

“The Denial of Death vs the Defeater of Death”
John 8:46-59
February 9, 2020
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pr. Nicoletti

We continue in the Gospel of John this morning, coming now to John 8:46-59 – the end of the conversation between Jesus and the Jews gathered in the temple in Jerusalem at the Feast of Booths.

As we have said, in John 8 Jesus addresses four major threats to the people of God. First, he addresses the darkness and deceptions of this world. Second, he speaks to the spiritual slavery that sin leads to. Third, he discusses the threat of the devil. And fourth he comes to the topic of death.

This morning we come to the last of those foes: death.

With that in mind we turn now to John 8:46-59.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

[Jesus said to them,] ^{8:46} “Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” ⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, like the psalmist, our soul clings to the dust,
and we ask you to give us life according to your word!
Teach us your ways,

help us understand your precepts,
make us to meditate on your works.
When our souls melt for sorrow,
strengthen us according to your word.
Help us to cling to your testimonies,
and enlarge our hearts,
that we may run in your ways.
We ask this in Jesus's name. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:25-32]

Jesus and the crowd are going back and forth as we drop in to verse forty-six of chapter eight. Jesus offers his spiritual assessment of the crowd in verses forty-six and forty-seven, and the crowd responds with insults against Jesus in verse forty-eight. Jesus replies by reasserting his relationship to God the Father, and then, in verse fifty-one he says "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

And it's *that* verse that we need to stop and pause on this morning.

Because Jesus makes a stupendous claim here. But before we even get to his claim – to the *solution* he is offering – we need to consider the *problem* he is claiming to solve. Jesus here offers a solution to death. We need to begin by reflecting on the *problem* of death.

And it's a problem that, generally speaking, we don't really like to reflect on.

This week, as an aid to my reflections on it, I began reading Ernest's Becker's Pulitzer-Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*.

Ernest Becker was a cultural anthropologist. He was not a Christian and so did not write from a Christian perspective. But, as one writer points out, "Becker has been widely recognized as one of the great spiritual cartographers of our age." [xi]

Becker begins the book by stating: "The main thesis of this book is that [...] the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity – activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man." [xvii]

"Of all things that move man," he writes, "one of the principal ones is his terror of death." [11]

And *this*, he explains is the nature of that terror: "to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression – and with all this yet to die." [87]

Becker draws our attention to the majesty of a human being – a man or a woman's great abilities. A human being, he writes, "sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear [...]. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with." [26]

Becker claims that this fear of death is universal, and he provides a number of arguments for its universality.

And in what he says, Becker in his foundational point paints a picture consistent with the Christians Scriptures. It is hard not to think of Hebrews 2:15 while reading him, which tells us that humanity, through “fear of death” has been “subject to lifelong slavery.”

In fact, the truth is that the Bible would press Becker’s point even deeper. Because the Bible speaks not only of physical death, but also of spiritual death.

In fact, the Bible tells us that physical death points to the even more serious spiritual death – a death where we are cast away from God forever – a death where we spend eternity in outer darkness – a death that comes to us not by chance ... but because we have brought it on ourselves – because we have rejected our God and Maker.

In some sense, so long as a man or woman continues in their rebellion against God, they experience something of spiritual death even as they live. But when physical death comes, that spiritual death enters its fullness.

Socrates and others may argue with cool rationality that we need not fear physical death because what lies beyond it for our souls is simply unknown to us.

But the truth is that on some gut level human beings fear physical death because they know it naturally leads to the fullness of spiritual death – of our being cast into the darkness.

And so, humanity lives in fear of death.

Of course such fear, if we were to allow it to go unchecked, would so consume us that we would no longer be able to function. [16] And so, Becker argues, human beings pursue denial. We seek after ways to deny the reality of our own death – both spiritual and physical. And we do it so persistently that our lives can be consumed with efforts to deny the reality of death, without us even realizing it.

“One’s whole life,” he writes, “is a [...] scenario with which one tries to deny oblivion and to extend oneself beyond death in symbolic ways.” [104]

Now ... you might be skeptical about this claim. You might assert that you are not concerned about death. Or you might say that as a Christian you no longer fear death.

But either way, I’d encourage you to reflect on the question this morning.

Of course, if you are a believer it may be true that you no longer fear death. We are certainly called as Christians to no longer fear death. We’ll speak of that later this morning.

But as Christians we also know that even our best works in this life are often a mix of virtue and sin. And so, for you, this morning is an opportunity to seek growth by examining your heart, and asking how much of your peace over death comes from true faith, and how much of it comes from denial.

And to help us reflect on those questions, we will consider three of the forms that denial can take, according to Ernest Becker.

And the first of the three is the most obvious. Quite often, we deny death by simply ignoring it.

We suppress the fear. We banish the thought from our mind. We go on and live as if we are never going to die. [20] We can do this by keeping death at arm's length [23], by trying to control our environment as much as we can [181], or, even as we face danger or risk, by telling ourselves that if there is a mishap it will fall on someone else, and not on us [120].

We turn our eyes from death, we try to tell ourselves that we are in control, we keep a positive attitude, and in doing all of that we banish death from our minds. And we are able to live – quite often – as if death is not a reality. Many people live most of their lives in this way.

But, of course, while it might work often on an emotional level, it only takes a little reflection to see that it is a lie – that it does not line up with reality. There is almost nothing more certain in our lives than the fact that one day we will die – and so it would seem that the brute fact that the grave awaits us all should inform, in some way, the way we live now.

But still we ignore it. Still we live and think and act as if it were not true. But it *is* true. We will, each one of us, one day be food for worms. We need to look that reality in the eye. We need to drop the pretense – the game of pretend that we so often play – and acknowledge that this form of denial will not work. Ignore it as we might, we all will die.

Which brings us to the second way we might deny death – what Becker calls “immortality projects.” We seek “a work” that will save our soul. [173]

And this can take a number of forms.

It might be overtly religious – as we try to earn ourselves a future beyond death, whatever form that might take. Various religions give their to-do list of works for immortality: a set of works which, if done well enough, allow one to overcome death – to achieve eternal life in one form or another.

But such systems do not only exist in the religious sphere. In fact, every culture, Becker argues, no matter how secular, offers prescribed paths to immortality – to having one's work or legacy or mark extending on, beyond one's life. [5, 121]

It might be by dedicating oneself to one's family to ensure that the next generation carries on even better than the one before, and so extends the work, the values, and even the name of the member who so dedicated themselves to it.

It might be through career success – making one's mark on one's company or an institution one serves.

It might be by taking part in a movement, whether political or social or religious – a movement that we believe will live beyond us for good.

It might be by trying to create some great work that we hope people will appreciate for years to come.

It might be any way we try to leave a mark on this world that will last beyond us.

And such projects can be corporate or individual.

They can be corporate projects, in which we invest our hopes for immortality in something bigger than ourselves. Where it's not really about us but about the family, the company, the political party, the movement, the cause, the particular religious institution that we dedicate ourselves to.

Or such projects can be about the mark that *we personally* make – about *our* individual success, or *our* individual legacy. The distinct mark *we* make on the company, or the country, or the family, or the congregation.

Now, to be clear in all this, the problem is not in the desire to do good work that outlasts our physical lives in this world. That is not a bad thing – that is a good thing. The problem – the issue, is our tendency to pin our hopes for lasting significance – for eternal significance – on our works.

Because when we do that – when we work for that significance, we eventually discover that our works can never grant us the immortality that our hearts ache for.

And that's true for a number of reasons.

For one thing, our works never seem to be quite enough. When it comes to religious works, we always fall short – always see imperfections, always see more that we could have done. Seen on a balance, if we are honest, we know that our good works never can earn us the spiritual immortality we long for.

And the same is true of our works in this world. After all, how much of a mark is enough? How much of a legacy is sufficient? What is enough for us to qualify for immortality? [120]

If we're honest, once again, it never seems to be quite enough. It never seems to reach. Our souls long for immortality, and our works in the world never seem to get us there.

And even if they could – even if our accomplishments were monumental – even then we could never guarantee that they would give us the lasting significance we long for. [109-112, 119] King Solomon sums it up well – he writes: “I hated all my toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vapor.” [Eccl. 2:18-19]

The truth is that we cannot control what happens to our work after we are gone. Which makes every immortality project we engage in in this world extremely fragile. [120] Which then fills us with fear and dread.

As Becker explains, “When you put all your eggs in one basket you must clutch that basket for dear life. It is as though one were to take the whole world and fuse it into a single object or a single fear.” [180]

And so perhaps the best way to identify *your* immortality projects is to ask: what do you clutch like that?

What is the thing – the project, the legacy, the cause – that you devote yourself to ... but if you're honest, you don't just devote yourself to it because it's good ... you devote yourself to it because you have pinned your hopes of a legacy on it – the hopes of it outlasting you in a way that will give your life meaning? And so the thought of it failing, or of it falling short of your dreams for it – fills you not just with sadness over a good thing that might be lost to posterity, but fills you with panic and anxiety ... because deep down you feel that you *need* that thing to last if your life is to matter after you die.

It could be any number of things. It could be the way you want to establish your family. It could be the impact you want to have at work. It could be an achievement you want to accomplish and be remembered for in this life. It could be your place in a community, or in a ministry. It could even be the way you view or want to impact this church.

What is the immortality project you most devote yourself to?

And can you see how hopeless that project really is?

Not necessarily in itself – in itself it might be a wonderful thing! But as a vehicle for your immortality – for your cosmic significance, can you see how it falls short? How your achievements will never be enough? How you will never be able to control what happens with it? How one day both it and you will be utterly and totally forgotten?

And so, when we look at our immortality projects – whether individual or corporate, whether secular or religious, they too fail. They also are too flimsy to hold off the reality or the terror of our death.

Which brings us to our third form of denial.

When we no longer can ignore death, and when we cannot hope in our immortality projects, what then are people to do?

Well, one response that dominates modern culture, Becker explains, is what he calls the “romantic solution.”

This is the person who says “I know I won't live forever, and I know nothing lasts in this world, but if only I can have that one person ... if I can only have him ... if only I can have her ... if I can only have true love ... *then* I'll be ok.”

It is, as Becker puts it, when we fix our urge for immortality “onto another person in the form of a love object.” [160]

Becker stresses that this has especially been a trend in the modern world. That today, people openly look for in a romantic partner what people used to look to God for: for fulfillment, for spiritual satisfaction, for peace, and for – in some sense – even eternal security. Listen to almost any popular love song and the hopes and dreams the singer places on a beloved seem to be more appropriate for a deity than a mere mortal. [160-161]

And that, of course, becomes the weakness by which this form of denial fails as well.

Because mortals die. And so they can never bear the immortal longings of our soul.

But the truth is that they fail us well before then. Because, as Becker puts it: “No human relationship can bear the burden of godhood.” [166]

“After all,” Becker writes, “what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to the position of God? We want redemption – nothing less. We want to be rid of our faults, of our feeling of nothingness. We want to be justified, to know that our creation has not been in vain. We turn to the love partner [...] for perfect validation; we expect them to ‘make us good’ through love. Needless to say, human partners can’t do this.” [167]

And in the end, any attempt to get this from another human being destroys that other person. Because, Becker writes, “If your partner is your ‘All’, then any shortcoming in him becomes a major threat to *you*. / If a woman loses her beauty, or shows that she doesn’t have the strength or dependability that [you] once thought she did, or loses her intellectual sharpness, or falls short of [your] peculiar needs in any of a thousand ways, then all the investment [you] have made in her is undermined. The shadow of imperfection falls over [your life], and with it – [the reality of] death.” [166-167]

And that weight placed on romantic love has wreaked havoc on our culture. We see it in the discontentedness and bitterness it can foster in marriages, when our spouse fails to live up to such impossible demands. We see it in men and women who are always abandoning one partner to try to seek that elusive sense of spiritual completeness from another, leading to patterns of divorce and serial monogamy. We see it reach its conclusion often in the cynicism that takes over how people approach sex and relationships, as people settle for meaningless sex as a consolation for the emptiness they feel over the failure of romantic love to bear the eternal weight of their souls. [164]

In the face of death our culture turns to romantic love for meaning, security, and eternal significance. But romantic love was never made to hold that weight. And when asked to, it will always buckle – it will always fail.

If we look at them head-on, we see that every one of our attempts to deny death fails in the end. And yet death continues to come for us.

Augustine, preaching from this text, reminded his congregation of this, saying: “As a man, you are born – [and] are destined to die. Where will you go to escape death? [...] Die then you must; you have no means of escape. Be it today, be it tomorrow; it is to be – the debt must be paid. What, then, does a man gain by fearing, fleeing, hiding himself from discovery by his enemy? Does he get exemption from death? No, but that he may die a little later. He gets not security against his debt, but asks a respite. Put it off as long as you please, the thing so delayed will come at last.” [Augustine, XLIII.12 (language modernized)]

What then, is our hope? What is the solution?

As I was thinking about the solution Jesus presents in our text this morning ... I found myself thinking about the movie *Jurassic Park*. This is a bit of a shift ... but bear with me – it's going to connect, I think ... at least, I hope!

Most of you will know the basic plot of *Jurassic Park*. Scientists find dinosaur DNA from dinosaur blood inside mosquitos preserved in amber deep in the earth. They use cloning technology to bring dinosaurs back today. And then the dinosaurs, of course, get loose.

There are now five movies in the *Jurassic Park* franchise. Some are ... not so good. But the first is well done.

I'm going to give some spoilers ... but since the movie came out 27 years ago, I think that's on you, not on me.

While the later movies focused on competing ways to control or fight the dinosaurs, one thing that set the first movie apart was the utter rejection of the idea that the humans could do anything to control the dinosaurs once they were loose. No one in the first movie survives by trying to kill or control the dinosaurs – the only thing to do is to run or hide. The dinosaurs will not be defeated by human efforts.

Towards the end of the film, after being on the run for some time from predatory dinosaurs who have escaped from their enclosures, the main characters – two adults and two children – find themselves in the main building of the park. And once in the building they finally feel safe. And they let their guard down. Until one of the children sees the shadow of two velociraptors who have followed them into the building.

The velociraptors of *Jurassic Park* (which are somewhat different from what actual velociraptors were like), are six-foot-tall, sixteen-foot-long, predators, who have six-inch sickle shaped claws on each of their feet for tearing open their prey.

The velociraptors enter, and the children run. They flee into the industrial kitchen. And the velociraptors pursue. The children try to silently crawl away. They try to hide in the cabinets. Through a series of events they make it to the door of the kitchen and flee, but the velociraptors are not far behind them.

They run out and find the two adults, and the chase continues, but finally the four find themselves cornered in the large open lobby of the main building. They huddle together as one velociraptor approaches from one side, and the second approaches from the other side. There is no where else to run. There is nowhere to hide. There is no way to fight. They have put these two predators off for some time ... but now they stand before them helplessly. The adults try to stand between the velociraptors and the children ... but even that will only delay their demise for a few extra seconds. The two predators close in. There is a tense moment of anticipation ... and then one of the velociraptors leaps at them in attack.

And as he is in the air ... suddenly ... out of nowhere ... the head of a massive Tyrannosaurus Rex drops into the frame from above and snatches the velociraptor up in its teeth. The T. Rex kills the first velociraptor, and then the second, as the four people flee from the building and into safety.

The solution Jesus offers us in our text ... is something like that.

As Augustine says, we can try to flee from death ... we can try to put it off – both physical death and spiritual death ... but eventually they will track us down. Eventually we will stand helplessly before them.

And when we do, our willful ignorance, our immortality projects, our romantic solutions – these will get us nowhere. Our only hope in that moment, is someone who is not only stronger than *us* – but stronger than *death*: stronger than physical death, and stronger than spiritual death.

And Jesus here tells us that that is what we have in him.

Jesus makes the promise of deliverance from death in verse fifty-one. He says “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”

The crowd responds that he must have a demon – for such a statement includes a claim that Jesus is superior to Abraham and to the prophets, and the crowd knows that can’t be true.

Jesus responds by again asserting his intimate relationship with God the Father, and then telling them in verse fifty-six “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”

It’s not clear exactly what Jesus means in verse 56. He could mean a few different things. [Augustine, XLIII.16; Carson, 356-357; Morris, 471-472; Wright, 130] On its face though, Jesus’s claim would only seem to require the idea of Abraham looking *forward* to Jesus’s coming.

Nonetheless, the crowd interprets Jesus as claiming to have existed at the time of Abraham. [Morris, 473] Jesus is not yet fifty – to see Abraham he would have to be over 2,000 years old. Such a claim, the crowd explains, is absurd.

But then, Jesus, instead of correcting them, responds by pushing their claim even further.

In verse fifty-eight, Jesus’s response is essentially to say: “No, no ... you’ve misunderstood. I’m not a 2,000-year-old human ... I’m the eternal God.”

He says “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” And the fact that he says, “I am” and not “I was” is key. The fact that he says “I am” rather than “I was” is why they pick up rocks to stone him, rather than laugh him out of the room. [Carson, 358]

Because “I was” would simply be an absurd statement. But “I am,” in their eyes, was a blasphemous statement. Because they knew that Jesus was claiming to be God.

“I am” was one of the ways God identified himself in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Greek used here in John eight matches the Greek of the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures used in Jesus’s day. [Morris, 473-474]

Jesus here tells the crowd what the Apostle John told us back in chapter one – that Jesus is not just some great teacher, not just some great man, *but he is God. He is the Creator. He is the eternal sovereign Lord.*

And that claim, we must then realize, is the basis of Jesus's earlier statement in verse fifty-one. How is Jesus able to keep his followers from death? Because *he* is more powerful than death. Because *he* is the eternal One. Because *he* is the Maker of heaven and earth.

Because when death corners us ... when we have fled from it all that we can ... and it finally has us surrounded ... our hope is not in ourselves, or in our community, or in our romantic interest ... our hope is in One who is not only more powerful than we are, but is more powerful than death itself – who will swoop down from outside of the frame and destroy death.

And Jesus here tells us that *he* is the one who can do that. *He* is the defeater of death for his people.

And he is the defeater of both physical death and spiritual death.

The most important of the two, we must recognize, is spiritual death. Jesus says: "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Spiritual death is eternal separation from God – to be sent out from God's presence forever. And Jesus declares that all who trust in him will never experience that death – their souls will be spared from that final spiritual death for all eternity.

But then also, built into that, Jesus promises that our bodies will not see death as a finality either. Both in the ancient world and today, the non-Christians of the world see the death of the body as final. Even if they believe that the soul lives on, once death comes, the body is done with. It was true of the ancient pagans in Jesus's day, and it is true of the materialist *and* the spiritualist in our day. Death is the end of the body.

But not according to the Bible. The God of the Christian Scriptures promises that on the last day, when Christ returns, he will raise up our bodies again. And for those who are in Christ, he will make our bodies new and glorious. Death will not have the final word over our bodies any more than over our souls. But we will live with God in a new heaven and a new earth, free from death and sorrow and sickness and pain. God's people will not see a final death of their bodies – but only a temporary death before they are raised and transformed for eternity.

Death comes for us all. Flee as we might, we see its shadow around the corner, and eventually we stand before it and can flee no longer.

The hope Christ gives to his people is that when death comes for us, he will be standing over us. And he is not only more powerful than us. He is more powerful than death in all its forms. And he will snatch up spiritual death as it comes for us and destroy it – because in every important way he has already destroyed its power over us when he died on the cross on our behalf, cancelling the debt of sin that made us subject to spiritual death. And so, when our bodies die, our souls will not be cast out, but will go to be with him – to experience his peace and joy ... until the day of his return to the earth.

And when Christ does return to the earth, he will snatch up that second form of death – physical death. And he will destroy it too – because again, in every important way he has already destroyed its power over us when he rose from the dead and defeated death forever.

That is the hope Christ offers to his people – not another denial of death, but that we might be protected *by him*, the defeater of death.

And how do we lay hold of that protection? How do we make that hope our own?

By clinging to Christ in faith.

In verse fifty-one Jesus says that this promise holds true for anyone who “keeps” his word.

Of course, “keeps” includes more than mere acceptance. It describes, rather, one who places Christ’s word at the center of their hearts and lives, who “believes it, cleaves to it, obeys and lives by it.” [Carson, 355]

As Calvin puts it: “Christ promises eternal life to his disciples, but demands disciples who will not merely nod their assents like donkeys, or profess with the tongue that they approve His teaching, but who will keep it as precious treasure.” [Calvin, quoted in Morris, 468 n.102]

We obtain this hope by keeping his word.

That means first of all that we can stop denying death, because we no longer need to be held captive by fear of it. We need not ignore its reality, we need not feverishly pursue our own immortality projects, and we need not look to romantic love for salvation.

We need not do such things, and in fact we *must not* do such things. Rather than hiding from the reality of death through them, we are called to place our trust in Christ.

And as we trust him, we live for him. We keep his word by pursuing lives that look like his. We keep his word by working for *his* kingdom rather than our own. And we do these works *not* because they are our own immortality projects ... but because we love Christ, and because we know that only what he loves will be carried into eternity.

So we invest in the mission of God in this world, not to make a name for our people or for ourselves, but because we know that the fruit of that work will last forever in the kingdom of God.

We work for justice and for righteousness in our lives, and in this world, and in our particular communities, not to get recognition for ourselves, not simply for the sake of being the victors in a culture war, but because Christ loves justice and righteousness and they will roll down like an ever-flowing stream for all eternity.

We invest in our children not because we need our work to live on through them, but because we love them, and because Christ loves them, and because we want to see them grow up and live forever in Christ’s eternal kingdom.

We love our spouse not because we rest the salvation of our souls on them or their love for us, but because we love them and Christ loves them and we want to encourage them on in the Lord, that they too might be with us and with him forever.

Secure in Christ we can stop investing our lives in denials of death, and can instead truly invest them in the things of God.

Our text ends with Jesus leaving the crowd as they pick up stones. And in that moment, it might seem like the crowd is the powerful one, and Jesus is the weak one fleeing their aggression. It is Augustine who points out that the truth is quite the opposite.

He says, “As man, [Jesus] fled from the stones; but woe to those from whose stony hearts God has fled.” [Augustine, XLIII.18]

If you are not a Christian, do not harden your heart. Your hardness of heart will not harm Christ ... but in the end, if you persist in it, it will harm you. You will find yourself alone ... facing death – both physical and spiritual – with none to help you, because you drove away the One who offered you salvation.

And for the many of you who know the Lord, hear in Christ’s words the call to return again to the faith he calls you to. See the ways you have wandered from your trust in him – the ways you have invested in little projects here and there to deny the reality of death – to try to build your own immortality, and abandon those projects once again, clinging afresh to Christ. And then, trusting in him, recommit yourself to the work that *he* has called you to do.

For, as C.T. Studd famously put it: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

Augustine. *Homilies on the Gospel of John*. “Tractate XLIII.” Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series, Volume 7.

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