

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Are You Ready For Death? (Part 3)

I Samuel 20:3

It is not just the famous that die suddenly. In 2009, my dad made us realize how close all of us are to death. The first Sunday of March, he was shaking hands at church and someone asked how long he would work since he was at retirement age. He replied that as long as he felt as good as he did, he would continue to work. He took the following day off from work due to a snow storm. While bringing in some wood to burn in the fireplace, he collapsed just inside the door. My mother called 911, and the EMS crew was able to start his heart again, but the outlook was not good. The EMS crew and the doctors did not expect my dad to live, but the Lord was not through with him, and he did live. There were no physical problems that my dad knew about. He felt well, but he was very close to death. That was just the beginning of the reality of the closeness of death that we would experience in vivid detail the following year.

Perhaps I should have been more aware of death, but I was not until 2010. As the year began, we were all very glad to see my dad recovering from his heart attack and subsequent heart surgery. My parents were talking about my dad going back to work for the extra money and also to keep him active. We had celebrated Christmas 2009 when my sister and her family came down from North Carolina. Unknown to us, it would be the last Christmas with everyone still alive. Four days shy of one year since my dad's heart attack, my mother died. Because of some recent cold weather and snow, we had parked our trailer at my parents' house. Tamatha and I had finished devotions with our children, had put them in bed, and were sitting in the living room watching the Olympics. My dad had just gone to bed. My mother, who normally stays up late, had gone to bed earlier because of a head cold. Not long after my dad had left the living

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room, he came saying that something was wrong with mother. We ran into the bedroom—she was not breathing. Tamatha called 911 and started doing CPR. After the EMS crew arrived, they continued doing CPR. They never could get a heartbeat started. They put her on a stretcher and took her to the hospital. We were hoping that something could be done, but the realization was in our mind that mother was already dead. I talked to one of the EMS crew at the hospital and asked, “It doesn’t look good, does it?” He replied, “No, it doesn’t. I’m sorry.” The attending physician came out later and said that she was dead.

I mention these details to try to make it dawn upon us how close death really is. My mother was in, what most would say, good health. She had some heart issues the previous year, but had just been to the heart doctor a few weeks before, and everything checked out well. Humanly and medically speaking, there was no reason to expect her to die. None of us thought she would die. She was “only” 66 years old. Her mother had lived to be 78, and her father to be 95. We thought she would cruise into her 70's, but she never made it. We were planning on celebrating our parents' 50th wedding anniversary in just a few years, and thought that both would easily make it there. But mother did not. Death was at hand. It was only a step away.

Thankfully, my mother was ready. She had accepted Jesus as her Savior as a young child many years before. Though we were not ready for her death, mother had made preparations for death years ago when she trusted in Christ. Though the suddenness of her death was stunning, it was all the more comforting to know that mother was in the presence of Jesus. We would miss her, but she was far better off with Jesus than with us.

Two other deaths would occur in 2010 that would reveal how close all of us are to death. We were in St. Louis, MO, in July of 2010, laboring with the Kuykendalls as we had for several years. John Sarakas came to church the first Sunday that we were there, as he always did. The following Saturday, we received news that Bro.

Sarakas was dead. I do not know all of the details, but apparently a friend had not seen him for a few days. After calling his house and getting no answer, they went to his house. Upon entering, they found his body. He had died sometime between Sunday when he was at church and later that week when they discovered him.

Needless to say, the pastor's family and the church family were in shock. John Sarakas had just been at church on Sunday. He was in his 60's, and had some health issues, but none that anyone expected would cause his sudden death. He was not sick with a disease where everyone was expecting him to die. It was a great surprise when news came that he had died. But again, we were made to realize that death is quick and sudden. It is only a step away.

It was the first meeting that we were in where a church member would die unexpectedly, but it would not be the last. In October, we were in Jefferson, GA, preaching a tent meeting. Dennis Campbell was a faithful member of the church and served as treasurer, as well. He was in his late 40's. On Wednesday, the church received news that he was in the hospital with chest pains. He was treated and released and came to the service at the tent on Thursday night. I talked with him and another member of the church in front of the pulpit after the service about what had happened the day before. We all thought that it was over. After all, he was there talking to us and feeling fine. Friday morning, the call came that Dennis was back in the hospital. He was being treated, but the doctors could not help. He died. The church was stunned, and so were we. Again, we had been made to realize how close death really is.

As I write this now, the news has just reported the sudden deaths of three people. One was a former basketball player who died while playing with some friends. Another was a former football coach who died while jogging. The final one was a young man who died while trying to get a baseball at a game. He fell on his head and died from the injuries. There are many other stories that I could mention, but I will stop with these. I have mentioned some famous people, and I

have mentioned some people that I knew personally, who died suddenly. These examples should cause us to see, without any question, how real the Bible is when it states that there is but a step between me and death. Death is close. Are you ready?

The final thought about The Closeness of Death is The Relationship. I have mentioned this as we talked about The Realization and The Reality, but let us focus on the last few words of David's statement. He said "*me and death*." It is one thing to notice that others have died, but are you ready to acknowledge that you will die one day? It is not the famous athletes who dropped dead while seemingly in great shape that matters. It is not your family members or church members who die suddenly that matters. It is sad to think, read, or experience these deaths, but it will not mean anything if you do not realize that you could die at any moment. David realized not only the fact of the closeness of death, but he made it personal. He realized that he could die.

David was not saying that Saul was close to death. He was not saying that Jonathan was close to death. He did not mention that his father Jesse was close to death. All of these were true, but David had to realize personally that he himself was close to death. It was David that made the realization—"There is." It was David that noticed the reality—"a step." We are always good at thinking, "It will not happen to me." We will say, "That was just a freak accident." We like to think that we are invincible, but we are not. Unless the rapture takes place, we are going to die. And we do not know when that time will be. I cannot say it with enough emphasis. We ourselves must realize that we must be ready for death. It is not grandpa, grandma, dad, or mom that has to face death at any moment. It is not just the old people in the hospital or nursing home. It is everyone of us individually. It is not just the famous athlete, or the church member in Missouri or Georgia. I must realize that death could come at any moment, and I must be ready.

I know how our minds work. We may think about death for just

a brief moment, but then we will try to put it out of our mind and think about anything else but death. Now I am not saying that we must be consumed with the thought of dying. We cannot and should not walk around thinking that every step could be the last step that I take. However, we must be prepared for when that moment of death comes. We cannot put that out of our minds and not ever think about it. We cannot say, "I will take care of everything at the moment when I am dying." Someone may get saved on their deathbed, but you cannot wait until then because you may not have a deathbed. You may not die over a period of time. You may die instantly like the people that I have mentioned. For most of them, there was no deathbed. Many just dropped dead suddenly while living their lives. They had no expectation of death. They just instantly died. Are you ready if you just drop over dead? Are you ready to say goodbye to this world and hello to eternity? Jesus died and rose from the grave, so that the greatest enemy we have, death, no longer has to be feared. We can be ready for death because Jesus conquered death. Death is real, but we can be ready, even for the Closeness of Death.