

"Have All Preparations Been Made for Your Death?"
2 Kings 20:1

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

Funeral for Larry Miller
14 August Anno Domini 1993

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.
Amen.

Dear Carolyn, Patrick, David, Michael, Darrell, other members of Larry's family, friends, and members of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church:

Everybody wants to live. That is why it is such a shock when someone dies, especially when death is sudden -- as Larry's was. Mingled with the grief and the pain of the loss is the realization that, at any moment, any one of us may find himself or herself face to face with death, and, that each one of us, sooner or later, certainly will. God has been gracious to our brother in taking him from this world to heaven, doing so without undue pain and doing so quickly. We can gratefully acknowledge God's goodness in this act, and have the confidence that Larry is with his LORD forever. At the same time, through the very suddenness of his death, God reminds us all, to make preparations for that day when we will face our eternal reward. So, on the basis of one verse in the Old Testament, we pray that you will be able to answer the following question in the affirmation

.... Have All Preparations Been Made For Your Death?

2 Kings 20:1 -- In those days Hezeki'ah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, `Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover."

These are the words of the LORD our God.

Thus says the LORD, `Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover.' These words were first spoken to King Hezekiah when he was deathly sick. They remind us all that there is no escaping our own need to prepare for death. That is because death is as sure as sin. When our first parents turned their backs to God in order to do their own thing, they died spiritually. They had cut themselves off from God Who was their only source of real life. The Apostle Paul wrote of the effects of Adam's sin like this: Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned.

We die because we sin. We are confident that God has taken Larry to eternal life in heaven -- not because Larry had no sin, but because he trusted in Jesus, his Savior from sin. And you and I cannot

hope for heaven ourselves because we are without sin and pure and holy in God's sight, but only because God forgives every sin through Jesus Christ, His Son.

We do not mean to say that death is always or even usually the result of some particular sinful act. Even the words of our text do not imply that. Concerning King Hezekiah, the Bible states: He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel; so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. Still, to that man named Hezekiah, with all of his personal faith, goodness, and love of the LORD, God said, Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover. Likewise Larry, whose body lies in rest, was not immune to death; and therefore, God is now speaking to every one of us with the clear question: Have All Preparations Been Made for Your Death?

With the warning of death, God gives the definite direction: Set your house in order. You and I must prepare for death, so we may meet it without fear and the danger of eternal ruin. Facing the certainty of death, it is foolish and suicidal to live our lives in this world according to our own desires, ignoring God's commands and promises, -- all in order to pursue our own pleasures and ambitions. It is a sad truth that we can get so wrapped up in ourselves and the attainment of our own self-set goals, that we not only fail to take our coming death into account, but actually invite God's wrath and damnation by the way we act and live. And day by day, month by month, year by year, we think and talk and live having no concern for the eternal consequences. We do that until a day like today comes and we face the reality of death. This is what God warns us against, as He tells us here: Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover.

How much is your spiritual house in order? If you received a phone call that the Queen of England was coming to your house, what sort of preparations would you make at home? Cleaning, painting, new drapes, scrubbing sinks, polishing furniture, and a hundred other things. If we get all concerned that human visitors in our homes might not see a speck of dirt or a clutter of personal effects lying around, how much more must we prepare to pass God's inspection; for He looks not at rugs and table and kitchen sinks, but He looks into the heart and the soul; and there is no escaping His scrutiny. Is your life, then, in order before Him? Can you open your heart and your soul to Him without fear, and confidently wait for His summons from this world, with the certainty that when you die here you will live with Him there as Larry is right at this moment? If you are or have been trying to shield yourself against His inspection, today, right now is the time to tell yourself the simple truth that there is no way to hide from Him. He knows what moves you to do what you do and say what you say; He knows if your house is in order or if it isn't -- and He won't necessarily wait until it is before He summons you from this life.

Knowing the vital need to prepare for death, then, we must also know HOW to prepare for it. Set your house in order, God says. And how do we do that with lives that get as messed up with sin as ours have been? It isn't any wonder that many try to push the thought of death aside until forced to face it -- because in each of us there is plenty to draw God's fire. Anyone who feels his heart and life are good enough for God in and of himself, is kidding himself; and he is in for a far worse shock than the sudden death of a loved one or a friend.

So, the first step in getting those houses of ours in order is to repent -- to recognize honestly that certain things done and other things left undone have been against God's will -- that words spoken have broken God's Law -- that even thoughts of anger, lust, hate, and adultery are enough to violate the Ten Commandments of God. So if you want to be ready for death when it comes, first ask

yourself now: Am I ready now, this moment, before God, to strip my soul and conscience bare and to confess my sins to Him -- everyone of them -- and to cast myself, without any illusions about my own goodness or merit -- completely on the LORD's mercy to forgive?

That, you see, is the second stage in preparation for your death -- in setting your house in order: To look to God, in faith, for forgiveness for our sins. If sin is the cause of death, as we have said earlier, then the only real remedy for death is God's cure for sin -- His full and free forgiveness through Jesus Christ, His Son. God sent Him into this world to save sinners just like you and me. That is what the Bible says. To accomplish that for you and me, Jesus went to die on the cross. He took every single one of our sins upon Himself -- that we might be forgiven -- that we might be prepared for the LORD when He calls us as He did with Larry last Tuesday afternoon. And Jesus, having endured death on the cross for us, rose from the dead alive again, in perfect and positive proof that forgiveness is secured for you -- no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, said, or even thought. Believing this Good News is the same as getting your house in order.

When God's Spirit gets through to you with the message of God's forgiveness for you, you will want to clean up that life itself, and to put out of your life those sins that God has already put out of His own heart and mind because of Jesus Christ. You will look to the LORD for directions and will gladly do what He wants you to do and live the life He has told you to live, loving Him above all things. A good life can not win God's forgiveness -- no life can be good enough for that. But when His forgiveness is given you as a free gift, a life will include prayer, worship at church, and reading the Bible will certainly follow.

No, your life and mine won't be completely free from sins of weakness -- not until the moment of death is past and you have left this sinful world behind you for God. But when you have set your house in order with real repentance and looking to Christ for life, then God also grants you the strength to endure through every crisis and problem of your life, with the full and unconditional assurance of eternal life in heaven.

It was 13 days ago, on Sunday, when an illustration was made in the sermon. I told the congregation of the official record book of this church -- a section within it designated for those who have died and received a Christian funeral. One column in that section asks for the cause of death. If you were to look at the causes in that column, you would find, cancer, pneumonia, stroke, leukemia, heart attack, and accident. On August 1st I informed the congregation that from now on I would be filling in that entry for the cause of death as "The Lord took him" or "The Lord took her." My guess is that not one of us here on that Sunday thought that the first entry of "the Lord took him" would be Larry's -- and little did we think that it would be so soon. But, here we are.

As you come nearer to your death each day, the joys and the sorrows of this world will grow so much smaller in proportion to the hope you cherish of life with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- AND with all those people, like Larry, whose faith in Him is the same as yours. And no one on earth will be able to shake that confidence or to destroy that assurance, because it is not built upon human feelings or strength, but it is founded upon the promise of God. Jesus has promised concerning those who believe in Him: I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Everybody wants to live. Even Hezekiah, as much in touch with God's mercy as he was, still pleaded for time in this world. God gave him 15 years more. In February of 1991 a loving wife and a faithful family pleaded with the LORD to grant Larry more time. God granted 2 1/2 years. Will God grant extra time for you or for me? We don't know. He makes no promises like that. But why would we really want it, when heaven is waiting for us? Rather than attempting to shield yourself against death all your life, only to have it overtake you anyway, doesn't it make sense to prepare now -- to set your house in order?

Have All Preparations Been Made For Your Death? I hope that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, each one of you will be able, this day, to answer, "YES."

God give you, by this Word, both comfort in the face of Larry's death, and the will to prepare for your own; so that, when He calls you from this life, you may, in the next world, meet your loved one and your LORD with joy! Amen.