

DEALING WITH DEATH

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement” (Heb. 9:27 KJV).

Solomon said there is **“a time to be born and a time to die” (Eccl. 3:2)**. While we may not like it, in our heart we know it is true. No matter what we eat, how much we exercise, or how often we go to the doctor, we are still going to die. No matter how forgetful we are, we will keep our appointment with death whether we want to or not.

Billy Moore had to deal with the reality of death more often than most. It all began in Georgia in 1974 when Billy was only 22. That year that he inadvertently killed a man in a robbery gone bad. He was arrested the next day, confessed to the murder, and was sentenced to death in the electric chair.

Billy read about death in the electric chair and discovered that some victims have their eyes pop out, their teeth shatter, their skin catch on fire, and usually defecating on themselves.

Faced with the certainty of death Billy confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and was immediately baptized.

Over the next 16 and a half years Billy received 13 stays of execution while 13 of his cell mates died in the infamous “chair”. This gave Billy the time to take a correspondence course and earn a bachelor’s degree from a Bible College.

Then a final execution date was set for May 24, 1984. He was told there would be no more appeals, no more court dates, and no more postponements. Billy decided to write a letter of apology to the family of the man he murdered. While he asked for their forgiveness he would understand if they didn’t. Since it was a Christian family, however, they did forgive him and even began writing to him every week.

Finally, Billy was then taken to the deathwatch cell for his last 72 hours of life. He was read an execution warrant and asked what he wanted them to do with his body. The area had the lingering smell of burning flesh and a strong antiseptic used to conceal it. He read his Bible and struggled to stay calm. Now it was only a few hours before his execution and the guards came in to shave his head. Just before doing so, however, the sergeant received a phone call from the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeal. The victim’s family, together with local groups, petitioned the court not only to stay the execution, but also to set Billy free. Billy had temporarily dodged death again. His final appointment is yet to come.

The process of setting him free took another 6 years but on Nov. 8, 1991 convicted murdered Billy Moore walked out of prison a free man. He is now married and an ordained minister who travels the world speaking with authority about the amazing power of forgiveness.

While there are many lessons we can learn from this remarkable story we will mention only two. First is the fact that forgiveness is absolutely essential. If we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven (Matt. 6:12). The way we judge others is the way that God will judge us (Matt. 7:1,2). Judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful (Ja. 2:13).

The second great lesson involves the certainty of death. If you knew that you would die in the next 24 hours would you immediately repent and be baptized? When would you do it if you felt your death was many years away?

There is an old story about the devil conferring with his demons about the best way to keep people from receiving Christ. Several suggested attacking the Bible, the Deity of Christ, etc. Finally one demon said he would tell them that Jesus was the Christ, that He conquered death, ascended into heaven, and will someday return to judge the living and the dead. The devil interrupted him and said: “We can’t tell them that because that is the truth”. The demon smiled and said: “I’m not done yet. After telling them the truth of the Gospel I would tell them that there was no need to get in a hurry. As long as we can trick them until waiting for tomorrow they will never do it”. This, as you know, is still being used as one of the devil’s most successful strategies.

Billy Moore prepared to meet God before he died, and so should we! Don’t listen to the devil. Today is the day of salvation! Confess Christ now!