Biblical Christians in Culture. *Looking at the world through the lens of The Word.*Discovering, applying biblical Truth,confronting untruth with Truth.

**Ep. 10 Final Destination**

What we do now, counts later.

Life is preparation for death.

*REPEATED THEMES 1. Belief affects behavior and behavior affects belief. 2. Everyone everywhere has assumptions, pre-thinking. 3. Christian thinking is molded by Scripture’s commands, principles, & doctrine 4. Everyone has “doctrine” that forms their thinking. 5. Doctrine influences living.*

Illustrations *Final Destination 2, Road to Perdition, Shawshank Redemption, The Birds, A Christmas Carol, Dead Poets Society,* eschatology, thanatology, “Ecclesiastes” video series (MarkEckel.com)

Questions All Ask Is death the end of consciousness or is there someone or something we will encounter beyond the grave? If we can’t conquer death is there any hope of someone else doing the same? If discussions of death are important, what should we be doing in life to prepare?

Universal, Human Concerns There is a universal human question, “Is there life after death?” There is a universal human experience—all cultures talk about it. There is a universal human longing—if a longing to know about death exists, perhaps there is a fulfillment of that desire. Some believe in reincarnation—that people will get a second chance at life, returning in another form, place, and time. Some believe in near-death-experiences where they believe they actually died, “hovering” above their physical body in spirit form. [Gary Habermas, Liberty University] Some believe that creation itself explains life after death through (1) seasonal cycles (after winter comes spring); (2) agricultural examples (seeds die to produce plant life); and (3) metamorphosis (caterpillar turning into a butterfly). Ask why there might be these universal ideas about death. Suggest that it is part of our human condition. The real question that haunts everyone is what’s beyond the grave.

The Book of Job suggests that a man may look dead lying in a coffin. But like the tree that is cut down producing new growth from living roots, a man still has “hope” after life (in verses 7 and 14 “hope” and “renewal” in the NIV are translations of the same Hebrew word, Job 14:7-14; 19:23-27). The Book of Ecclesiastes Solomon is examining the “under the sun,” naturalistic view of life. Life, without God, is meaningless. But if God is worshipped, life is then understood as a gift. 2:12-16 *all people die and are soon forgotten.* 5:15-16 *you can’t take it with you* 6:1-6 *working for earthly prosperity without enjoying it is worse than death* 7:2 *death is the destiny of every man* 9:1-6 *it is better to live than die; opportunity is now* 9:7-10. Considering the negativity surrounding death, what comfort does Solomon offer? *[Enjoy what you have while you have it: both life and favor from God are possible.]*

Scriptural Sureties *Hope* in the Old Testament meant certainty. Hope was tied to the trustworthy, personal, eternal, Creator. If an eternal hope exists it must be tied to an eternal God. A Designed Universe. *If we are a product of a chance universe we have no purpose, no ethics, and no hope.* The Incarnation of Jesus—God taking on Human Nature. *Jesus had to bridge the gap between the eternity and the temporal world of humans.* The Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead. *Provision had to be made for human sin at the cross, but without the resurrection, there is no hope of our promise of eternal life.* The Act of Repentance of Anyone toward God. *Turning away from sin and toward God is necessary for eternal life.* Thessalonian *eschatology*, the study of future things. Paul spent 3 weeks with Christians there (Acts 17:2) prompting follow-up questions. Note the tone of tenderness in the first letter. Paul shows deep care, encouraging those left behind, assuring them of their place in heaven. Those who reject the Gospel, Paul begins the second epistle with a blend of vindication and horror. To the Christians he says injustice will get its just desserts in the next life. But beyond this, it is a “terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). The worst punishment in eternity is separation from God—for all time.

*Further Thoughts on Death [from my 2011 essay The Graveyard Schools the School Yard]*

***Yahweh****will “swallow up death forever” (Isaiah 25:8) in spite of death’s sting and enemy status (1 Corinthians 15:26, 55-56).  At the moment, death not only silences but causes others to forget us (Psalm 6:5)—both small and great (Ecclesiastes 2:16).  Neither is there an opportunity to praise Yahweh in death (Psalm 88:10).  Yet, Scripture’s clarity about death is matched by its clarity about hope.  Both testaments anticipate not simply another life but a sure hope of eternity (Job 19:23-27; Psalms 16, 49, 73; Philippians 1:20-26).*

*While confident about life after death (Hebrew 2:14-18), I am always concerned about how death impacts life.  While we accept death’s inevitability (Hebrews 9:27) we nonetheless should discuss it (Mark 8:31; 9:31).  We suffer with those who have “lost” loved ones (John 11:33-38).  As we age, we “look back,” evaluating our lives (2 Timothy 4:6-8).  Jesus, as always, turns the discussion on its head, confronting those more interested in earthly than heavenly justice.****In Luke 13 Jesus****sidesteps the political and cultural ideals of the day to pronounce that awful news today should make us consider our demise tomorrow.  Responding to human defined disaster, Jesus proffers this idea: we are living on borrowed time.  Our view of afterlife should drive us to have the right view of this life.*

***Dietrich Bonhoeffer****, in his classic The Cost of Discipleship, lived what he wrote: “When Christ calls a man, He bids him to come and die.”  Bonhoeffer lived under the dictatorial hobnailed boot of Adolf Hitler.  As a Christian minister, Bonhoeffer wanted peace.  But as a Christian minister, Bonhoeffer also knew he must stop evil.  Bonhoeffer’s numerous attempts at ending Hitler’s life, ended his own two weeks prior to the Allied liberation.  It was Dietrich’s commitment to life’s purpose, that brought his life to an end.*

*In 1980****Czeslaw Milosz****won the Nobel Prize for poetry.  In his acceptance speech, Milosz spoke about the importance of literary freedom against the slavery imposed by earthly dictators.  Reading the speech recently, I was reminded why Milosz was such a believer in reality: he, like Bonhoeffer, had lived through the horrors of World War II.  Here is the line that struck me hardest: “Those who are alive receive a mandate from those who are silent forever.”*

***Milosz’ demand for the dead makes demands on my life as an educator****. We are connected again to Milosz’ insight that we owe a debt to those who have gone before and those who will follow.  How we view death will affect how we teach about life.  Ecclesiastes 9 constructs a positive response to death; one that leads toward positive instruction. Shaw was right: one out of one submits to the grave (9:5).  But while standing in the funeral home, verses 7-10 chart a course for proper living.  This is****no****carpe diem moment as some commentators have expressed.  Solomon’s now or never approach is solidly linked to The God of Life: He approves what we do.  God-given life is a gift. So as not to miss the point, Israel’s teacher-king uses the imperative—“Go!”*

*Solomonic words in Proverbs 27:1 still apply today: “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”  Over and over I repeated James’ idea, “your life is a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (4:15; see Job 9:25; 14:1; Isaiah 40:6-8).  My teaching addressed the shortness of life by the length of our appreciation.  Remembering that each day is a gift from God, our questions should turn to answers.  We should show compassion, give generously, use things wisely, understand good comes from bad, and remember God holds the key to the door of the future.*

*How many times have I rehearsed Acts 13:36 to a class?! “David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, died.” I would simply affirm the truth, “We serve at the behest of The Living God.  And my hope is that future generations will say about me after I’m gone, ‘He served his generation.’”*