

Jason Upchurch - Q and A - End of Life

Turn in your Bible this morning to **2 Kings 20**. As promised we are doing a few Q and A sermons between our series in Ephesians and Ecclesiastes.

The questions this morning are all end of life based questions.

- 1) What should the Christian ethic be on end of life care. How do we balance valuing human life with being wise with money and fear motivated experimental treatments.
- 2) How should we view DNRs and Advanced Medical Directives that are obviously or potentially sinful. Some have the MAID mentality. MAID stands for Medical Aid in Dying, we often hear assisted suicide.
- 3) What are we allowed to do to extend life? I.e. out of country organ transplant. What is not allowed?
- 4) How do adult children honor our aging parents with this whole issue. Especially if we disagree on treatment?

These are all good questions and I confess for some of them there are no easy answers. A couple of these will spill over to next week but I want to start the discussion here in **2 Kings 20** with just some preliminary thoughts on preparing for death.

As Christians we know that our lives are brief but that they matter.

Paul says that he wants to bring glory to God by life or by death.

1 Tim. 5 has a section admonishing believers to take care of their elderly parents. That is the act of godliness that we render to them. If we don't take care of them, we are worse than unbelievers.

Solomon says a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children in Proverbs. He also talks about the galling effect when children spend that money in foolish ways.

Moses calls us to number our days that we might get a heart of wisdom. It's only when we know our time here is limited that we begin to be wise. If we don't number our days we're fools.

We usually go to Silverwood once a year and on the way over we go around and ask each kid: what's the one thing you want to do? What ride or thing do you want to see? Why do we do that? So we can plan our day for maximum joy and with maximum efficiency because our time is limited. Everyone got their ride, everyone also probably got their 2nd and 3rd favorite thing. There's no panic, no hurt feelings at the end of the day.

That's kind of like life. Number your days so you live it out wisely for the glory of God. You have to know how to live it and know how to wind it down.

So let me read through this and talk about planning to die, and then answer these other questions directly. This is King Hezekiah, one of the few good kings in the southern kingdom of Judah. And the Lord tells him he's going to die. So let me give you 3 simple lessons here from Hezekiah.

1. Death is coming, set your house in order. **Read 20:1-7**

Most of us don't know when we're going to die. God knows, we don't. But the older we get the more prepared for that reality we need to be. The Lord said to Hezekiah: Set your house in order. I like that phrase. Basically get your affairs prepared for when you die. All of us are going through the River of Death. Some sooner, some later, better be ready.

So let me ask you, if a meteor smashed into your car while you're driving home from church today, would it be easy for people to deal with your estate? Or would it be a nightmare? I think there's an aspect where part of how we love our neighbor is that we don't make it hard for our neighbor to discharge our estate.

Do you have life insurance?
Do you have a will?
Are all the passwords for your accounts easily accessible?
Are you going to leave your wife high and dry? Your husband or kids?
On your financial accounts, do you have the designated recipients up to date?
Do you have DNRs in place for hospital situations?

Those are just some of the financial, legal questions you should be asking. We all should - as much as possible - have our affairs in order. And I'm preaching to myself as well, we need to update some of our estate details as well.

But I say that because Solomon doesn't say the good man leaves an inheritance to the grandchildren's government. Or a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's lawyers. If you know that you can bless your family before you die or after you die with ease of discharging your estate or maybe even some wealth why wouldn't you do that? I think the only answer is if you think they would ruin themselves with the wealth. In which case you could set up a trust to disburse funds slowly, or for education or some other arrangement.

But you also need to put your relationships in order.

Paul says as much as it depends on him, he is at peace with everyone.

Prov. 10:7: The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.

When you go out, is what people remember good? A blessing? Or do you need to go patch some stuff up? If that's you, go do the hard work of patching it up. The gospel we believe is a gospel of reconciliation and it calls us to be reconciled to others.

Matt. 5: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God.

You know why peacemakers are blessed? Because peacemaking is exactly what Jesus came to do: make peace between God and man through his own sacrifice. And just looking at Jesus we should conclude that peacemaking is very, very hard. It requires humility, courage, patience, frankness in discussion, wisdom.

Now, the Lord says to Hezekiah: set your house in order because you're going to die. Did God just randomly change his mind? Or did the Lord lie to Hezekiah? Well, I don't think he lied and I don't think the Lord flippantly changed his mind. Suffice it to say I think the Lord intended to use this situation all along. But Hezekiah recovers.

God gives him a sign that he will recover: the sun's shadow goes backward ten steps. The entire earth somehow counter rotates several degrees without all creation flying into outer space. That's what the scholars call a miracle.

1. Set your house in order.
2. Don't get apathetic in your waning years.

Here's the problem: Hezekiah gets dumb. Rather than using this extra time the Lord has given him to prepare his family and the country for the future, he does the most foolish thing he could. He shows his mortal enemies all his storehouses. **Read 12-21**

This is the sad, failed legacy of an otherwise good and wise king. For all the good and faithfulness Hezekiah showed in his life, he absolutely fumbled it at the end. He brought the mortal enemies of the Jews - the Babylonians - and showed them all the treasures of Judah. And when he was confronted with this foolishness he didn't repent, instead he contented himself that he wouldn't be affected. I mean, how arrogant and self-centered is this? **Read 19**

He's fine. Grandkids and great grandkids are going to be hauled off into exile as slaves in a foreign land. They will be there for 70 years and mostly be lost to the pagans. But that's a good word Lord. He won't see it. He won't be locked up in chains.

Brothers, there are a lot of well meaning Christians who do the very same thing. They don't consider the welfare of their loved ones or families or those around them as they get older and prepare to die.

I see these huge estate sales on Marketplace where grandpa or grandma got older and they have amassed a huge amounts of stuff that they can't possibly take care of or do anymore and rather than winding down their life or giving it to people, they leave the headache for their kids and grandkids who sell their stuff for pennies on the dollar.

What happens is laziness and apathy kicks in. "Eh, they can figure out their life. It's my money anyway - they can go earn their own."

And they betray a great legacy they could leave.

I was thinking about an older man a week ago. He came to church for a year or so when I first began ministry but then became kind of isolated and honestly a hermit. And I was driving by his house thinking about him and I hadn't seen him out for a long time. And so I looked up his property information on the Scout map. Turns out he died a few years ago. No close family members, but he had given his entire estate to the Union Gospel Mission. He wanted to see the gospel proclaimed for years to come. That's pretty cool.

He didn't become apathetic in old age. He knew death was coming, wound down his life and made sure his estate was discharged to the glory of God.

You can use wills and trusts and designations to advance the gospel. When I was at Bible college we got brand new classrooms and scholarships because a rich lady died and left her estate to the college. In part that money helped fund my education, which set the course of my life. And in some far off connected way you guys are all the recipients, in a sense, of the fruit of her generosity.

Imagine using your estate for the glory of Jesus Christ that impacts your family and the church of Christ for years to come.

Last part here.

1. Set your house in order.
2. Don't get apathetic in your waning years.
3. Train your children in the Lord.

This is by far Hezekiah's worst fumble. **Read 21:1-9**

The biggest failure of Hezekiah was that he didn't train his son in the ways of the Lord. And it's not just some things he strayed on. Manasseh was so bad, the pagan countries around him looked good compared to Judah. **Read 9**

That's crazy. And you might think, "Well, Manasseh was only 12 when he began to reign. What could he know?" Well 1 chapter later Josiah is only 8 when he begins to reign and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and led the whole country back to righteousness.

Hezekiah did not train his son - and likely his wife - in the things of the Lord. Brothers, the biggest legacy you need to impart to your children is the knowledge of the Lord. The Word of God needs to be on your lips day and night.

If you die with no money, no property, no nothing to give to your kids but you pass on to them the keys of the Kingdom you've given them a bigger inheritance than anything they would receive here on this earth.

If you died and left your kids with no money, no job skills, no nothing but a love for the Lord Jesus and firm foundation of the truth of the gospel you'll hear well done good and faithful servant.

Moms too, but Dads especially, I believe its on your shoulders to be constantly training your kids every day in the Word. This is intentional, systematic instruction. You can do that for breakfast, after dinner, whatever. But it needs to be regular and planned and constant. You need to plan this out and execute faithfully.

But we're called in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** to teach them all day every day. It doesn't have to be hard. It can be simply reading Scripture and praying. Add a hymn in there. Whatever.

Fathers, we're called in **Ephesians 6:1-4** to train them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. This is not optional, this not whether they want it or not. This is all on us.

Hezekiah didn't do this with Manessah and he was an absolute wretched king.

Now, there's a little ray of hope. If you read **2 Chronicles 33** you find out that at the very end of his life Mannaseh seemed to maybe come to the Lord. He cried out to God in prayer, the Lord heard him and he began to undo the evil he had done. But for almost 6 decades he had led Judah astray.

So there's hope for our kids, even after we're in the grave. So we need to be ready for death.

Which leads us to our question.

1) What should the Christian ethic be on end of life care. How do we balance valuing human life with being wise with money and fear motivated experimental treatments.

This is something near to my heart. If you've had elderly parents who didn't just die in their sleep super complicated question. And it's become harder in the last 30-40 years with medical technology that allows us to extend life and offer treatments.

And there's no "one size fits all" answer. There's so many considerations and situations that it's hard to make blanket statements. But let me give some basic biblical principles.

A. Life is precious. It is a gift from God and it is good and right to preserve it if we can within reason. The only time we have the authority to actively take life away is in capital punishment when someone has committed a grievous offense. That's the only biblically authorized time. I say that because Canada is killing itself at alarming rates. They call it "Medically Assisted deaths." It's self-murder is what it is. And we don't get to do that.

Turn to 2 Sam. 1 This is where David received the news that Saul has died. Remember King Saul was in battle at the end of 1 Samuel and Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in battle. 1 Samuel records that Saul was mortally wounded in battle and fell on his own sword - committing suicide which was dishonorable.

But David hears a different story from this messenger. **Read 1-16**

Why did David execute the man? Wasn't he helping Saul? I mean Saul asked for the man to kill him. He was just ending the pain and speeding up the inevitable.

Well, first of all he seems to be a liar. He's an Amalekite, a pagan, who David has just been destroying. So he probably wants to get in David's good graces. He says he put Saul to death. That's just his testimony which contradicts the reality we read about in the last book.

We know that, but David doesn't know that. Why does David kill him? Why does he justly end this man's life? He because by his own testimony - whether true or a lie - he put to death the Lord's anointed. He killed a man with no cause.

Every Christian, by the way, is the Lord's anointed. We're anointed with the same Holy Spirit Saul was anointed with. We don't get to end our lives. Not an option ever because life is precious. And it's precious for every human because we are made in the image of God.

In the Law, someone who put someone to death without cause - meaning the victim who died didn't commit murder or adultery or some sexual sin - the person complicit was put to death. You can't just go around killing people - that's murder. And that itself is a reason to be put to death.

B. We are able to ease pain. **Turn to Prov. 31.** Most of you know that drunkenness is a sin. We have liberty to drink alcohol. Wine or beer - what the Bible calls strong drink. I think even hard liquor is permissible as long as you're not getting drunk. But there seems to be one exception to drunkenness. **Read 1-9**

Now, on a quick reading it could just seem to be a prohibition to any drinking at all for kings, but it's okay for those who are dying. I think the issue here is drunkenness and most commentators agree. A little beer or wine won't make you forget the rights of the poor. A beer or two won't make you pervert any laws. What makes you do that? A lot of alcohol.

Conversely a little wine won't help you forget your misery. **Read 7**

What helps you forget misery? It's a lot of alcohol which is why people get drunk and do drugs. To forget their pain and miserable existence. The reason it's bad for them to do that is because they're not authorized to do so.

They're not at the end of life. We went to Riverfront park a couple of days ago and there's people doing drugs and taking very powerful medications. And just 10 blocks away on the hill is Sacred Heart giving out similar medications. Why can they do it, but not the junkie? Because the situations are importantly different.

God authorizes those in severe pain to take powerful means to ease the pain. MacArthur: Such extreme situations, possibly relating to a criminal on death row or someone agonizing in pain with a terminal illness or tragic circumstance, are in utter contrast to that of the king (cf. Ps. 104:15).

This is why it's permissible for people who are getting surgery or in the last stages of painful diseases to take powerful medicines that ease their pain, but also affect their cognitive ability.

If you're in the hospital and in extreme pain there's a good chance you'll be on fentanyl. The same type of stuff that causes the guys downtown to go into a weird stupor. Why is it okay to use that in the hospital but not from your dealer? Because the circumstances are different. You're in extreme pain, or you're near death, or you're recovering from surgery.

And here's the important part: you've entrusted your life into someone else's care who can make sober-minded decisions for you. Surgeons, doctors, loved ones.

- A. So life is precious, we don't get to end it
- B. We are able to ease extreme pain.

C. Money is a dangerous consideration.

One of the reasons that Canada's suicide death rate is so high is because, to quote Al Mohler, the right to die has become the duty to die. If you've got a terminal disease like Alzheimer's or some slow painful cancer that will take a long time and a lot of money to care for, many people realize that they will be a burden on their family. And so they can either drain their life savings to live for another 10 years totally helpless while they waste away. Or they can take a pill for \$1.50 and end their life and leave their family with an inheritance.

Added to that, insurance companies realize this math too. They won't pay for extended treatments or experimental treatments that would cost a lot. But they'll pay for assisted suicide pills. So a lot of people feel stuck.

According to Canada's own reports (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/annual-report-medical-assistance-dying-2022.html>) a little more than 5% of deaths in Canada as of 2022 are from assisted suicide. That number climbs every year. Something like 60% of those deaths were because of cancer condition with lung cancer and colorectal cancer being the top motivators.

What do we do with that information? We need to soberly understand that no one wants to die a long slow, painful death. Like Kenny Rogers said in the song the Gambler, we all just want to die peacefully in our sleep. Beloved, that doesn't always happen. We live in a fallen, painful world where death really is the enemy and death is often ugly.

Now, here's the other side of the money thing: a lot of people will pay out the nose for treatments that have a small success rate. Or they'll pay a ton of money in the hope to extend life a few more months.

Steve Jobs bought body parts from a foreign country. Can we do that? I think we need to be careful. Is it ethical? Is it legal? Is it fueling a body parts market where we're just harvesting organs from people?

It's okay to get dental work done in Mexico. Can I go to China to get a lung? Many people will spend all they have grasping to this life for a small percentage chance of living just a little longer. We can certainly spend money to heal ourselves.

Remember the woman with the issue of blood in the gospels? She had spent all that she had on doctors to cure the hemorrhaging? She's never chided for that. She came to Jesus for healing and he healed her.

But at some point we do need to consider return on investment, likelihood of success. American medicine has become "do everything you can to stay alive as long as possible no matter the quality of life." I don't think that's a great strategy.

If you're wrestling with these issues there's a book called Being Mortal. It's written by a Hindu doctor - so know ahead of time what you're getting into and read it with Christian eyes. But he asks these questions. What really matters at the end of life? What do you really want the waning days of your life to look like? Many Americans go from procedure to procedure, surgery to surgery living out their last days spending all they have to live a miserable existence.

He suggests maybe a more meaningful sunset to life is hospice where you can visit people in the comfort of your home eating ice cream watching football with pain management. It's not the most expensive option, and it's not the cheapest. But it might be the best one.

We'll pick up the other questions in a couple of weeks.

Pray