and experience of death**

##### **1. Read 1Cor. 15.17-23**

1. “Fallen asleep” became the standard description of Christians who die before Christ's return, so sure were they that death was merely a kind of “sleep”!
2. Remember how **revolutionary** the resurrection of Christ is. Crucifixion never meant anything good—it meant that the Romans won, and Jesus was a fraud—until the resurrection.

##### **2. Death be not proud - Read 1Cor. 15.54-7**

1. As our Confession of Faith (ch.20) says, we have been freed in Christ “from the *evil* of afflictions, the *sting* of death, the *victory* of the grave, and everlasting damnation.”

### 3. Our Ultimate Hope - Read Rev. 21.1-4

1. “Death is important; it is an enemy, but for the Christian, it is a beaten enemy. . . first, a short sleep, then an eternal waking. And death shall be no more. . . death will be not simply redefined but defeated. God's intention is not to let death have its ways with us. with the resurrection, Christians began to believe that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. . . . Resurrection is not the redescription of death; it is its **overthrow** and, with that, the overthrow of those whose power depends on it.” (Wright, 15, 50)

### 3. Death in Christ *before* Christ’s Final Return

#### 1. *Heaven before the New Heavens and New Earth - Read Phil. 1.19-25*

1. Notice Paul’s confidence that upon death he will be with Christ. (Cf. 2Cor. 5.1-8)
2. Rom. 8.28-39 - not suffering nor death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!
3. “Our task in the present . . . is to live as resurrection people in between Easter and the final day, which our Christian life, corporate and individual, in both worship and mission, is a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second.” (Wright, 30)

### The Paradigm of the Cross [it’s not just a distant victory over death!]

#### 1. *Jesus’ Cross is the Glory of God most clearly seen*

1. Read John 12.23-33

#### 2. *We must follow*

1. Read Luke 9.23-25

#### 3. *The Christian Life is a Cross-formed life*

1. *Read 2Cor. 4.7-12 & 2Cor. 12.7-10*
2. The Christian life **does not promise** long life, health, happiness, and wealth! There is no biblical promise of a long retirement, with plenty of golf and time with the grandkids!
3. Following a Savior who is “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53.3), who himself laments and weeps for his people (John 11.33-35; Luke 19.41-44), who declares, “*4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matt. 5.4)*”, means that suffering, grief, mourning, and experiences with death are all meant to form us into the image of Jesus.

### **Practical Implications from the Paradigm of the Cross**

#### **1. The Christian life for all ages is a *practice in dying***

1. Our final death should be the culmination of what we’ve practiced following Christ the whole time.
2. “**Remembrance of Death**” is an entire spiritual discipline, where former generations meditated on the fact that they will die. This is not morbid because it’s real! Church Fathers instructed all Christians to “remember your death” every day. What would be the impact on our spiritual life if we did this?
  1. *Read Psalm 39:4-7*
  2. This practice, of course, should encourage a growth in our assurance of salvation and confidence of God’s grace that alone brings us to heaven.

#### **2. Our death is an opportunity to glorify God**

1. All of life, including all of suffering and even death, are meant for the glory of God. Let it all lead you to deeper **repentance**, awareness of your **frailty** and **dependence** upon God, a reminder that this life is **fleeting** and not our home, etc.

2. Notice the great dignity this gives us! No matter what happens—as bad as it gets, all the way to death itself—the purpose of God is not thwarted in us!

1. “They cannot rob us of our death!”

### 3. **Honesty about death**

1. The gospel frees us to talk about death honestly, facing the reality of it, without fear, yet knowing that it is an evil.

2. *Honesty about the fear of death and dying as well*

1. We may have faith in the resurrection, but it may take a lot of work to internally appropriate this truth. Therefore, we have to be aware of ourselves and others, who may not have such assurance.

### 4. **New perspective on suffering**

1. *For caretakers* - you are called to walk with those who suffer, to the glory of God. Your life’s goal is not to maximize the ease with which you can accomplish your ambitions! It is to love those in your life to the glory of God by the power of God!

1. God calls us to care for our family, who is placed in our lives by God’s providence, and the church is to supplement that (hence, “orphans and widows” as those without family or worldly power).

2. Yet, with healthy boundaries.

2. *For those aging themselves*

1. Don’t be ashamed! This is a part of God’s plan for your life, and you still have the opportunity to glorify Him, trust Him, consecrate your suffering to him, and allow others to care for you, allowing them to witness the grace of God as you **humbly receive** care. Don’t bow down to the Youth Culture!

2. How? The same way you grow in the Christian life - by the means of grace (Word, prayer, community) and the Spirit of God.

## 5. What about miraculous healing?

1. We pray for healing (James 5), knowing that God made us to be fully healed in body and soul, yet also knowing that this reality will only fully be accomplished at Jesus' return.
2. There's a difference between praying for what we can be *certain* God will give (the Holy Spirit, peace, truth, etc.) vs. what God *may* give now, but will certainly give later (healing, prosperity in the heavenly sense).

## 6. Excessive life-extending medical treatment?

1. *Wisdom over obligation* - the Bible places a huge amount of value on human life, but it does not required us to seize any way possible to extend life at all times. Clearly, Christian martyrs serve as a testimony that death is not the worst evil, and that honoring God in life and death should be our first priority.
  1. Christians are against abortion and euthanasia because we do not have the right to decide when our life shall end (that's God's business!); yet, we recognize that death is part of this fallen world and cannot be escaped at all costs.
  2. There may be good, biblical reasons to pursue a treatment or to refuse a treatment—the key is to do so with the goal of glorifying God and witnessing to Him in the process.
  3. One goal of this seminar is to help all of us realize the **importance of having these conversations ahead of time, with a perspective that is saturated by the gospel.**
    1. Discern where you are at, and discuss with loved ones:
      1. What do you most fear regarding your own death?
      2. Where do you want to die (if you can choose)?
      3. How would you like your funeral done?