

Preparing to Die Well

Lesson 6 – November 27, 2011

Opening Hymn: All the Way My Savior Leads Me (Blue Hymnal #505)

“What shall we do in heaven? Not lounge around! – but worship, work, think, communicate, enjoying activity, beauty, people, and God. First and foremost, we shall see and love Jesus, our Savior, Master, and Friend. I have been writing with enthusiasm, for this everlasting life is something to which I look forward. Why? Not because I am out of love with life here – just the reverse! My life is full of joy, from four sources – knowing God, and people, and the good and pleasant things that God and men under God have created, and doing things which are worthwhile for God or others or for myself as God’s man. As I get older, I find that I appreciate God, and people, and good and lovely and noble things more and more intensely; so it is pure delight to think that this enjoyment will continue and increase in some in some form, literally forever.” (extracted from J.I. Packer. *Growing in Christ*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994, 88-89.)

Question:

Have you watched a loved one, friend, or acquaintance in the final states of life? Do you think that they “died well?” Why do you say that? Did you watch them in any way “prepare” to die? What did they do?

Some Testimonies of Those Who Died Well

Gordon Yeager (age 94) and wife Norma (age 90) – died October 12, 2011

[KCCI TV Video](http://www.kcci.com/r/29528191/detail.html) (<http://www.kcci.com/r/29528191/detail.html>)

Death Is Not Dying (Rachel Barkey – age 37) – died July 7, 2009

[Death Is Not Dying](http://deathisnotdying.com/) (<http://deathisnotdying.com/>)

This video was taken at a Women’s Conference in Vancouver on March 4, 2009. Rachel died just four months later.

- 2:20 – 3:00
- 5:45 – 8:45

Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) – Thoughts on Religious Experiences (1844)

[Internet Archive](http://www.archive.org/details/thoughtsonreligi1844alex) (<http://www.archive.org/details/thoughtsonreligi1844alex>)

Archibald Alexander was born 1772 in Virginia to Scottish immigrant parents. He attended William Graham’s Timber Ridge College in Lexington, VA at age 10. Alexander was ordained in 1791 at age 21, and he pastored churches in Virginia and later Philadelphia. He received his D.D. from the College of New Jersey in 1810. He became the first professor appointed to the newly created Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812, continued as its “principal” instructor until 1840, and he remained there until his death. He was a prolific author and great influencer of other theologians including Charles Hodge. His book, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, was written and published in 1844.

Preparing to Die Well

An unnamed lady personally known to Alexander (Chapter XVI)

I recollect a sickly but pious lady, who with a profusion of tears expressed her anxiety and fear in the view of her approaching end; and there seemed to be ground for her foreboding apprehensions, because from the beginning of her profession she had enjoyed no comfortable assurance, but was of the number of those who, though they "fear God and obey the voice of his servant, yet walk in darkness and have no light" of comfort. But mark the goodness of God and the fidelity of the Great Shepherd! Some months afterward I saw this lady on her deathbed, and was astonished to find that Christ had delivered her entirely from her bondage. She was now near to her end, and knew it, but she shed no tears now but those of joy and gratitude. All her darkness and sorrow was gone, and her heart glowed with love to the Redeemer, and all her anxiety now was to depart and be with Jesus. There was, as it were, a beaming of heaven in her countenance. I had before tried to comfort her, but now I sat down by her bedside to listen to the gracious words which proceeded from her mouth, and could not but send up the fervent aspiration, "Oh let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like hers!" Then I knew that there was One who had conquered death and him who has the power of death; for Satan, to the last moment, was not permitted to molest her.

Observation and Commentary (Chapter XVI)

No arguments have ever so powerfully operated on my mind to convince me of the reality and power of experimental (*) religion as witnessing the last exercises of some of God's children. Some of these scenes, though long past, have left an indelible impression on my memory, and, I hope, a salutary impression on my heart.

[* Note – "experimental" or "experiential" religion stands opposed to an only "theoretical" religion. Banner of Truth Magazine online writes, "For Samuel Davies (1723-1761 – born in Virginia and became president of College of New Jersey in 1759) the absolute essentials in experimental religion are described in his own words as 'that thorough change of heart, usually denominated regeneration; that distressing conviction of our undone condition by sin, and utter inability to relieve ourselves by virtue of that strength common to mankind in general; that humble acceptance of Christ as our only Savior and Lord, by a faith of divine operation; that humbling sense of the corruption of human nature, and eager pursuit and practice of universal holiness'. These characteristics were certainly present in his life to a very high degree."]

Another unnamed lady personally known to Alexander (Chapter XVI)

Another lady, and a near relative of the former, I had often observed passing along her way, humble, gentle, silent, evidently not seeking to be conspicuous, but rather to remain unnoticed and unknown. She had a few chosen female friends, with whom she freely communicated, for her heart was affectionate and her disposition sociable: to these she poured out her inmost soul, and received from them a similar return.

...

It was evident that her health was slowly giving way, and that the disease which carries off nearly one-half of the adults in this land was secretly consuming her vitals. But she never complained, and seemed rather to become more cheerful as her eye became more brilliant and her cheeks more pallid. She was for a long time, after this seen occupying her humble, retired place in the house of God, and still went her accustomed rounds among her poor and

Preparing to Die Well

sick neighbors, while doing everything to render home comfortable to her restless, unhappy parent. At length, however, her strength failed, and she was obliged to confine herself to the house, and before long to her bed. Being informed of this, being her pastor, I visited her.

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She received me with an affectionate smile and a cordial shake of the hand, and said that she was pleased that I had thought it worth my while to come and see a poor dying woman. Not many minutes were spent in compliments or general remarks: she entered freely and most intelligently into a narrative of her religious exercises, which had commenced at an early period of her life, but expatiated [opened in discourse] in the sweetest manner on the divine excellences of the Savior; not as one who was speaking what she had learned from others or from the mere exertion of her own intellect, but as one who felt in the heart every word which she uttered. There was a gentleness, a suavity and a meek humility expressed in every tone of her voice, and the same depicted on every lineament of her countenance. Though when in health she was never reckoned beautiful, yet there was now in her countenance, animated with hope and love and religious joy—or rather peace—a beauty of countenance which I never saw equaled. It was what may without impropriety be called spiritual beauty.

...

I have often regretted that I had not put down, at the time, her most striking expressions, but the mere words could convey no more than the shadow of such a scene.

Additional Observation and Commentary (Chapter XVI)

If the foregoing was a sample of the deathbed exercises of every Christian, then would I say that his last days are his best days, and the day of death happier than the day of birth. This, however, is far from being a true view of the general fact. It is a select case—one of a thousand; upon the whole, the happiest death I ever witnessed.

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I once witnessed an extraordinary scene ... in a skeptic who neglected religion and scoffed at its professors till very near the close of life, and then seemed to be agitated and exhilarated with religious ideas and feelings, leading him to profess his faith in Christ, and to rejoice and exult in the assurance of salvation; and all this without any previous conviction of sin, and unmingled at the time with deep penitential feelings. Well, why might it not have been an instance of sovereign grace, like that of the thief on the cross? It is possible.

Andre Rivet (1573-1651) – France/Holland (Chapter XVII)

Andrew Rivet [was] a [Huguenot] Frenchman by birth and education, but [he] spent the greater part of his life in Holland, where, at Leyden, he was professor of theology. The learned need not be informed that in that age, when theology was more thoroughly studied than in any other since the apostles' days, Andrew Rivet had no superior, whether you contemplate him as an exegetical or polemical [characterized by controversy] theologian.

...

Rivet's theology was as sound as it was extensive. His great learning did not turn his head or lead him into heresy; but it will be seen by the following narrative, abridged from Middleton, how little value he set on all his learning, compared with the teaching of the Divine Spirit.

Having preached a sermon on Christmas day, he was immediately afterward taken ill with a constipation of the bowels. Of a beloved niece who attended on him he asked what she

Preparing to Die Well

thought of his disease, which he thought would prove mortal. She answered that she was of the same opinion, but that he had nothing to fear, having been long prepared to follow God when he should call, and that his life had already been long, and nothing remained to be desired but that it should be crowned with a happy and glorious end. "Thou speakest right," said he, "and I pray thee always address thyself to me with like speeches, and while my sickness continues depart not from me, day nor night. Promise me now that thou wilt keep a cheerful countenance, and that thou wilt speak nothing to me but what may administer joy and support to me. Although I fear not death, yet I fear the trial of those pains which I have always had a very sharp feeling of." Then, suddenly turning his speech unto God, he said, "Great God, thou art my Father; thou hast given me both life and a new life; thou hast taught me from my youth and I have declared thy wonderful works; forsake me not now in my old age..."

...

The pains of his disease were very great, but he continued to call upon God for help and for support. His expressions of his own sinfulness and weakness were of the most abasing kind. Confessing himself to be a miserable sinner, and casting away all confidence in any good thing which he had done in his life, he accused his own defects, and ascribed unto God all the good which he had ever done...

...

He received the visits of all who expressed a desire to see him, and would have none hindered from coming to him. "Let all that will," said he, "have access to visit me. I ought to give an example of dying to other men." And to those who stood around his bed he said, "Come, see a man who is an example of the great mercy of God. What shall I render unto him? All his benefits overwhelm me..."

...

He would not permit any clergyman who came to see him to go away without praying with him. It grieved him much that his wife, who was of feeble health, should be subjected to so much fatigue and watchfulness in attending on him. But as she was unwilling to leave him, he said, "Since thou wilt have it so, tarry; it is a pleasure to me to see thee. The Lord strengthen thee!"

...

His sufferings were exceedingly great, but he bore them with wonderful patience, and whenever there was the least interval of ease he was engaged in prayer or exhortation.

...

Though every day was expected to be his last, yet the strength of his constitution enabled him to hold out until Saturday, January 7, 1651. To the last he continued to spend his whole time, when awake, in prayer and in such discourses as we have recorded.

...

The last words he tried to utter were those of Paul: "I have fought a good fight," etc., and when others assisted him to finish them, he said 'AMEN'.