

INTRODUCTION

As I've been studying country music I've discovered there are four or five major themes. Country music is mostly about suffering. Two major themes are suffering because of a mean or ugly woman, and the suffering that comes from drinking. Here are some song titles demonstrating those themes. "Her Teeth Were Stained, But Her Heart Was Pure;" and "I Wouldn't Take Her to a Dawg Fight, 'Cause I'm Afraid She'd Win." And there are dozens of country songs about "drankin." "What Made Milwaukee Famous (Has Made a Loser Out of Me);" "I Can't Pass the Bar, and There's One on my Way Home;" "I'm Drinkin' Christmas Dinner Alone This Year;" "The Pint Of No Return;" "Warm Beer and Cold Kisses;" "Red Necks, White Socks, and Blue Ribbon Beer;" and winning my prize for the most creative title is "I'd Rather Have a Bottle in Front of Me Than a Frontal Lobotomy;"

Some of you can remember when we used to listen to music from a record player. Sometimes you could play records backwards and hear a hidden message. For instance, there was a rumor going around for years that Paul McCartney of the Beatles was really dead. If you played the end of Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds backwards, you were supposed to hear the words, "I buried Paul." Do you know what you hear when you play country music backwards? "I got my wife back, I got my job back, I sobered up, my dog came home and my pickup started!"

Hank Williams could write songs about pain and suffering because his short life was full of pain. Kris Kristofferson said Hank Williams was the only man who could make misery attractive. He suffered the physical pain of spinal bifida, and he struggled with an addiction of alcohol and drugs. On January 1, 1953 the #1 song on the country music charts was written and sung by Hank Williams. It was "I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive" and the words said: "Now you're lookin' at a man that's gettin' kind-a mad / I had lot's of luck but it's all been bad / No matter how I struggle and strive / I'll never get out of this world a- live." The last verse went, "If it was rainin' gold I wouldn't stand a chance / I wouldn't have a pocket in my patched up pants/ No matter how I struggle and strive/ I'll never get out of this world alive."

It's ironic that on the very day that this song became #1, Hank Williams died, January 1, 1953. I've visited Hank's grave in Oak Wood Cemetery in Montgomery, Alabama, and I saw these words engraved on his tombstone "I'll never get out of this world alive."

Hank wrote several songs about death and dying after his mother died. Although many people don't like to talk about death, you'll find the word "death" or "die" almost a thousand times in the Bible. One of the most important passages about death in the entire Bible is found in Hebrews 9:27-28:

"Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

Is it really true "you'll never get out of this world alive?" Let's notice three important truths found in this portion of God's Word.

1. THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

When the Bible says "It is appointed for men to die once" it is speaking of the absolute certainty of death. We live in a day of uncertainties. Nations rise and fall, the stock market goes up and goes down, spouses leave, jobs are cut back. Someone said the only two certain things are death and taxes. But there are many folks who have figured out how to avoid paying taxes, but nobody except Jesus figured out how to cheat death. It's the only true certainty.

Three buddies were talking about death and they were discussing what they'd like people to say about them at their funeral. The first said, "I hope people will say, 'He was a great humanitarian who cared for his community.'" The second one said, "Well, at my funeral I hope people say, 'He was a great husband and father who really cared for his family.'" The first two looked their friend and after thinking for a moment he said, "At my funeral, I hope people say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

Many people are like the third guy, because the subject of death and their own death makes them squeamish. Death is not a popular topic. You may agree with Woody Allen who said, "It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

So, you might as well face it—you're going to die. Try making the following confession: "I admit it: I'm going to die...and soon!" You can add, "unless Jesus returns before I die." The Bible teaches there is a generation of Christians who will not experience death—those who are alive when Jesus comes back to rapture the church. The Bible says, "I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...the dead will be raised, and we will be changed." (I Corinthians 15:51)

I believe Jesus is going to return before I die. Instead of looking for the undertaker, I'm looking for the Upper-taker! But nobody knows when He's coming back, so we must consider the truth that we will die—and soon. Even if you live to be 90, that's a short time compared to eternity. The Bible says, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:14) Have you ever walked out on a crisp, cold morning and noticed your breath created a little vapor cloud? It was there for a second, and then it vanished. In light of eternity, that's how quickly your life passes by.

I read about an African American pastor who was invited to speak at a high school graduation. Rather than giving the usual "live up to your potential" speech, he spoke plain words to them about preparing for death. He said: "Young people, you're going to die! You may not think you're going to die, but you're going to die! One of these days they're going to take you out to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt on your face, and go back to the church and eat potato salad. When you were born, you alone were crying and everybody else was happy. The important question I want to ask is this: When you die, are you alone going to be happy, leaving everybody else crying? The answer depends on what you do with Jesus." (James Emory White, *Your Life is Your Opportunity*, p. 88)

2. THE REALITY OF JUDGEMENT

This passage says, "it is appointed for men to die once ... and after that to face judgement." (Hebrews 9:27) Death is not the end, the Bible teaches that there is something after death - judgement. You won't miss your appointment with death, and you will have your day in God's court. Go ahead and make this confession: "I admit it, I'm going to stand before God!"

Whether you are a Christian, or an unbeliever, you will face God's judgement after you die. But there are two totally distinct judgements that will occur after death.

(1) Judgement for Believers

It will result in reward and rejoicing. If you are a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, you don't need to fear judgement, because you know the judge. The same is true with Judge Jesus. If you are in Christ, you have no need to fear judgement. Our great promise is found in Romans 8:1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Christians will be judged, but it will be a time of rewards and rejoicing. In the Athens Olympics, a runner from Baylor University, Jeremy Wariner, won the 400 meter race. He ran the best time of his life at 44 seconds flat. As he and fellow Americans, Otis Harris and Derrick Brew stood on the raised medal platform they wore garland crowns along with their gold medals. It was a wonderful time of rejoicing.

That's a picture of the language used in II Corinthians 5:10 that says, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (II Corinthians 5:10) The word for judgement seat is the word *bema*, which was the ancient word used for the platform in Athens that was used to reward athletes.

The Bible speaks of Christians receiving crowns at the judgement seat of Christ. Don't worry; it won't be a golden crown. The Bible says our crowns will be garland crowns, which is the word *stephanos*. We won't wear our crowns for long because the Bible says in Revelation 4:10 we will gather around the throne of Jesus and worship Him. "They lay their crowns before the throne and say, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory, and honor and power.'" (Revelation 4:10) But there is another judgment as well, and it won't be a time of rejoicing.

(2) Judgement for unbelievers

It will be a judgement that results in people being thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. The judgment of Christians will take place after the rapture of the church, but the judgement of unbelievers won't happen until after the seven year tribulation and the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

The Apostle John described the final judgment in these words: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence...and I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne...the dead were judged according to what they had done...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire...the lake of fire is the second death." (Revelation 20:11-15)

When Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, he chose to place the last

judgment on the front wall. In it, Jesus can be seen with His hand raised as if He is issuing orders. In the bottom of the picture, he painted people who were crying out in anguish from being sentenced to eternity separated from God.

Who will be at this judgement? Of course, we would expect the Neroes, the Hitlers, the Stalins, and the Ted Bundies who lived such evil lives. But Jesus indicated there will be counterfeit Christians there as well. Some good church members who never came to know Jesus will be there and they will be in shock. Jesus described the sad scene in Matthew 7:21. He said, "Not everyone who says unto me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven...Many will say unto me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name rive out demons, and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never KNEW you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

So, there is the certainty of death and judgment, but there is good news in this passage as well. It speaks of:

3. THE POSSIBILITY OF SALVATION

"Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:28)

We hear a lot about "the second coming of Christ" and I'm excited about it. There are hundreds of verses that teach the second coming, but this is the only verse in the Bible that employs the phrase "appear a second time."

Jesus came the first time to bear our sin—and He did that when He died on the cross. I Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree." When He comes the second time, He won't be coming as the gentle Jesus, meek and mild; He will return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He came the first time as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world; He will return as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah! When He came the first time, He was judged, tortured and killed by evil men; when He comes again, He will come as the Judge! When He came the first time He tasted death; when He comes the second time He will have the keys to death and Hades.

Do you know what happens to a Christian when they die? The body quits, but the true person, the soul and the spirit, go to be with Jesus. That's why the Bible says, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

There was an old man named Mr. Peas, who understood this Biblical truth, so he left instructions for this epitaph to be put on his tombstone: The body of Peas lies beneath this sod / But Peas ain't here, this is just the pod. / Peas shelled out and went to God!

Old Hank said, "I'll never get out of this world alive." Too bad, because the truth is that if you have Jesus living in your heart, you WILL get out of this world alive. Try making this confession:

"IN CHRIST, I WILL GET OUT OF THIS WORLD ALIVE!"

The full meaning of the gospel is *not* that Jesus died—that's just one part. The gospel says He was crucified, buried, and three days later He was raised from the dead. He tasted death for me, and He conquered it.

In John 11:25 Jesus made this amazing claim: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (John 11:25) Jesus says, "I've already experienced death, so that when you die, it'll be just like you're still alive.

I've attended hundreds of funerals through the years, but there is one funeral I will *not* attend: Mine. Oh, if Jesus tarries, I will have a funeral, but I won't be there. I hope you'll attend though. Can you imagine what it would be like? There will be a casket, and my empty shell of a body will be lying in it. But if you shake your head and say, "Poor David, he's dead, how sad!" I pray that God will give me the supernatural strength to sit up in that casket and look at you and say, "Nah, nah, nanananah, hey, hey, I'm alive!" Because I WILL be more alive than you are.

Actually, Cindy knows if die before her, I want my casket closed, and I want a sign placed on the casket that has the verse from Philippians 1:21. This will be my parting message to all who come to my funeral: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Don't be sad for me because I know when I die there are several things I'll gain. I'll gain the literal presence of Jesus. Now I see him as through a smudged mirror—I have to see Him with eyes of faith, but then I'll see Him face to face. I'll gain freedom from pain, freedom from worry, freedom from stress, freedom from fear. I can't lose. For me to live is Jesus—and to die is gain. It's like saying, "Heads I win, tails I win!"

CONCLUSION

Hank Williams wrote some great songs about living and dying. There is no question he knew enough of the Bible to be a Christian. After his mother's funeral he wrote a song entitled, "When God Comes and Gathers His Jewels." The lyrics of his song "The Angel of Death" sound like a sermon: In the great book of John you're warned of the day / When you'll be laid beneath the cold clay / The Angel of Death will come from the sky / And claim your poor soul when the time comes to die. / When the Angel of Death comes down after you / Can you smile and say that you have been true? / Can you truthfully say with your dying breath / That you're ready to meet the Angel of death?"

That's a good question, and I hope Hank could truthfully say with his dying breath he was ready to meet the angel of death. During the last few years of his life Hank was drunk most of the time. He entered several rehabilitation programs, but he never could kick the habit. It got so bad toward the end he wasn't allowed to sing at the Grand Old Opry or the Louisiana Hay Ride. There had been too many times he went on stage drunk, or didn't even show up at all.

After Christmas of 1952, Hank was trying to get from Montgomery to Canton, Ohio to be in a show with Homer and Jethro. The weather was too bad to fly, so he hired an 18-year-old taxi driver, Charles Carr, to drive him in his Cadillac. Hank settled in the back seat with his favorite

companion, a bottle of whiskey, and he was soon asleep. A policeman stopped the car in Tennessee for speeding, and when he saw Hank in the back seat, he said, "That guy looks dead." Charles assured him that he was only sleeping. Five hours later, Charles noticed Hank's overcoat has slipped into the floorboard, and he stopped to cover him up. That's when he discovered Hank had died. He drove him to a hospital where he was pronounced dead. It was on January 1, 1953, the same day that his song, "I'll never get out of this world alive" became the #1 country song.

Will we see Hank in heaven? I'm not qualified to say. If he turned from his sin and placed his faith in Jesus, he'll be there. But those who knew him said his lifestyle never reflected a personal relationship with Jesus. But without a doubt, he *knew* the gospel. How sad it would be to *know* the gospel, and even write and sing songs about it and yet never accept it!

But I don't have to worry about Hank—and neither do you. We only have to be accountable for our own souls, but we ARE accountable. Let me ask you, "Can you truthfully say in your dying breath that you're ready to meet the angel of death?"

How would you complete this statement: For, to me to live is...? Now don't give me the answer you think I want to hear, or the answer you *know* is right. What are you really living for? How would you fill in the blank? If you say, "For to me, to live is pleasure," then you have write, "to die is loss." Because death will bring the end of your earthly pleasures, and you're not ready to meet death. If you say, "For me to live is money," then you have to say, "to die is loss." Because you can't take it with you. There are no U-Haul trucks in a funeral procession! If you say "for to me to live is fame" then "to die is loss" because there will be no applause for you after you die. Even if you fill in the blank with something as good and noble as "for me to live is family" then you must say, "to die is loss." Because if you live only for your family, you have no assurance that you'll see them in heaven." The *only* eternally correct answer is to say, "For to me is live is Christ." Then you can say, "to die is gain." Because when you die you'll gain the prize of seeing Jesus face to face. You'll gain the promise of your salvation. That's why Christians are the only ones who can truly have hope in this old world.

A little boy was visiting a pet store to pick out a new puppy. He looked into a wire crate containing eight or nine puppies, and they were all cute. But there was one puppy that was wagging his tail with excitement. The little boy said, "I want the one with the happy ending!" And, my friend, when you choose Jesus, you choose the life with the happy ending.

OUTLINE

1. THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

ADMIT IT: "I'M GOING TO DIE*...AND SOON!"

**I Corinthians 15:51*

"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." *James 4:14*

2. THE REALITY OF JUDGEMENT

ADMIT IT: "I'M GOING TO STAND BEFORE GOD!"

(1) For Believers: Reward and rejoicing *II Corinthians 5:10*

(2) For unbelievers: Lake of fire and death *Revelation 20:11-15*

3. THE POSSIBILITY OF SALVATION

CONFESS IT: "IN CHRIST, I WILL GET OUT OF THIS WORLD ALIVE!"

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, event though he dies." *John 11:25*

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." *Philippians 1:21*

FILL IN THE BLANK:

FOR TO ME...

TO LIVE IS _____ TO DIE IS _____



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes