

## LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF J. C. RYLE

### PART 5 – DEATH

*“You cannot live always: there must be an end one day. The last sermon will one day be heard; the last prayer will one day be prayed; the last chapter in the Bible will one day be read—meaning, wishing, hoping, intending, resolving, doubting, hesitating—all will at length be over. You will have to leave this world and to stand before a holy God. Oh that you would be wise! Oh, that you would consider your latter end!”<sup>1</sup> — J. C. Ryle*

#### I. The problem of death

*Genesis 2:16-17; 5:1-31; Job 7:9-10; 13:28; 21:23-26; John 8:44; Romans 6:23*

##### A. Its certainty

*“Look at the churchyards and cemeteries. One by one the people around you are dropping into them, and you must lie there one day.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“After all our scheming, and contriving, and planning, and studying,—after all our inventions, and discoveries, and scientific attainments,—there remains one enemy we cannot conquer and disarm, and that is death. The chapter in Genesis which records the long lives of Methuselah and the rest who lived before the flood, winds up the simple story of each by two expressive words: ‘HE DIED.’”<sup>3</sup>*

*“One man is the possessor of half a country. Another has not so much as a garden of herbs. And yet two paces of the vilest earth will be amply sufficient for either of them at the last.”<sup>4</sup>*

*“The infant will soon be a boy, and the boy a man, and the man will find grey hairs upon him long before he expects, and the grave will be ready for him probably before he is ready for it.”<sup>5</sup>*

##### B. Its cause

*“Settle it in your mind that the main cause of all the suffering you see around you is sin.”<sup>6</sup>*

*“From the crown of our head to the sole of our foot we are liable to disease. Our capacity of suffering is something fearful to contemplate. Who can count up the ailments by which our bodily*

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 238. *Holiness* was first published in 1877 (chapter 1-7), then again in its current expanded form in 1879.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 18. *Practical Religion* was first published in 1878.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-303.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Race* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2025), 165. *The Christian Race* contains a collection of several sermons preached by Ryle, the first of its kind, and was first published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1900.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

frame may be assailed?... 'Strange that a harp of thousand strings should keep in tune so long.<sup>7</sup> It is not, to my mind, so wonderful that men should die so soon, as it is that they should live so long."<sup>8</sup>

## II. The panacea for death

Genesis 5:21-23; Proverbs 11:4; John 11:25-26

### A. Scripture

*"There is but one fountain of comfort for a man drawing near to his end, and that is the Bible. Chapters out of the Bible,—texts out of the Bible,—statements of truth taken out of the Bible,—books containing matter drawn from the Bible,—these are a man's only chance of comfort when he comes to die... No dying man will ever get real comfort, except from the contents of the Word of God. All comfort from any other source is a house built upon sand."<sup>9</sup>*

*"I never saw anyone enjoy what I should call real, solid, calm, reasonable peace on his deathbed, who did not draw his peace from the Bible. And this I am bold to say, that the man who thinks to go to his deathbed without having the Bible for his comforter, his companion, and his friend, is one of the greatest madmen in the world. There are no comforts for the soul but Bible comforts, and he who has not got hold of these, has got hold of nothing at all, unless it be a broken reed."<sup>10</sup>*

### B. Faith

*"What can take the sting of death away?—There is but one answer to such questions. Nothing but strong faith can do it. Faith laying firm hold on an unseen Saviour,—faith resting on the promises of an unseen God,—faith, and faith only, can enable a man to look death in the face, and say, 'I depart in peace."<sup>11</sup>*

### C. Righteousness

*"I suspect that, with rare exceptions, men die just as they have lived. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is [a] holy life. They that live unto the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If we would die the death of the righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only; let us seek to live his life."<sup>12</sup>*

*"I appeal solemnly to everyone who reads these pages, How shall we ever be at home and happy in heaven, if we die unholy? Death works no change. The grave makes no alteration. Each will rise again with the same character in which he breathed his last. Where will our place be if we are strangers to holiness now?"<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> A line from the hymn, "Our Frail Bodies, and God Our Preserver," written by Isaac Watts. The full verse reads, "Our life contains a thousand springs, And dies if one be wrong; Strange, that a harp of thousand strings Should keep in tune so long."

<sup>8</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 333.

<sup>9</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 118-119.

<sup>10</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 120.

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke: Volume I* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 52. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Luke* was first published in 1858.

<sup>12</sup> Ryle, *Holiness*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

## IMPLICATIONS

### 1. On our contentment

*Philippians 4:11-13; I Timothy 6:6-9; Hebrews 13:5-6*

*"The good things of the world cannot comfort a man when he draws near death. All the gold of California and Australia will not provide light for the dark valley. Money can buy the best medical advice and attendance for a man's body; but money cannot buy peace for his conscience, heart, and soul."<sup>14</sup>*

*"Health and riches and honour and pleasures, houses and lands, and wives and children, what are they? How long do they last?—It is but threescore years and ten, and we must leave them all, and six paces of the vilest earth is room enough for us. Naked came we into the world, and naked must we return unto the dust, and carry nothing with us. Where is the difference between the rich and the poor in death? They both go unto one and the same place; the worm feeds sweetly on them both; it is but a short time, and you would not be able to distinguish between their bones."<sup>15</sup>*

### 2. On our evangelism

*Zephaniah 2:1-3; I Thessalonians 1:8-10*

*"We must be bold and decided, and uncompromising in our language. We would rather run the risk of offending some, than of losing any... We would realize the character given by Charles II of one of his preachers: 'That man preaches as though death was behind his back. When I hear him I cannot go to sleep."<sup>16</sup>*

### 3. On our urgency

*Psalms 95:6-11; Hebrews 3:12-13*

*"We are apt to shut our eyes to plain facts, and to speak and act as if young people, as a matter of course, never died when young... The first grave that ever was dug on earth, was that of a young man: the first person who ever died, was not a father but a son. Aaron lost two sons at a stroke. David, the man after God's own heart, lived long enough to see three children buried. Job was deprived of all his children in one day. These things were carefully recorded for our learning."<sup>17</sup>*

*"Trifle not with that precious gift, an immortal soul. Defer not the consideration of the matter to a more convenient season. Presume not on a death-bed repentance. The greatest business ought surely not be left to the last. One dying thief was saved that men might not despair, but only one that none might presume."<sup>18</sup>*

### 4. On our eternity

*Luke 16:22-23; Hebrews 9:27*

*"[Death] opens the door to judgment and eternity,—to heaven or to hell. It is an event after which there is no change, or space for repentance. Other mistakes may be corrected or retrieved, but*

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<sup>14</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 117.

<sup>15</sup> Ryle, *The Christian Race*, 116.

<sup>16</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 304.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John: Volume I* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 178. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Luke* was first published in 1869.

<sup>18</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 344.

*not a mistake on our deathbeds. As the tree falls, there it must lie. No conversion in the coffin! No new birth after we have ceased to breathe! And death is before us all.*<sup>19</sup>



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<sup>19</sup> Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 117.