

The DEATH PARADIGM

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The Death Paradigm—*the dark lens that hides truth and shades all we see*

Prior to the Lord's resurrection, death ruled supreme. Death conquered everyone: young, old, rich, poor, strong, weak, kings, commoners, individuals and nations. Everyone bows to Death. We may eat well, exercise, wear a seatbelt in a car and a helmet on a bike, but Death swallows everyone (Proverbs 27:29).

And we will die alone. Someone may sit at our bedside but dying is a solo act. The fear of death haunts us like nothing else. A dark cloud that casts a shadow of pessimism and fear over all we do. It's the source of endless human activity aimed at avoiding it, delaying it, denying it and finally, for a fortunate few, accepting it.

Throughout the day, every day, the news bombards us with horrific stories of death: pandemics, shootings, car wrecks, train wrecks, plane crashes, capsized boats, heart attacks, strokes, terrorist attacks, war, drownings and suicides.

All Things Will Die

Alfred Lord Tennyson captured the idea in his poem, "All Things Will Die:"

One after another the white clouds are fleeting;

Every heart this May morning in joyance is beating

Full merrily;

Yet all things must die.

The stream will cease to flow;

The wind will cease to blow;

The clouds will cease to fleet;

The heart will cease to beat;

For all things must die.

All things must die.

Spring will come never more.

O, vanity!

Death waits at the door.

Every Story Ends Badly

Besides physical death we talk about the death of a vision, a relationship, a marriage, a company, a career, hope, health, a church and the list could include every aspect of life. Viewed through the lens of death everyone's story ends badly. And that reality feeds the belief that painful experiences will ultimately get worse. If I'm watching the replay of a football game and I know my team will lose, I also know their best efforts will fail in the end. How can I be optimistic when I know the outcome?

In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon lamented the futility of life under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Viewed through the death paradigm nothing he examined mattered—not wisdom, skill, pleasure, possessions, rivalry, work, art, laughter, or accomplishments. It's all “vanity and striving after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14; 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 6:9).

The Eye Is the Lamp

The Death Paradigm is a dark lens that hides truth from our mind and shades all we see. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 6:22-23: “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Between two bookends of teaching about treasuring God in heaven more than money on earth, Jesus stated a truth: how someone views reality determines whether their heart is filled with darkness or light. A good eye allows light into the heart. A bad eye keeps it out.

The Bad Eye

The only other place Jesus mentioned a “bad eye” is Matthew 20:15 where he told the parable of the wealthy landowner who hired four groups of workers throughout the day. He promised to pay the first group a denarius^[1] for the day's labor. He promised each of the remaining three groups a fair wage. When the workday ended, he paid all the workers a denarius.

Those who worked throughout the day complained to the landowner that he had treated them unfairly. He said, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?”¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last?” (Matthew 20:14-15 NKJ). The “evil” eye here and the “bad” eye in Matthew six are the same.

The bad eye speaks of a lens which prevents a person from seeing redemption in every situation. It prevents us from seeing every loss, or potential loss, through the lens of Jesus' resurrection. John Piper described it this way: “It is the eye that is blind to what is truly beautiful and bright and precious and God-like. It is a worldly eye”^[i] This is the Death Paradigm.

A Black Backdrop

It is the black backdrop against which the Resurrection Paradigm stands in sharp contrast.

[1] A denarius was a Roman coin valued at a day's wages for labor. In 2020 terms it's value would be around \$75.

[i] Piper John, The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body. A Meditation on Matthew 6:19-24). Desiring God, January 29, 2003 <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-eye-is-the-lamp-of-the-body>