



The title above comes from a conversation I had this week with Walter Rowbotham. Walter is 96 and has been a committed member of Sunbridge Road Mission for many years. He was telling me that every night he has a time of prayer before he goes to bed. In his own words, “when I’ve prayed, I put my head on the pillow knowing if I wake up in the morning it’s a new day with the Lord. If I don’t wake up, then I’m with the Lord in glory. That is how I rest at night.”

Walter is very aware that life is fragile, and yet many of us go about our busy lives in denial of our mortality. As coronavirus sweeps across our world, it forces us to acknowledge the reality Isaiah spoke of nearly 3000 years ago:

*All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. (Isaiah 40:6-7)*

All of us will face death, and just as there is wisdom in fixing the roof before the storm comes, so we would be wise to prepare for death before it arrives. One of the challenges with coronavirus, is because it is so infectious, once people are hospitalised with it, they are unable to have contact with friends and family. In Christ we can face death with confidence, and as your pastor I want to make sure, like Walter, you are prepared for death should it come. I would have loved to interview Walter, but given the current limitations sharing snippets of our conversation seemed the best way to benefit from God’s grace in his life.

With the current lockdown many of us are having to get used to spending time on our own, and it can be uncomfortable. When the busyness of our lives is stripped away, we find out what is left underneath, and that applies to our relationship with God. Robert Murray McCheyne famously said, “what a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more.” When the meetings and activities of Sunbridge Road Mission are taken away, who are we before the Lord?

Walter has got used to being on his own since his wife Olga died 7 years ago. Whilst he obviously misses her, this has been a time where he has come to treasure the Lord’s presence. He has been following the Lord Jesus for 69 years but said he has continued to mature spiritually over the years, particularly since his wife’s death.

He described the way he sees his home as the Lord’s house. He is aware that God is “here with me, both night and day,” and speaks to the Lord aloud throughout the day. This isn’t merely “me asking the Lord for this, that, and the other, it is a two-way conversation.” The Lord speaks to him in the silence. Walter told me that he is never lonely “because the Lord is always with me. He will never leave me nor forsake me.”

He told me that his Christian life had not been a “mountain top experience all the time, I have had ups and downs, but I’m on the mountain top at the moment. The Lord is with me all the time.”

Walter is prepared for death because he knows the Lord and looks forward to being with him. Many of us look forward to the prospect of heaven, but listen to how Jesus defines eternal life in John 17:3:

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Obviously, the isolation and uncertainty of coronavirus will bring challenges, but it also provides an opportunity to get to know the Lord better. Like Walter we can begin to treasure and enjoy the God we look forward to seeing face to face.

The motto of the Boy Scouts is ‘Be Prepared’ and Jesus says a similar thing to his followers. In Matthew 24:42-44 when he talks about his return, he commands us to:

*Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come...so you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

As Christians we are always to be prepared. Whether the Lord returns or calls us to himself before then it shouldn’t take us by surprise. As we think about preparing for what might lie ahead two components are particularly important. Being right with God, and right with others.

### **Right with God**

Walter told me quite clearly that he is not afraid of death, because he knows where he is going. He looks forward to the glory that awaits him. How can he be so sure of that? It isn’t because of anything he has done. It is because of what God has done for him: “I know that my sins are forgiven. It was all done at calvary.”

Hebrews chapter 10:27 says very clearly that

*people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgement*

The problem is not just our mortality, but that all of us will face God as our judge. We will have to give an account of our lives, and none of us even get close to living up to God’s perfect standards. So often we have ignored God and his ways and done our own thing instead. Our sin deserves God’s judgement. On our own, none of us are prepared to meet God, but listen to how Hebrews goes on in verse 28:

*Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

Jesus came to deal with our sin. This is what Walter means when he talks about calvary. At the cross, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for our sin. He takes the punishment our sins deserve. He faces God’s judgement on our behalf so that we can be forgiven, adopted into God’s family, and look forward to living with God forever. A Christian is someone like Walter who has turned to Jesus to deal with their sin and is now waiting for his return.

So often we put off getting right with God for a future day but Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 urges us to turn to him whilst there is still time:

“Remember him – before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

One way to think about the steps involved in trusting Christ is:

**Admit** that you have sinned. Acknowledge that you have ignored God, rebelled against him, and need his mercy.

**Believe** in Jesus as the Son of God whose death takes away your sin and whose resurrection brings hope of eternal life.

**Come** to Jesus for forgiveness. Ask him to deal with your sin and turn to follow him.

God’s promise is that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* (Rom. 10:13).

If you’re unsure of where you stand with the Lord and would like to talk about it, please give me a call on 07746967757. We’ll never be prepared for death until we’re right with God.

### **Right with others**

There is wisdom in putting things right with others before it is too late. So often we put conversations off for another day, but we don’t want to find ourselves unable to communicate with loved ones and regretting we hadn’t put things right sooner.

Obviously, this means putting practical things in order like sorting out our will, and talking with family members about funeral arrangements, but there’s other things to consider too.

Is there anyone we need to forgive?

Many of us will find that for all sorts of reasons we have relationships that have broken down. Perhaps there are family who are estranged, or old friends we fell out with years ago. We can allow barriers and bitterness to grow up, with the hope that one day it will sort itself out. The Lord commands us to forgive others, just as we have been forgiven, so take the opportunity to put things right where you can. It might be appropriate to apologise for things we’ve done, reach out in reconciliation, or to communicate to someone who has wronged us that we’ve forgiven them.

What do we want to communicate to those we love?

Too often things go unsaid, and we miss the opportunity to speak meaningfully into the lives of people close to us, but it doesn’t have to be that way. One lady, who was part of the church in Preston with us, wrote letters to her children whilst she was still able to, for them to open after her death. She made the most of the opportunity to communicate what mattered most to her, to assuring them of her love, and urging them to press on in the Lord.

I asked Walter what he thought about coronavirus, and he replied, “if I get it I get it. If the Lord takes me, I’ve got to accept it, and praise the Lord I’m with him.” I pray that we might all face this time with the same hope and assurance.

Love in Christ,

Pastor Matthew