



## *WHAT IS DEATH? WHAT IS LIFE?*

### **I. THE STORY OF DEATH: *ET MORTUUS EST.***

#### **Genesis 5 – Et Mortuus Est**

In the day that God created man, He made him **in the likeness of God**...

<sup>3</sup> And Adam lived 130 years, and begot a son **in his own likeness, after his image**, and named him Seth.

<sup>4</sup> After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were 800 years; and he had sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> So all the days that Adam lived were 930 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>6</sup> Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. <sup>7</sup> After he begot Enosh, Seth lived 807, and had sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup> So all the days of Seth were 912 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>9</sup> Enosh lived 90 years, and begot Cainan. <sup>10</sup> After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived 815 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup> So all the days of Enosh were 905 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>12</sup> Cainan lived 70 years, and begot Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup> After he begot Mahalalel, Cainan lived 840 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup> So all the days of Cainan were 910 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>15</sup> Mahalalel lived 65 years, and begot Jared. <sup>16</sup> After he begot Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup> So all the days of Mahalalel were 895 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>18</sup> Jared lived 162 years, and begot Enoch. <sup>19</sup> After he begot Enoch, Jared lived 800 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>20</sup> So all the days of Jared were 962 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>21</sup> Enoch lived 65 years, and begot Methuselah. <sup>22</sup> After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup> So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. <sup>24</sup> And Enoch walked with God; **and he was not, for God took him.**

<sup>25</sup> Methuselah lived 187 years, and begot Lamech. <sup>26</sup> After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup> So all the days of Methuselah were 969 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

<sup>28</sup> Lamech lived 182 years, and had a son. <sup>29</sup> And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed." <sup>30</sup> After he begot Noah, Lamech lived 595 years, and had sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup> So all the days of Lamech were 777 years; **and he died.** [*Et mortuus est.*]

### Genesis 2:16-17

<sup>16</sup>The Lord God gave a command to the man. He said, “You may freely eat from every tree in the garden,<sup>17</sup> but you shall not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die.”

## What are some assumptions people might have about what death is? Some clichés?

### Three Deaths:

1. *Spiritual* – Each person, born in the image of Adam is spiritually dead.  
**Romans 5:12** “So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned.”
2. *Bodily/Temporal* – Simply when the body and soul separate from each other.  
**Genesis 3:19** “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Temporal death is simply the “last farewell” as the poet [Horace] says, “*Mors ultima linea rerum est.*”<sup>9</sup>

3. *Eternal* – When the soul separates from God.  
**Matthew 25:41** “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels.’”

In eternal death, the soul is left to face its own conscience alone, in the face of God’s holy and just wrath, and ultimate despair of God’s grace.

### Spangenberg:

“For that bite brough Adam and all his children into fear, misery, trouble, toil, and affliction; yes, it bequeathed them death. For the book of Wisdom says in chapter two[:23-24], ‘God created human beings for eternal life and made them in his image that they might be like him, as He is. But through the devil’s hate and envy death came into the world.’”<sup>10</sup>

### Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me? | 377 vv. 5-6

Warum sollt ich mich denn grämen  
P. Gerhardt, 1607-76  
Tr. composite, based on J. Kelly, 1833-90

*Death cannot destroy forever;  
From our fears, Cares, and tears  
It will us deliver.  
It will close life’s mournful story,  
Make a way That we may  
Enter heav’nly glory.*

*What is all this life possesses?  
But a hand Full of sand  
That the heart distresses.  
Noble gifts that pall me never  
Christ, our Lord, Will accord  
To His saints forever.*

<sup>9</sup> “Death is the end to which all things are moving,” Horace, quoted in Spangenberg, pg. 45

<sup>10</sup> Spangenberg, *Ibid.*, pg. 47

## The Dance of Death

### John 3:6

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (NIV)

Spangenberg:

“Therefore, the philosopher says that it would be good if human beings were never born or would die as soon as they were born [Eccl. 4:1-3]. The human being who reaches the end of life quickly is indeed the best situation.”<sup>11</sup>

## Day of Wrath | 537 v. 2

Dies irae  
13th Cent. Sequence; Thomas of Celano (?)  
Tr. W. J. Irons, 1812-83

*Death is struck and nature quaking;  
All creation is awaking,  
To its Judge an answer making.  
Lo, the book, exactly worded,  
Wherein all hath been recorded;  
Thence shall judgment be awarded.  
When the Judge His seat attaineth,  
And each hidden deed arraigneth,  
Nothing unavenged remaineth.*

## Should a Christian flee death?

Death is not always something to be fled. It may happen that to flee death is to flee God's Word and Command.

Luther:

“For example, in the case of a man who is imprisoned for the sake of God's word and who, to escape death, denies and repudiates God's word. In such a situation everyone has Christ's plain decree and command not to flee but rather to suffer death, as he says, “Whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven” and “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

...Those who are engaged in a spiritual ministry such as preachers and pastors must likewise remain steadfast when at risk of death. We have a plain command from Christ, “A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep but the hireling sees the wolf coming and flees” (John 10:11). For when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death.

...In the same way, all public officials such as mayors, judges, and the like have the responsibility to remain. This, too, is God's word, which establishes earthly authority and commands that town and country be ruled, protected, and preserved, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 13:4, “The governing authorities are God's ministers for your own good.” To abandon an entire community which one has been called to govern and to leave it without official or government, exposed to all kinds of danger such as fires, murder, riots, and every imaginable disaster is a great sin....”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Spangenberg, *Ibid.*, pg. 51

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, “How Should a Christian Act During a Deadly Epidemic?” pgs. 3-4

However, fleeing, especially for those who do not have a vocation or duty to stay, may be good and right.

This also may be in service to the neighbor. Luther gives examples of the Christians in Damascus who lowered Paul in a basket over the wall to make it possible for him to escape (Acts 9:25), and how in Acts 19:30 Paul allowed himself to be kept from risking danger in the marketplace because it was not essential for him to do so.

Spangenberg:

“Why do you want to fear death? It opens the door to eternal life for you. Let the unbelievers and the godless fear death, those who go through temporal death to eternal death.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Narrow Gate of Death and the New Birth of Eternal Life**

Luther:

“Since everyone must depart, we must turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us. Here we find the beginning of the narrow gate and of the straight path to life [Matt. 7:14]. All must joyfully venture forth on this path, for though the gate is quite narrow, the path is not long. Just as an infant is born with peril and pain from the small abode of its mother’s womb into this immense heaven and earth, that is, into this world, so man departs this life through the narrow gate of death. And although the heavens and the earth in which we dwell at present seem large and wide to us, they are nevertheless much narrower and smaller than the mother’s womb in comparison with the future heaven. Therefore, the death of the dear saints is called a new birth, and their feast day is known in Latin as natale, that is, the day of their birth. However, the narrow passage of death makes us think of this life as expansive and the life beyond as confined. Therefore, we must believe this and learn a lesson from the physical birth of a child, as Christ declares, “When a woman is in travail she has sorrow; but when she has recovered, she no longer remembers the anguish, since a child is born by her into the world” [John 16:21]. So it is that in dying we must bear this anguish and know that a large mansion and joy will follow [John 14:2].”<sup>14</sup>

Spangenberg:

“Even if the gate is too small and the path too narrow [Matt. 7:14], it certainly is not long, and it gets there quickly, as Christ said of the pregnant woman in John 16[:21]...Therefore, we must remember that after this earthly life, there will be a greater dwelling place in eternal life.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Spangenberg, “The Booklet of Comfort for the Sick,” pg. 73

<sup>14</sup> Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die (1519),” <https://kwaweber.org/2019/08/29/dr-martin-luther-a-sermon-on-preparing-to-die-1519>

<sup>15</sup> Spangenberg, *Ibid.*, pg. 59

## II. THE STORY OF LIFE: CONSUMMATUM EST.

The Christian Death is Completed in Christ

### Deuteronomy 30:15-19

<sup>15</sup> "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, <sup>16</sup> in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

### John 19:30 – The Consummation of Death

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished!"

*[Consummatum est.]*

Then, bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.

### Psalm 16

<sup>4</sup> Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god...

<sup>7</sup> I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel;

**My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.**

<sup>8</sup> I have set the Lord always before me;

Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;

My flesh also will rest in hope.

<sup>10</sup> For **You will not leave my soul in Sheol.**

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

<sup>11</sup> You will show me **the path of life;**

In Your presence is fullness of joy;

At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands | **343 vv. 2, 4**

Christ lag in Todesbanden  
M. Luther, 1483-1546  
Tr. R. Massie, 1800-87, alt.

*No son of man could conquer death,  
Such mischiefsin had wrought us,  
For innocence dwelt not on earth,  
And therefore death had brought us  
Into thralldom from of old  
And ever grew more strong and bold  
And kept us in its bondage.  
Alleluia!*

*It was a strange and dreadful strife  
When Life and Death contended.  
The victory remained with life,  
The reign of death was ended;  
Holy Scripture plainly saith  
That death is swallowed up by death,  
In vain it rages o'er us.  
Alleluia!*

Spangenberg:

“You should think to yourself and say to yourself, “Look, you are baptized, and in this life you are likely to suffer temptation and hostility, following the example of your savior Christ.” You are to take up your cross and follow Him [Matt. 16:24]. In your baptism you have received a promise signed and sealed that **your temptation, cross, suffering, and death do not belong to you, but they are Christ’s temptation, cross, suffering, and death.** That means, as Christ has conquered all of them, and in the end He rose from the dead and lives eternally, so in the very same way you shall conquer the devil, death, sin and hell and every evil in the name of God, and wake again on the Last Day from the dead and live with Christ eternally. The priest promised you that in your baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He [God] will not go back on this promise to you, for He is a faithful God.”<sup>16</sup>

Gerhard:

“By the word death, I understand both Christ’s death and our own. Indeed, **the death of Christ and His sufferings is the essence of Christianity.**”<sup>17</sup>

#### Luke 7:11-17 – Jesus vs. Death

<sup>11</sup>Soon afterward Jesus went on his way to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him. <sup>12</sup>As he was approaching the town gate, there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother. She was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. <sup>13</sup>When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not cry.” <sup>14</sup>He went up to the open coffin, touched it, and the pallbearers stopped. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” <sup>15</sup>The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

<sup>16</sup>Fear gripped all of them, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us” and “God has visited his people!” <sup>17</sup>This was reported about him in all of Judea and in all the surrounding countryside.

#### Who Knows When Death May Overtake Me | 483 vv. 1, 10

Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende  
Ä. Juliane, 1637-1706, abr.  
Tr. The Lutheran Hymnal, St. Louis, 1941

*Who knows when death may overtake  
me!*

*Time passes on, my end draws near.  
How swiftly can my breath forsake me!  
How soon can life's last hour appear!  
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray  
Thy peace may bless my dying day.*

*Then may death come today,  
tomorrow,  
I know in Christ I perish not;  
He grants the peace that stills all  
sorrow,  
Gives me a robe without a spot.  
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray  
Thy peace may bless my dying day.*

<sup>16</sup> Spangenberg, Ibid. pg. 69

<sup>17</sup> Johann Gerhard, “Handbook of Consolations,” preface, pg. 3