

Some Thoughts on Funerals

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One of the most difficult parts of the work of an evangelist I am called on to do is to "preach a funeral." I become amused at times by families who want another preacher to preach the funeral of one of their loved ones, but who fear I will be offended if they don't ask me to have a part in the funeral. While I am always quite willing to help any family who needs me, I assure you that I am never offended at not being asked to preach a funeral.

No funeral is "easy" to preach, but some are less difficult than others. When one has lived a faithful life of service to Christ and His church, the hope and assurance we have through the Scriptures for such a person make it easier on both the family and the preacher. It is, in fact, a real source of joy to reflect on a noble life that has moved from time into eternity, prepared to meet God, even though we are saddened by the separation death brings.

There are some funerals in which, if the preacher preserves his own integrity, he can say little or nothing about the one who has died, beyond the facts in the obituary. I have been sickened to attend a funeral occasionally at which the preacher did his best to preach a Grade A reprobate straight into Heaven. Now a reprobate deserves a funeral like anybody, but just because someone has died doesn't give a preacher the right to lie about him, try to make something of him that he wasn't and, in the process, perhaps kindle false hope in the hearts of grieving loved ones. I read recently of a very ungodly man who died, and the preacher was frantically searching for something good to say about him. After consulting with several relatives and close friends of the deceased, the only virtue he could discover was that the man was good at slopping hogs. I've preached some funerals that provided little more material from the life of the deceased that was worthy to repeat in my remarks. All an honest preacher can do in such cases is to preach to the living; no one has a right to expect him to do more.

I have long thought that we "preach" our own funerals by the way we live. If I have not lived in such a way as to please God, all of the remarks a preacher may make over me will not change that. Likewise, if I have lived as a faithful child of God, the judgments of men will not affect my destiny. One of the saddest statements in the Bible relates to a "funeral." Jehoram was so wicked that at death, he "departed without being desired" (2 Chr. 21:20).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, July 9, 1987, of which I was editor.]

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