

DEATH AND THE WARNING OF JUDGMENT

REVELATION 20:11-15

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:14-15

The prevailing attitudes towards death in the west are either to show a fear of death and the unknown, or conversely to show a contemptuous lack of fear of death and the unknown. The fear of death can be seen in our refusal to talk about it, our refusal to prepare people for it outside of palliative care, the attitude that must call in the specialists if someone has a terminal diagnosis, that it is not something that the ordinary practitioner can really deal well with and to hide behind the philosophy of treatment at all cost. The lack of fear of death is shown particularly in our attitude towards euthanasia and in what we teach about the purpose of life and the existence of the afterlife

As Christians we know that both are right responses, but for completely different reasons. It is right to fear death as this is God's punishment on mankind for its rejection of him as the one with the right to call the shots (not a nice thought but true – see again Genesis 2:17). In particular it is right to fear death if we are unrepentant for our rejection of God – Jesus' own experience shows us that facing God's wrath in death is greatly to be feared (See Luke 22: 42-44). However we also know that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1) Jesus has set us free from the power of death by dying in our place; because of his sacrifice the dead shall be raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:52) to spend eternity with God in Heaven. There is nothing for the Christian to fear in death.

We need not fear death for ourselves, but the presence of death around us should remind us of the certainty of judgement and the reality of heaven and hell. It should move us towards an urgency to proclaim the gospel. Death is not the end. At the end of time the dead will be raised imperishable and those who have trusted in Jesus, whose names are found in the book of life, will spend eternity in God's heavenly dwelling place, whilst those who remain in rebellion will be raised only to face the second death – eternal separation from God in a place of wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus' resurrection proclaims both his victory over death, but also the certainty of judgement (Acts 17:31). To prepare people for death we need to be telling them the truth about Jesus and his resurrection, in the hope and fervent desire that when they stand before the heavenly throne they might be found among those whose names are written in the book of life.

Questions for Discussion

- **How much of the way you care for your patients is shaped by your knowledge of judgement? What might you do differently after reading a passage like this?**
- **Why do people not fear hell and judgement? How can we respond to them?**
- **What might you say to someone who was thinking about euthanasia?**
- **How can we prepare people for death outside of palliative care?**
- **How can we get our classmates to explore the reality of God's judgement when we have our lectures on dealing with death?**