



Dr. Jeff Hensley
Pastor
Kings Mountain
Baptist Church

Do not be afraid to speak of death

In Shakespeare's Hamlet there is a line that Hamlet's mother speaks in an attempt to console her son who is grieving over the death of his father. While Hamlet is looking dejectedly at the ground, his mother Gertrude says, "Do not forever with thy veiled lids seek for thy noble

father in the dust; thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity." To this Hamlet replies, "Aye, Madam, it is common." His mother then responds, "If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?" Although Gertrude's remark sets forth rather matter-of-factly and accurately the truth that death is a reality of life, her apparent lack of empathy toward her son's grief is striking, for the truth is that death is particular to all of us. It is truly particular or personal and we feel it deeply when someone we

love is taken from us. Yet, even though this is so, there is a strange kind of irony about death that takes place in the church, for although our faith forces us to face the reality of death; we still find it hard to talk about death in church. Oh, we do it at funerals, but most of us come to church to talk about life rather than death. We don't want any mention of failure, defeat or death at church. In fact, you would get the impression from some television preachers that the Christian Gospel is really about success, prosperity and achievement. In Matthew 16 Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. After

Peter made his famous confession that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus began to tell Peter and the others that he was going up to Jerusalem and would be killed. Peter responded with what sounds like anger. "This shall never happen to you!" In all likelihood, what Peter was most upset about was not Jesus' death, but his own, or at least about the death of his dream of what Jesus would do. Let's face it; it is much easier to follow the victorious warrior-king than it is to follow a suffering servant who chooses to die on a cross, and Peter did not yet understand what Jesus intended to accomplish.

Perhaps this is why Jesus' response to Peter is so breath-taking: "Get behind me Satan! (for) You are not on the side of God, but of men." Peter probably wanted Jesus to go to Jerusalem, become king, defeat Rome, and then usher in a golden age like the days of David, but Jesus had a bigger plan. Jesus intended to face death directly, because death is very much personal for all of us, but redemption is equally personal and this is what Jesus came to bring. Now I don't like to speak of death any more than anyone else, but I don't fear speaking of death, for I know that Jesus faced it and defeated it on my behalf. For this, I am deeply thankful.

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