

Introduction

- I suspect this story is apocryphal, at least in this form:
 - a Christian had died. A little while after the funeral their minister was visiting just to see how his wife was doing...
 - during the conversation the lady came out with the following line...
 - "I know he's happy in heaven now that he's dead, but lets not talk about such a sad and distressing subject"
 - talking and thinking about death can be uncomfortable, difficult... even when we have the Christian hope of heaven
 - but I think it will be helpful for us, over the next few weeks, to spend some time thinking about death: about things we know, things we think we know, about realities we may not have fully dealt with
- There were a couple of things that made me think it would be helpful to spend a few weeks thinking about what practical help Scripture has for us as we (all) at some point or another face or have to deal with death.
- **First**, there were a number of conversations I've had with folk, people who are Christians, and yet who were expressing struggles with death:
 - with the prospect of their own death, with their own increasing frailty and the challenge of illness, and with the death of loved ones
 - (easy to slip into the mentality that because we know that somehow Jesus has something positive to say about death and grief; because of all those half-remembered verses about tears being wiped away; that its all actually OK/easy/sorted.... when the reality of our lives is that it often isn't - and perhaps for those of us who are doing OK at a particular point to not acknowledge the struggles others may be having)
- **Second** there was a funeral I conducted recently:
 - a Fintry parish funeral - a woman in her 50s - got to the grave side and the family got out a small portable CD player and after the coffin had been lowered into the grave, and I'd done the short service of committal, they put on some music
 - "Always look on the bright side of life", Monty Python
 - it was an incredibly stark reminder of how far most people "out there" are from a Christian understanding of death and dying...
 - it was one reminder, but there are others...
 - common talk of people, speaking of the person who has died, that they are "now with husband or wife", looking down on us from up above, at peace now...
- **What do we actually know to be true about the end of earthly life, and what lies beyond?**
 - and what hope do we have to share with those who do not yet know Jesus?
- Today simply raising the subject, and seeking to put our experience of death in its wider Scriptural context...

Where did death come from?

- Ultimately rooted in our sinful disobedience
 - early chapters of Genesis tell the story of the first sin, and how death entered the world... but we live today, both with the consequence of that first act of disobedience and with the consequences of our own sinful disobedience
 - Gen 2:16-17: **And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."**
 - Satan's deception, that sin's consequence is not death... Gen 3:4: **"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.**
 - and finally, sentence pronounced... Gen 3:19: **"for dust you are and to dust you will return."** and then Adam and Eve are thrown out of the garden, and separated

from the tree of life, Gen 3:24: After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Where is death headed?

- Headed for destruction (v.7)
 - (amazing imagery - the shroud that covers all peoples...)
 - will be swallowed up forever (v.8)
 - its consequences (tears) will be wiped away (v.8)
 - its disgrace (defeat, weaknesses associated with, ignominy) (v.8)
 - positively, it will be replaced with salvation (v.9)
- And all this at God's hand, his initiative, his action (v.1)
- Isaiah is the prophet who most extensively spoke in light of the coming Messiah:
 - and his confidence here in the end of death is firmly rooted in God's plans, which culminate in Jesus' death and resurrection, the coming of Messiah...

Application: Do not be afraid...

- "Do not be afraid" a refrain of Scripture... how many times is it said?
 - in all sorts of contexts...
 - but including the presence and prospect of death
- When God says "do not be afraid" to people, it is because he is at work...
 - and for our purposes, specifically, his work has defeated death, and is in the process of mopping up its consequences
 - so we do not need to be afraid - we are still in the in-between of the Kingdom, now and not yet...
 - death is defeated, and yet still fighting back/lashing out
 - we don't need to be afraid to think about death, with all its pain and upset, with all the fears it holds
 - and we don't need to be afraid when death visits our door that we will be swept away
- We will explore several specific dimensions of death, dying and grieving over the next few weeks:
 - and we do so, not afraid to face uncomfortable realities...
 - but confident that God is at work, that we do not need to be afraid, that he is the great healer, that he can work good even as we face that which is fearful and devastating to us - death and its prospect, for ourselves or for those we love and lose