

## Dying By Faith

Franklin Church of Christ  
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### Introduction:

This past week, one of those turning point events occurred for my life. Kelsey Harris, 16-year-old daughter of Simon and Teresa Harris, died because of brain cancer. Simon preaches the gospel in Jonesboro, Arkansas. We had met a couple of times. My wife has become friends with Teresa due to some internet forums. But even though we didn't know each other well, I felt close because of following the numerous e-mails and internet updates about Kelsey's illness over the past year. When we heard she had died, Marita and I both wanted to go to the funeral. As we stood in the visitation line, watching Simon and Teresa hug those who came by to support them, I couldn't help but wonder where I would be if roles were reversed. What if one of my children were in the coffin? As I progressed down the line, it seemed to me this line wasn't working the way most funeral lines do. Instead of the visitors comforting Simon and Teresa, it almost seemed like they were comforting the visitors. In fact, when I finally was able to hug Simon and say, "I'm so sorry for your loss," he said. "We're not. Our job as parents is to get our kids to heaven. That's where Kelsey is. Certainly, earlier than we planned. But our job with her is done and our goal accomplished. We have joy in that." During the service, Wilson Adams read from letters Simon and Teresa had written. One of them pointed out that they didn't like to say that they had lost Kelsey. "Kelsey is not lost; She is saved," the letter said. What faith, what comfort, what joy. Don't misunderstand, Simon, Teresa, and their other children are grieving for the hole left in their lives by Kelsey's death. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that kind of grief. **Philippians 2:27** demonstrates Paul would have had that kind of sorrow over the death of Epaphroditus. No doubt, there will be times when their overwhelming emotion is sadness. That is only natural. However, I can't help but see that they face death with faith. That is exactly how Kelsey faced it. I was moved by that. In fact, it caught my attention so much I began to dwell on it. How many lessons do we have that talk about living by faith? How many lessons do we have that talk about how we will live if we have faith? How many lessons spring from **Galatians 2:20** or similar passages? In contrast, how many lessons talk about dying by faith? How many lessons talk about how we will die if we have faith?

As these thoughts played in my mind, I kept coming back to **Luke 23:46**. Jesus certainly gave us wonderful examples of what it means to live by faith. But perhaps His greatest example for us is not how He lived by faith, but how He died by faith. As He hung on the cross, He quoted **Psalms 31:5** and cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (ESV). Think about that amazing statement. Jesus said He trusted God so much He was willing to commit not merely His life to the Father but His spirit. He was not willing to commit His spirit to the Father only so far, but even up to the point of the Father removing His spirit out of His body. He trusted God so much that even if God's plans for Him meant death, He would follow. That is even highlighted in the language of the verse. The words translated "my spirit" and "breathed his last" come from the same root word (pneo, Strong's #4154).

What a great example. How many Christians face life with increasing faith, but crumble when they face death? Can we learn to commit our spirit to the Father so much that when God calls our spirit to part from our bodies we continue to faithfully entrust our spirit to Him? We often turn to **Hebrews 11** as our primer on faith. As I reread the chapter with this new thought in mind, I found six principles I believe can help us entrust our souls to God, not only living by faith but also dying by faith as well. In fact, notice **Hebrews 11:13**. These saints not only lived in faith, they died in faith. That is what we want. That is where we must grow. Let us increase our faith to be like Jesus.

### Discussion:

- I. Acknowledge we are strangers and exiles on earth (**Hebrews 11:13**).
  - A. If we view the earth as our home, we will always struggle with leaving it. If we have become too comfortable with the earth, we will always struggle with leaving it. We live in a very mobile society; therefore, many of us know what it is like to leave home and move to a strange place. Folks make this move with two different mindsets. Some view themselves as being forced to leave home. They may move because their job demands it or circumstance dictates it. However, they constantly look back with longing and make plans to go back home someday. Others, view themselves as going somewhere to make a new home. They probably miss some things about that old home, but they don't look back with longing. They have moved and are looking for a new home.

- B. We must remember **Philippians 3:20**. Our citizenship is in heaven. That is our new home. This world is not our home. As **Philippians 3:19** and **Colossians 3:1-2** say, we must take our minds off the things down here and rest them on heavenly things. As **Matthew 6:19-21** says, we must lay up our treasures in heaven. That is, we must learn to value heavenly things and not earthly. Only then will heaven be our home. Only then will we see we are simply strangers and exiles down here. Only then will we be able to die by faith.
- II. Trust God's promises even when we haven't experienced them (**Hebrews 11:13, 39**).
- A. Abraham had been told his family would become a great nation. He had been told he would possess the Promised Land. He had been told his seed would be a blessing to all nations. However, when he died, he had not received these promises. Yet, he saw them coming. He believed God so much he saw what had not happened yet.
- B. God has promised us eternal life (**John 3:16; Romans 6:23; et al**). Yet, we haven't received it yet. That is, we haven't experienced it. In fact, as we live in a world ravaged by cancer, heart disease, natural disasters, and death in numerous other forms, this promise seems a bit questionable. We have to die to have eternal life? On the surface, that just doesn't make sense. However, as Jesus said in **Matthew 16:25**, we must lose our lives to save them. If we spend time trying to save our lives, we'll lose them.
- C. If we want to die in faith, we must learn to so believe God's promises that we can see them even though we haven't experienced them. We must recognize God cannot lie (**Hebrews 6:18**). Only then will we let go of our lives and allow God to save them. Only then will we be able to die by faith.
- III. Trust God to take care of those we leave behind (**Hebrews 11:20-21**).
- A. When Isaac and Jacob were about to die, instead of despairing about what would happen to their children when they were gone, they were both able to invoke God's blessings on them. They trusted God to take care of those they left behind. I do recognize the miraculous and revelatory nature of these blessings. I understand that we don't have those kinds of specific promises about the ones we leave behind. Yet, we do know we have a God who loves those we leave behind (**I John 4:8**). We do know we have a God who wants to bless those we leave behind (**Matthew 7:7-11**). We do know we have a God who works everything out for the good of those who love Him (**Romans 8:28**). We do know we serve a God who will do what is right and just (**Genesis 18:25**). Do we trust Him to take care of our loved ones as we've trusted Him to care for us in this life?
- B. For me personally, I have to admit my fears about this issue are simply a result of my own arrogance and pride. Somehow, I have the idea that I have to be the one that fixes everyone else in my family. However, I have to admit that when I've relied on me to get things fixed, all I've done is made things worse. What on earth would cause me to believe God somehow has to rely on me to fix or help those I leave behind when I die? Now don't misunderstand me, I love my wife, children, and family. I don't want to leave them and I don't want them to leave me. However, do I really think I can do a better job with my family than God can? Do I really think I can do a better job with this congregation than God can? I pray, like Paul in **Philippians 1:24-25**, that God can use me to help others, whether in my family or in Christ's church. However, if God can be more honored by my death than my life (cf. **Philippians 1:20**), then I'm willing to commit not only my spirit to the Father, but also my family and His church.
- C. If we want to die by faith, we are going to have to learn to trust God to take care of those we leave behind. We are going to have to do that even now while we are still with them. We are going to have to humble ourselves and realize we can't fix any of them anyway, only God can. We need to commit them to God as well as our spirits. Only then will we be able to lean on God. Only then will we be able to die by faith.
- IV. Encourage others to have faith in God and His promises as we die (**Hebrews 11:22**).
- A. When Joseph was about to die, he not only had faith that God would fulfill His promise and bring the Israelites back to Canaan, he encouraged the rest of his family to have the same faith. In **Genesis 50:24-26**, he reminded his family of God's promise to them. He made them swear

when they returned to the Promised Land they would carry his bones. That promise was passed on from generation to generation and Joseph's bones were indeed carried out of Egypt and buried in Shechem (**Joshua 24:32**).

- B. As I consider this, I can't help but think about Kelsey Harris again. At age 14, I have no doubt she had touched some lives, but not many. I had met her. To me she was simply the daughter of a friend. This past Monday, at age 16, she died. On Thursday hundreds of people traveled from 10 states to pay their respects, support the family, and remember Kelsey. Many of them demonstrated how they had been touched and changed by Kelsey through wearing a shirt that has been made with a quote from Kelsey while she was going through the painful treatments. Somebody asked her why she was always so happy. She said, "Life's more interesting when you're happy." Over 400 hundred people were at the funeral on Friday. Every one of them heard the gospel presented. Every one of them heard of Kelsey's faith. And I guarantee you every one of them were more moved by the sermon Kelsey lived for that last year of her life than by the more than 1000 sermons I've preached over the past 16 years. The reality is, when you are dying by faith, you may end up impacting far more people in a short amount of time than you did in all the years you were living by faith.
  - C. Let me ask you, do you think it was easier for her to maintain her faith as she consistently passed it on to others? I think so. If we want to die by faith, we need to keep passing on our faith to others even as we approach death. It may be by teaching the lost or comforting the saved. In either case, only when we encourage others in their faith can we really trust God. Only then will we be able to die by faith.
- V. Be obedient and faithful unto death (**Hebrews 11:32-38**).
- A. As the Hebrew writer wrapped up this chapter on faith, he talked about how several other saints had continued on obediently even unto death, sometimes even gruesome deaths that were the result of their faith. These didn't simply get sick and die. They didn't simply have a sudden accident and die. They were executed for their faith. How did they face it? They didn't turn their back on God when they were threatened with death. They hung on to God. He was their only hope. How much more if we are merely dying because it is the natural end to this life (cf. **Hebrews 9:27**) should we maintain that obedience unto death?
  - B. Sadly, though, when some Christians face death, they begin to question God. I'm not saying we aren't allowed any seemingly negative emotions around this—sadness, fear, even anger. And I'm not saying if we have those feelings that we should bury them. Let God know what's on your heart. He knows anyway, don't try to hide it from Him. Just read the **Psalms** if you don't believe me. However, don't think because you are facing death God doesn't exist or suddenly His will has become nonexistent. Everything that made you believe in God and believe God while things were good for you still apply even as you face death. Keep living for His glory as long as He gives you breath. Do this even if it is your faith itself that is going to cause the end of your life. As **Revelation 12:11** says, if we want to overcome our adversary we must not love our lives, even unto death.
  - C. If we want to die by faith, we must continue to live by faith, obeying God up to the very moment of our death. Only then will we overcome the enemy. Only then will we die by faith.
- VI. Know that you will be raised to a better life (**Hebrews 11:35**).
- A. We come full circle to where we began. This world is not our home. We know God's promises are coming. The reason all these Old Testament saints were able to die by faith is because they believed they would be raised to a better life. They were looking for a better country, a heavenly one (**Hebrews 11:16**).
  - B. This life isn't about this life. It is about preparing for the next. We are looking forward to a new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells (**II Peter 3:13**). That is, sin will not have tainted it. There will be no death or dying. There will be no suffering. There will be no cancer, no diabetes, no heart disease, no AIDs, no murder, no accidents, no natural disasters, no suffering, no pain, no loss. There will be God in His righteousness and us made clean by the blood of His Son.

- C. When we realize how much better the coming country is, why would we want to hang on to this one? If we want to die by faith, we need to remember how much better where we are going is. As **Romans 8:18** says, nothing is to be compared with that glory that is going to be revealed to us. Only when we grasp this will we look death in the eye. Only then will we die by faith.

### **Conclusion:**

As we conclude, we need to go back to the foundation for this lesson: Jesus Christ's example in **Luke 23:46**. The only reason the six points of this lesson have any meaning to help us die by faith is because Jesus led the way. He died by faith. He came into this world as one of us. He then died as one of us. As He faced His death, He asked that God remove the cup from Him if possible, nevertheless...and this is a big "nevertheless"... "not as I will, but as you will" (**Matthew 26:39**). He trusted God so much, He was able to say that it wasn't about what He wanted, but He would trust God's plan and follow it wherever it led, even if it led to suffering, death, and separation from the Father. On the cross He cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" He trusted God so much He was willing to turn over the plans of His life and His death to the Father. Because He did this, because He paved the way, He offered the sacrifice that allows us to live by faith and die by faith. He offered the sacrifice that prepares a home for us in the better country and offers us eternal life. The question is, are you willing to trust God with your spirit as much as Jesus did? Are you willing to turn your life, your spirit, your all over to God no matter where His plans take you, even when they take you to death? If so, you will be able to face that death by faith. If you haven't trusted God that much, why not start today and turn your life over to Him in penitent obedience, being baptized in Jesus' name for the remission of your sins (**Acts 2:38**)?