

THE LAST ENEMY

Wrestling with the reality of death

A conference at Emmanuel Evangelical Church
London N14

Dr Rob George
Professor of Palliative Care

David Field
Steve Hayhow
Steve Jeffery

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Emmanuel
EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The Last Enemy

Wrestling with the Reality of Death

Speakers

Dr Rob George is Professor of Palliative Care at Kings College London, and Consultant in Palliative and End-of-Life Care at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital. He has spoken widely as a Christian specialist on issues associated with death and dying, and is active as a government advisor and a spokesman on Christian medical ethics.

David Field is an Elder at Emmanuel Evangelical Church. He previously served as a Minister and a theological educator, and has written a commentary on Obadiah and many other essays and articles. He now works in executive search, and his interests include the novels of John Buchan, Everton FC and fruit brandy. He is married to Sue, and has three daughters.

Steve Hayhow is an Elder at Emmanuel Evangelical Church. He previously served as a Minister, and now works in the telecommunications industry. His interests include music, books, classical and Christian education, and he and his wife Kris have seven children.

Steve Jeffery is the Minister of Emmanuel Evangelical Church. He co-authored *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (IVP, 2007), and has appeared on Premier Christian Radio and BBC Radio 4's *Beyond Belief*. He and his wife Nicole have three children. His other loves include jazz, coffee and *Yes, Prime Minister*.

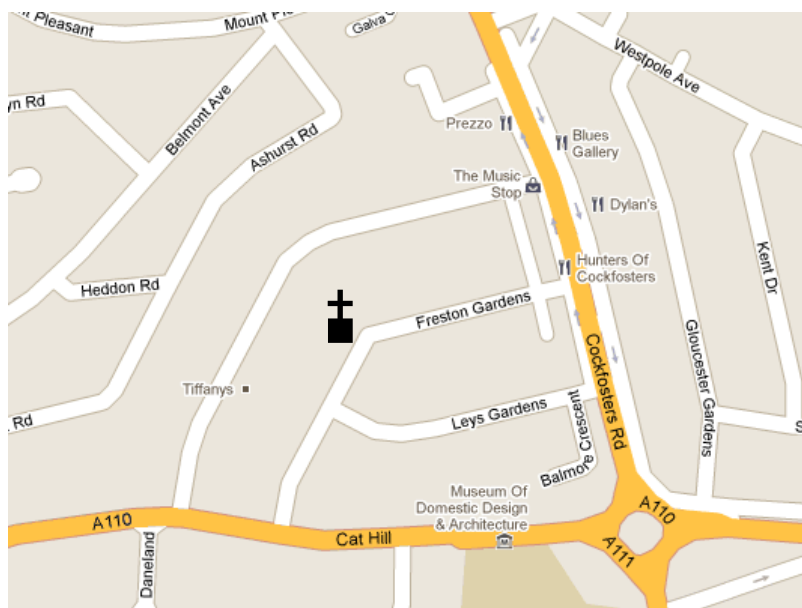
Programme

- 9:30 Coffee
- 10:00 Session 1: **The Shadow of Death: Exploring the experience of death (David Field)**
- 11:00 Coffee
- 11:30 Session 2: **People of Dust: The biblical doctrine of death (Steve Jeffery)**
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Session 3: **The Moment of Death: A medical doctor speaks about dying (Professor Rob George)**
- 2:30 Tea
- 3:00 Session 4: **Yet Shall They Live! Christian faithfulness in a world of death (Steve Hayhow)**
- 4:00 Conclusion

Refreshments and lunch

Tea, coffee and cold drinks will be available before the conference, at lunchtime, and during the morning and afternoon breaks.

If you're planning to buy food for lunch, you will find several shops selling sandwiches, light lunches and other snacks on Cockfosters Road, just a short walk away.



Psalm 22:1-11

My God, my God, O why have you
Forsaken and abandoned me?
Why are you far from giving help,
From listening to my anguished plea?

My God, I cry to you by day;
You do not hear when I complain.
I call to you throughout the night;
In silence I cannot remain.

Yet you are holy: on the praise
Of Israèl you are enthroned.
In you our fathers put their trust;
They trusted, and were not disowned.

They called, and you delivered them;
You listened to them when they cried.
Our fathers were not put to shame,
Because on you they had relied.

But I'm a worm and not a man,
By people scorned, reproached by all.
And those who see me shake their heads;
They sneer at me, and thus they call:

"This man has trusted in the LORD,
So let him save him from his plight.
Now let his God deliver him,
Because in him he takes delight."

Yet you, LORD, brought me from the womb;
When I was at my mother's breast
You gave me cause to trust in you.
From birth upon you I was cast.

Yes, from my mother's womb till now,
O LORD, you are my God alone.
Be not far off, for trouble's near,
And other helper I have none.

Sing Psalms, 1994

Psalm 22:11-20

Be not far off, for grief is near, and none to help is found;
For bulls of Bashan in their strength now circle me around
Their lion-jaws they open wide, and roar to tear their prey.
My heart is wax, my bones un-knit, my life is poured away.

My strength is only broken clay; my mouth and tongue are dry,
For in the very dust of death You there make me to lie.
For see how dogs encircle me! On every side there stands
A brotherhood of cruelty; they pierce my feet and hands.

My bones are plain for me to count; men see me and they stare.
My clothes among them they divide, and gamble for their share.
Now hurry, O my Strength, to help! Do not be far, O LORD!
But snatch my soul from raging dogs, and spare me from the sword.

The Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973

Psalm 22:22-31

To all my brothers I'll declare
the glory of your holy name.
I'll praise you where the people meet.
Who fear the LORD – his praise proclaim!
All sons of Jacob, praise his grace,
and stand in awe, O Israel's race!

For he has not despised the poor;
he has not scorned their wretched state.
He has not turned away his face
from anyone in trouble great.
When any cried to him in grief
he heard their prayer, and sent relief.

Within the congregation great
I offer praise you have supplied.
I'll pay my vows with them who fear;
the meek with food are satisfied.
Who seek the LORD shall him adore –
may your heart live for evermore.

All ends of earth, rememb'ring him
shall turn themselves unto the LORD.
The kindred of the nations then
to him their homage shall accord.
Because the LORD the kingdom owns
and rules above all earthly thrones.

The rich and mighty of the earth
shall eat, and low before him bend.
And in his presence all shall bow
who helpless to the dust descend.
The wretched who, although they strive,
yet cannot keep their souls alive.

A seed shall rise to serve his will,
and to the age it shall be told
about our Lord; then they shall come
and shall his righteousness unfold
unto a people yet unknown,
that this was done by him alone.

The Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973

1. The Shadow of Death: *Exploring the experience of death*

David Field

1. ... where we live in tension and in ambiguity

- Do not weep; do not weep; Jesus wept – what’s going on?
- Some of the ambiguities about death:
 - nothing / everything; weep / don’t weep; Satan’s weapon / God’s weapon (Q1); blessing-death / curse-death;
 - death as vehicle – a horrible means of transport which may take us somewhere good
 - death as ogre – a vicious monster but compelled to do the will of a loving Lord
- Evangelicals and living with tension (Q7)
 - stone in your shoe; picture not straight; dripping tap; car alarm in night;
- Postmoderns and living with tension
 - lowered expectations; a single view (Q3, 4, 5, 6, 13)

2. ... where the “antithesis” between “in Christ” and “not in Christ” is at its sharpest

- The absolute key to our attitude to death is whether we think that there is something the other side of it. And the absolute key to *that* is whether we are looking at it “in Christ” or not.
- We still live in the darkness of death – but not in darkness *about* death
- Given the ambiguity of death and the division of humankind there is a fourfold response to death
 - faithful response to death-as-curse
 - faithful response to death-as-defeated-by-Christ
 - unfaithful response to death-as-curse
 - faithful response to death-as-defeated-by-Christ

3. ... where fear, sadness and anger rise to the surface as temptation to sin and call to faithfulness

- Various qualifications
 - approach / moment; process / fact; different experiences of death
 - death of others; death of self
 - what is a “good death”?
- Death is the intensification of the painful things in life
 - intrusion (Q8, 9) – dehumanising; lack of control; unmet desire
- Death is the end of the good things in life
 - nothing lasts; the end (Q11); end of opportunity – only one life; incompleteness (Q10)
- Death is the loss of all things in life
 - lose possession of things; lose control of events; lose connection with people
 - *except in Christ*
- Images for death
- Think about it now (Q12)
 - what scared of? what sad about? what angry at?
- Hurt, limitation and loss – we react with anger, fear, and sadness
- No wonder we weep!

4. ... where we meet Christ and have dealings with him

- It is Christ with whom we have to do
- Jesus is the frontier ahead and it is to him that we move. *Memento mori* means, concretely, *memento Domini*. Barth
- He sends his butler to the door but it is to Christ's house we have come
- Careful of reifying / overly-personifying "Death". At the moment you die (negation / cessation) do you meet something or someone called Death? No, you meet Jesus Christ.
- We think we're going to meet death but we're not, we're going to meet Jesus
- Where do you *think* we'd meet Jesus better than at the place of death?!

Conclusions

- Ambiguity
- Antithesis
- Fear, sadness, anger – temptation to sin and call to faithfulness
- We're dealing with Jesus

Bible passages

1. Psalm 23.4 – Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.
2. Isaiah 25.7-8 – And he will swallow up on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up the death which is forever and the Lord GOD will wipe away a tear from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth.
3. Luke 7.13 – the Lord said to her, "Do not weep"
4. Luke 8.52 – but he said, "Do not weep ..."
5. John 11.35 – Jesus wept
6. I Corinthians 15.54 – When the perishable puts on imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, *then* shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory
7. Philippians 1.21 – For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain
8. 2 Timothy 1.10 – ... our Saviour Christ Jesus who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel
9. Rev 1.18 – I died and behold I am alive for evermore and I have the keys of Death and Hades

Quotations from various writers

1. Death is both Satan's great weapon and God's great weapon: "our supreme disgrace and our only hope; the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which he conquered". C. S. Lewis
2. A godless era is frantic for life and prone to suicide. Rushdoony
3. The self-aware embrace of the tragic ... Leithart
4. Maurice Maeterlinck: There are no dead
5. So death, the most terrifying of evils, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more. Epicurus
6. He was no more, freed from being, entering into nowhere without even knowing it. Philip Roth
7. If thou and nature can so gently part // The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch // which hurts and is desired. Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra V.ii.294.

8. You're born to live and you die instead. Philip Roth
9. "The fog is rising ..." Emily Dickinson
10. People are not afraid of death *per se* but of the incompleteness of their lives. Lisl Marburg Goodman
11. The last act is bloody, however fine the rest of the play. They throw earth over your head and it is finished forever. Pascal
12. To become wise, we must listen to the wild dogs barking in our cellar. Nietzsche
13. A refusal to mourn a death, by fire, of a child in London. Dylan Thomas
14. Death destroys a man; the idea of death saves him. E M Forster

2. People of Dust: *The biblical doctrine of death*
Steve Jeffery

Introduction: "Death? I don't want to think about that."

1. What is death?

2. Why is death painful?

Reason 1: Death is the unnatural rupture of body and soul

Reason 2: Death is an echo of the punishment for sin

Reason 3: Death brings a (temporary) end to relationships

3. What does death accomplish in God's purposes?

Introduction: two questions

1. Why do Christians still die?

2. How can the death of Christians be good?

Purpose 1: Death is the climax of personal discipleship through suffering

Purpose 2: Death is the climax of our personal conformity to Christ

Purpose 3: Death is a step towards maturity for the church

Purpose 4: Death is participation in the death of Christ for the sake of the church

Purpose 5: Death is the final defeat of sin

4. Yet Shall They Live! *Christian faithfulness in a world of death*

Steve Hayhow

Introduction

Jaroslav Pelikan has said this about our approach to death:

“How an era of history interprets death and related themes may be a valuable key as we can find the true spirit of that era. Thus an era like ours, which has made death into the final obscenity – and, so it appears, the only obscenity - is thereby telling us a great deal about itself.” (*Bach Among the Theologians*, p. 68).

Philip Larkin, *Aubade*

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying, and being dead,
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
- The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused - nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness forever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

I. The Christian Hope is the Resurrection and Renewal of all Creation

The Bible teaches us that that this resurrection has many strands:

1. Jesus *is* the resurrection.

John 11:25-26 “Jesus said..., ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”

2. The resurrection of Christ is the basis for our forgiveness and acceptance with God: it is the historical even of the resurrection of Jesus that is the basis of our salvation.

Romans 4:25 “It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

3. Resurrection describes the *new life* that we already have – “alive” is what a Christian is, “death” is what the human race already dwells in.

Ephesians 2:5-7 “...even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together** with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and **raised us up with him and seated us with him** in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

4. The Christian hope is not a bodiless (or body-free) existence in heaven, but a physical reality.

Acts 4:2 “...they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”
(**Acts 4:33; 17:18,32; 23:6; 24:21**)

5. The resurrection affects the whole of created reality – through Christ there is to be a resurrection, a making new, of the heavens and the earth.

Revelation 21:1 “Then I saw a new heavens and a new earth...” (see Isaiah 65-66)

Romans 8:21-25 “...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

6. It takes the whole of creation to the maturity and fullness of glory that was God’s purpose from the very beginning.

1 Corinthians 15:44-49 “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

It is **resurrection and new creation** that are the *environment* for talking about death

II. Ecclesiastes: Another Approach to Living with Death

Ecclesiastes shows us how to live in a fallen world, with hope and in the fear of the LORD.

1. “Vanity” (Ecclesiastes **1:2**) describes life as “hebel”, lit. mist, vapour, breath, wind... (not “vanity” or the NIV’s “meaningless”)

See **Psalms 62:9; 94:11; 144:4; and Proverbs 21:6.**

Death pervades life, our work, our missions, our achievements, our goals and our bodies, our minds and all we are... in a fallen world. Therefore, at the same time we live in the enigmatic world of God’s sovereignty, **and** we live under the all-pervading effects of sin - with its vexations and frustrations.

2. Human life is weak and ephemeral.

Psalm 39:4-11 “... let me know how fleeting I am! / Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”

(also **Psalm 78:33, Job 7:16; James 4:14**)

3. Therefore Ecclesiastes has a lot to say about death. Death expresses the urgency of living, it bounds the limit of our opportunity.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

(See also **Ecclesiastes 2:14; 5:16; 3:16-22; 6:1-12; 7:2-3; 7:25ff; 9:1-6; 12:1ff.**)

How does our culture handle this?

- Perfect bodies, perfect homes, perfect children; health, diet, obsession about food; exercise obsession; perfect teeth, hair loss.
- Vampire novels, where young women are “attracted” to blood sucking young men – vampires. This is an unhealthy playing with death.
- The “body modification” culture: tattoos of death, piercing sexual organs, S&M and self-harming.

Leviticus 19:28 “You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the Lord.”

4. Death has a sanctifying purpose in our lives. In **Ecclesiastes 7:1-12** Solomon reflects on the life benefits of death.

- As the fact of death pervades life, it is necessary for godly living. Hence in **Ecclesiastes 7:2** funerals are “better” than parties because they teach us how to live, when combined with wisdom. Thus **Ecclesiastes 7:3** sorrow and sadness *make for* a glad heart, i.e. sadness and mourning as preludes to joy!

Thomas Brooks: “It is a very high point of Christian wisdom always or look upon the good things and the great things of this world as a man will certainly look soon them when he comes to die.”

- **Test:** What are you instinctive reactions to words like: *serious, sorrow, sadness, grief or solemn*. And how much of that reaction is shaped by our happy face culture of entertainment and blindness?

5. Ecclesiastes gives us an answer: a call for joy, hard work, joyful marriage and the enjoyments of our wine, our food and our drink (**Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; 3:1-15; 5:18-20; 9:7-10; 11:1-4**).

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10 “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

1. Be cheerful and live with joy!
2. Remember that you are justified – you are already “approved” – live out of your justification through Christ, before God.
3. Dress well and make sure you smell good!
4. Enjoy your marriage!
5. Work hard. Live with some urgency. Take the opportunities that God has given you. Do something.

Martin Luther's advice to Prince Joachim of Anhalt (1534), who suffered from melancholy and "dejection of spirit":

"I should like to encourage Your Grace, who are a young man, always to be joyful, to engage in riding and hunting, and to seek the company of others who may be able to rejoice with Your Grace in a godly and honourable way. For solitude and inwardness are poisonous and deadly to all people, and especially to a young man. Accordingly, **God has commanded us to be joyful in his presence; he does not desire a gloomy sacrifice.** [Luther quotes Ecclesiastes 12.] **No one realizes how much harm it does a young person to avoid pleasure and cultivate solitude and sadness.** Your grace has Master Nicholas Hausman and many others near at hand. Be merry with them; for gladness and good cheer, when decent and proper, are the best medicine for a young person—indeed, for all people. I myself, who have spent a good part of my life in sorrow and gloom, now seek and find pleasure wherever I can. **Praise God, we now have sufficient understanding of the Word of God to be able to rejoice with a good conscience and to use God's gifts with thanksgiving, for he created them for this purpose and is pleased when we use them**" (Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955], pp. 92-93).

Conclusion

John Donne, *Death Be Not Proud*

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

