

TWO APPOINTMENTS YOU WILL NEVER BREAK

Dr. John Allan Lavender
Heb.9:27; 1 Cor. 15:55-57

Our scripture texts this morning deal with two great considerations:

One -- An Inescapable Fact.

Two -- An Inexhaustible Faith.

Let's focus our attention first of all on

An Inescapable Fact.

A...it is appointed for men to die once, and after that
comes judgement@ (Heb 9:27).

I never knew Harvey Firestone, even by reputation, for I was quite young when he was at the height of his career. But the other day I came across a quote from a speech he once made, a quote which apparently formed the creed by which he lived:

A man who has a financial surplus can control circumstances. A
man without a surplus is controlled by them. @

Now I have never deprecated the value of money. Dealing, as I do, in the fabric of human lives, I see too much evidence of the good dedicated dollars can accomplish to ever deprecate the value of money. Nor do I belittle the power of money. Even a small amount of savings can ease the strain of a sudden shift in circumstances. As the old saw has it:

A Money can't buy happiness, but it sure can make unhappiness a lot
more bearable. @

Some people possess such vast financial holdings they can actually control many of the circumstances of life. The whole philosophy of diversification in business is built upon the premise that capital invested in a sufficiently diversified way will provide the strongest possible

defense against a sudden change in one's economic situation. So large corporations, and even independent investors, manipulate their holdings in such a fashion as to try to control circumstances rather than be controlled by them.

But to say all that is not to say all. Up until now we have been talking about this day and night world in which we spend a brief three-score years and ten. And, while there may be a sufficient amount of money or power or influence to soften the blow of the events which transpire *here*, there is not enough of *anything* this old world can offer which will alter the inevitability of two great events through which all of us must pass: death and judgement.

Harvey Firestone found that out. The financial surplus upon which he had so heavily depended to control the circumstances of life was unable to help him in the hour of death. He came face to face with the first of these Two Appointments We Can Never Break, for it is written A...it is appointed for men to die once . . .@ (Heb. 9:27), and sure enough, on such and such a date, Mr. Firestone died! So the first thing we need to face together this morning is

The Inevitability of Death.

It is not easy for most people to talk, or even think, about death. Even folks in the prime of health shudder at the thought. Death is something for which most of us are just not ready. It is something that doesn't fit into our scheme of things.

So we talk all around it. We call it Apassing away,@ Apassing over,@ Apassing on.@ But the Bible takes no such unrealistic attitude. The Bible says quite simply and flatly that we die!

A man may Apass on@Cbut first he diesCand he is dead!

The Christian faith is realistic. It affirms a definite schedule: Death. After death, the judgement. After judgement, heaven or hell.

We may succeed in controlling the circumstances through which we pass in *time*.

We may possess sufficient financial surplus or influence or power to manipulate the affairs of *this* world to satisfy our own selfish aims and desires.

We may be able to slip out from under some of the unpleasant obligations which are constantly demanding our attention in *this* life by paying somebody else to do them for us. But there is nothing we can do to escape the two appointments we will never break: death and judgement.

For

A...it is appointed for men to die once, and after that
comes judgement.®

I once heard of a minister who was accustomed to sayingCwhen he entered the home of a family just suffering bereavementCATHere is no death.® But friends, that's a lie! We *do* die. Everybody dies. You will die. I will die.

AMan is that existing being who dies and who
knows that he dies.®

And we are incredibly foolish not to accept this factCtake it into accountCand come to terms with it! So I speak to you this morning as a dying man to dying men about death and judgement and how, through Jesus Christ, you can come to terms with them.

After Death: The Judgement

How *do* we come to terms with death? That's the second thought we need to deal with this morning, and the answer is by coming to terms with sin and the fact that, after death, there is the judgement.

In 1 Corinthians 15:56 Paul declares: AThe sting of death is sin.® If we could be sure that death is the cessation of it allC

the end of trials
and tribulation
and troubleC

if we could be certain in our souls that Anothingness is all that lies ahead® then, perhaps, we might not be afraid to die.

But everything within us argues that death is not the end. There *must* be more than this brief episode upon the epidermis of the earth. And when we pick up the Bible and begin to read it with an open mind, our inner intimations of immortality are vindicated. For the Bible makes it perfectly clear that death is not the end—that after death there is the judgement—the judgement of God upon our sin.

It is impossible to be intellectually honest and take only those parts of scripture which please the eye or ear. We must wrestle with the hard passages, too. If we are going to hear what Jesus says, we must hear it all. And it is inescapably clear that one of the strong notes in Jesus' teaching is that every one of us must someday stand before God to give an account of our sin.

Now we really have no argument with that. The idea of final judgement is perfectly logical. Every day we witness proof that the law of the harvest is at work. That is, as St. Paul declared:

A...for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Gal. 6:7).

Every bit of reasoning power within us argues that this is true. Even modern psychology has its Law of Compensation which states:

People tend to get back from life what they put into it.

So when we think clearly and unemotionally, we have to admit that the idea of judgement makes good sense.

I love the story of the little boy who lived in Colorado. Like all little boys, he didn't always obey his mother. One day she asked him to do something and he threw himself into a temper tantrum and stormed out of the house crying, 'I hate you. I hate you. I hate you.' He ran through the woods which surrounded their farm crying, 'I hate you. I hate you. I hate you.' As he ran along, he came upon a canyon and, indulging his temper, he cried out, 'I hate you' whereupon the echo, created by the canyon roared back at him: 'I hate you'.

The little fellow had never heard an echo and it frightened him. He thought it was some great

monster living in the canyon which was ready to devour him. Completely shaken, he raced back to his mother in tears and, clinging to her apron strings, sobbed out his story. The mother was very wise and saw an opportunity to teach her lad a lesson he would never forget. She told him to go back to the canyon and yell: AI love you. I love you. I love you.@ He was too frightened to go alone so, clinging tightly to his mother's hand, he timidly picked his way through the woods until he came to the edge of the canyon. Then, in a whisper at first, and finally with his whole heart, he cried: AI love you. I love you. I love you.@ As he listened, the voice of the canyon gave utterance to the voice of his own soul and sent back a resounding AI love you. I love you. I love you.@ What was that echo? It was a physical manifestation of the spiritual truth that:

A... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.@

Similarly, the psychological Law of Compensation is just a modern phrasing of the ancient scripture text:

Awhatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.@

So we have no quarrel with the idea of judgement because we know in our hearts it is inevitable. It is just. It is written in our souls, almost, that sin must issue in punishment and that a man will reap as he has sown.

The Fact of Judgement Creates Fear of Death

This leads us to a third thought: the fact of judgement that creates our fear of death. As Paul succinctly said:

AThe sting of death is sin.@

Until we judge sin in our lives and put it under the blood, we will never be able to face death comfortably. It will always be hidden behind a cold, gray mist of dread.

If we ever hoped to pull the fangs of death, we must deal directly with sin *now*, and by so doing, escape the future judgement of God upon our sin. It is the cloud of impending judgement hanging overhead which causes us to fear death and, by removing it, we can face death calmly and unafraid.

An Inexhaustible Faith

Well, how are we going to do that? This leads us to that other great consideration I mentioned at the very beginning of our teaching this morning. So far, we have been dealing with An Inescapable Fact:

A...it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement.®

Now I want us to look at An Inexhaustible FaithC

ABut thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ® (1 Cor. 15:57).

The good news I am privileged to preach to you this morning is that the cross of Jesus Christ is piercingly effective in removing sin. The scripture declares:

AThere is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus® (Romans 8:1).

The Bible says:

A...making peace by the blood of his cross® (Col. 1:20).

And againCin J. B. Phillips powerful translation of Colossians 2:13-15C

AGod has forgiven you all your sins. Christ has utterly wiped out all damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His *own* head on the cross. And then, having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, He exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in His final glorious triumphant act!®

It is true, as Paul has said,

AThe sting of death is sin® (1 Cor. 15:56).

But that is not the end of it. In the very next verse he goes on to say,

ABut thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ® (1 Cor. 15:57).

Thus his premise:

AOh death, where is thy sting?@ (1 Cor. 15:55).

By the power of His cross, Jesus battered sin into subjection and thereby, for all time to come, withdrew the sting of death for those who put their trust in Him.

I remember most vividly an experience I had on a picnic when I was a boy about six or seven. Mom and Dad had taken my sister and me for a picnic up in the Oakland hills to what was then known as Sequoia Park. Since then, it has been renamed Joaquin Miller Park in honor of the famous California poet. There was a lone bee flying around that seemed to think my paper plate heaped high with picnic fare was his own private banquet table. I had been stung by bees before so I was pretty leery of that pesky fellow.

My mother reached across the table to brush the bee away and as she did, it stung her. She let out a painful Aouch!@ and then said something I have never forgotten. Pointing to the red spot with the stinger in the center, she said,

AYou don't have to be afraid any more, Johnnie. A bee has only one stinger. He stung Mother. He can't sting you.@

That's what Jesus did. He took the sting from death by mounting a cross. By battering sin into submission He turned death from an exit into an entrance. From something to fear into something we can approach on Atip-toes of expectancy@.

Two Verses.

One -- An Inescapable Fact:

A...it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement.@

Two -- An Inexhaustible Faith:

ABut thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.@

What Can You Do about Death and Judgement?

My friend, the time to take care of the matter of dying is now. It is a matter of eternal importance. To die outside of Christ is a dreadful thing and,

ABehold, *now* is the day of salvation.@"

God is waiting for you to come to Him. He is anxious for you to come to Him. He has already declared His love for you through the giving of His Son.

Jesus did not die to *make* God love you. Jesus dies because God *does* love you. God has already done everything He can to bridge the gap between you. The rest is up to you. He will not go where He is not invited.

AGod will lead and guide, direct aright

Will you with wisdom, love and light.

In many ways be good and kind

But God will not force the human mind.@"

Frank Lauback put it this way:

AGod has built countless bridges to men's minds, but He has placed one limitation on Himself. He does not cross the last draw bridge to our minds until we invite Him. It is a draw bridge which we open and close within the castle of our souls. Don't ask me why. I don't know. I suppose it is because He wants His children to have free will.@"

I like to put it this way:

God does not force Himself upon us because He wants us to love Him, not because we *must*, but because we *may*.

When we do thatCwhen we do love Him willingly and whole heartedlyCwe have His complete forgiveness.

Our sin is gone.

Our appointment with judgement is made unnecessary.

Our fear of death is taken away.

We are able to cry with Paul:

AO death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.@"

In Hyman Appleman's book, God's Answer To Man's Sin he has a beautiful story about Daniel Curry, an old Methodist circuit rider.

One day Daniel got lost on the Nebraska prairie. The night came, and as it was too late to go much further, he dismounted, unsaddled and hobbled his horse, built a little fire, cooked a little supper and arranged his saddle in preparation to sleep. By the light of the fire, he read his Bible, lifted his heart and soul to God in prayer, loosed his clothes, stretched out on the blanket, pillowed his head on the saddle and slept.

He dreamed that he died and that his soul knocked on the pearly gates of Glory. The angel opened the gate and asked his name and reason for being there.

AMy name is Daniel Curry," answered the preacher. AI have come to claim the mansion in the sky that Jesus promised me long years ago.@"

The angel leafed the pages of a book on the table by his side.

AI'm sorry," he said, Abut your name is not in this book. There is no place for you in heaven.@"

AI don't care whether my name is in *your* book or not," Curry replied. AI know it's in the Lamb's Book of Life and I am coming into Heaven!"@

ADo you want to argue it out with God,@ asked the angel.

ANo,@ said Curry, Anot unless I have to. But if you will not let me in any other way, take me to God.@"

AStand still,@ said the angel.

He stepped to Curry's side, put his hand under Curry's armpit, spread his mighty wings and, with a rush, soared up into the air bearing Curry with him. On and on flew the angel with the speed of thought. Curry kept his eyes open against the rushing wind. Suddenly he saw a blazing, brilliant light as of a thousand suns rolled into one. It blinded him. He closed his eyes to the glare.

The angel sped for the very heart of that great illumination. Suddenly, he stopped and gently lowered himself and Curry to the pavement. The preacher looked down. He was standing on something that resembled crystal glass. He looked up. There, on a white throne high above him, sat one like unto the ancient of days, even Jehovah. Curry was stricken with awe. He was face to face with God. His knees gave way, and he threw himself face down on the pavement. From the figure on the throne came a voice—stern, clear, solemn:

AWho art thou? What seekest thou?@"

Curry tried to rise, tried to speak, but fear had entered into his very bones. He could neither move nor utter a word. Again came the voice:

AWho art thou? What doest thou here?@"

Again Curry tried to speak but his strength was gone. His mind refused to work. His lips were sealed with the awfulness of the Presence he was facing. Again came the voice:

ASpeak, mortal. Who art thou? What seekest thou?@"

Just as the preacher felt that hell itself was yawning at his feet, there came the soft shuffle of sandaled feet, the quiet rustle of cloth rubbing against cloth. Someone came to his side, bent over him and lifted him up. Curry looked over at the hand of the one who was standing beside him and saw in it a diamond-shaped scar. Daniel Curry knew it was well with his soul.

From the majestic figure on the throne came the repeated question:

AWho art thou? What doest thou here? What seekest thou?@

The figure at Curry's side spoke. Gently as the summer breeze, sweetly as the lullaby of a mother to a sleeping child, majestically as the oceans roar, the words flowed up:

AFather, this is Daniel Curry. Whatever sins he has committed,
whatever transgressions may blot his record, whatever inequities
may stain his past, charge them all to me. Daniel Curry confessed
me before men, and I am now confessing him before Thee, my
Father in heaven.@

Beloved, it may not be exactly that way. But Jesus did say,

AWhosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before
my Father which is in heaven@ (Mt. 10:32).

Come, accepting and confessing Christ, and from now throughout an endless eternity, you will
rest assured that you are God's in Christ -- forever -- amen!