

# 4 funerals & a wedding | sermon

NEIL ATWOOD & LUKE TATTERSALL share sermon ideas for funerals and weddings

“Dearly beloved we are gathered here today ...”  
Are these words the easiest ones said in a wedding ceremony or funeral? Many people search the web for funeral and wedding sermon ideas. NEIL ATWOOD and LUKE TATTERSALL throw in some home grown ideas ...

## **Funeral - John 11:17-44**

*A funeral service is a profound opportunity for ministry of the Word. People are asking big questions, and while they are also very distracted and vulnerable and we can't hope to answer all of them in a half hour service, I've found this sermon adapts itself well to many funeral situations. While the passage is a tad long, I've read it (or had it read by one or two people) and simply cut out some of the other standard "Anglican" Bible readings out. Many people have commented that they found the passage very helpful as it presents a very human (as he grieves with the sisters) and a very divine (as he raises Lazarus) side to Jesus.*

The passage we have just heard is one that always touches me deeply. When I hear It, I am saddened at the situation, similar to that which brings us together today - the death of a loved one and a friend. But I am also encouraged because the passage speaks of the hope that it's possible for all of us to have. I want to share briefly with you some of the things that make the passage so meaningful for me.

## **Mourning/Grief**

However many times I read it, I'm always drawn into the sadness of the occasion. Death touches us all. There's no escaping it. And I find myself sharing the sorrow of these sisters, Martha and Mary, over the death of their brother Lazarus, as we today share in the sorrow over the loss of <insert name here>. And this passage reminds us that it is right to grieve over the loss of those dear to us. It is not something to ashamed of, or to hide. For we are whole people, not just flesh and blood. We are emotional and spiritual people, and it's natural to express our grief in a way that expresses our emotions and all parts of our personality. It's natural to remember... to sorrow.... to weep.

We see in the passage how Jesus wept. He wept then over the death of Lazarus. He wept over the sadness of the sisters and their friends. And Jesus still cares enough to grieve with us today. But he did more than just grieve. He went on to give his own life that we might have the chance to experience eternal life.

## **Fragility of life**

This passage also reminds me of how fragile life is. It is 2000 years since the raising of Lazarus occurred. 2000 years since Jesus lived and died for us. What has really changed in that time? Sure we live in a more sophisticated age. Sure technology abounds - we have computers and television and we've even put men on the moon. But at a basic level, what has changed? People are still the same. We are all a mixture of good and bad. That hasn't changed. The things that make life worthwhile, laughter and love and friendship - they haven't changed. The fact that life is so fragile and the certainty of death is still the same. Death does not call according to our plans and schedules. Lazarus was a relatively young man.... Death will not be ignored. So, today we recognise the inevitability of death, as we grieve the loss of . and we also recognise we have to face the inevitability of our own death one day. There is no escaping it. The Psalmist says:

The days of man are but as grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; when the wind goes over it, it is gone.

We each have to come to terms with the fragility of our own life. But , if that was all this passage says to us, it would be sad indeed. However, it is a joyful passage

because it also speaks of hope. For Jesus not only raised a dear friend Lazarus from the dead. He also spoke of the resurrection hope that is offered to us all. All of our sophisticated technology can never conquer - death. At best it can only defer it. Only God himself can cancel death. Only he can offer us the prospect of eternal life. And that is what Jesus does offer us. A life where there will be no more *death*, or mourning or crying or pain. An eternal life, with God in heaven, who is the source of life, the creator of all things! That is what Jesus refers to in the passage when he says to Martha:

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies,’ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

Jesus does not deny that we will all face death, but he does say that there is a life beyond death. A better life. An eternal life - for all who truly believe in him. Let me say that having eternal life in Jesus does not depend on how we die, in one sense it doesn't even depend on how we live. It depends on our attitude to Jesus in this life. Whether our belief in him is strong enough to show in our *lives*.

Certainly this occasion, this passage, does remind us that life is fragile. It reminds us that we must all face death. But it shows us how we can face death with hope, because it points us to Jesus Christ. As we come to know Jesus, to put our trust in him, we can take his words to Martha and apply them to ourselves.

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies,’ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

Let us pray ...

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### **Funeral - Psalm 23**

I think I could safely say that every person here this morning would have heard that Bible passage at some time before today.

It is a very popular Bible passage - and it is a passage that is suitable for occasions such as this because it speaks about trust in God through all situations - both good and bad.

It was written by a man named David - a man probably best remembered for his fight with the giant, Goliath.

What he wrote about in this Psalm was life - life as it really is. He did not try to pretend that life had no troubles or that life was always easy - far from it. David knew that in life there are good times - but there are also difficult times.

There will be times when we walk beside the still waters. But there will also be the times when we must walk (as David says) “through the valley of the shadow of death”. And there is even the time when we must face death itself.

But David doesn't shy away from those things - in fact he faces them with great confidence.

And where does that confidence come from? Is it that he is just a man of real inner strength? Is it just a lot of hollow brave talk?

The answer to that question is found in the very opening words of the Psalm:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

His strength and confidence comes not from within himself - but from God. It is because he has placed his trust in God that he is able to face life so confidently and is even able to face death without fear.

He can face all that life has to offer because he knows that his God will provide for him, God will guide him and God will care for him.

That is not a guarantee that life will be perfect. But it is a guarantee that God will be a firm anchor even in the most difficult times.

The Psalm finishes on a great note of hope:

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Those who trust in God as their Shepherd can be assured of his presence and guidance in this life and they can be assured that beyond this life they will be with him forever.

When we turn to the New Testament it is no coincidence that Jesus says that he is the good shepherd - he is the one in whom we are to trust - he is the one who promises to be with us in this life - he is the one who promises us eternal life if we trust in him.

Jesus is the one what God expects us to place our trust in. When Jesus was on this earth God said that - he said “This is my son. Listen to him.”

Jesus is the one who will guide us through this life. Jesus is the one who promises that he has prepared a place for all those who have their trust placed firmly in him.

### **Funeral - Ecclesiastes 3**

I think that every single person at some time in their life will find themselves amazed by the world that we live in. I think that at some point in each person's life we look at the world around us and we are in awe at what we see. Impressed by how big it is. Struck by how complex life is. Amazed by how insignificant we can seem to be in a universe this size.

It may be that you look up at the stars on a crystal clear night and are struck by their beauty and how space seems to go on forever. It may be that you are looking at a

butterfly or a rose in your garden and you are amazed by the complexity or detail of such a small thing.

It can happen when you look out on the ocean or stare at the mountains.

We live in a world that is beautiful and yet complex—immense yet so detailed.

And when we look at the world you can't help but think about how it got here. How did it come to be the way it is - who made it that way? Why do things happen the way they do?

In that Bible passage that was just read for us the writer talks about his amazement at the world we live in. He is amazed by the order that he sees in the world. He is struck by the balance that there seems to be. As he says:

There is a time for everything  
and a season for every activity  
under heaven.

He sees that things seem to happen in order. And we can see that too. The sun rises and the sun sets. The tide comes in and the tide goes out. The seasons come and go in order.

But he recognises that those things don't happen by chance. He knows that there is a God who stands behind this world. A God who gives us the order that we see around us.

He uses a great expression to describe the sense of awe and wonder that we can feel when we look at the world around us. He says this:

God has put eternity into the  
hearts of men yet they cannot  
fathom what he has done from  
beginning to end.

The writer says that God has put eternity into each of our hearts. He has placed inside each of us a sense

of awe and wonder about the world we live in - an understanding that there is more to life than what we see around us.

God has done this so that we will revere him.

I think that if we are honest with ourselves then we can say that we know that sense of eternity.

Back about 40-50 years ago there was a man by the name of Arthur Stace. He walked the streets of Sydney with a piece of chalk. Not many people knew his name - but many people saw his work. With his chalk he stopped on the footpath and wrote the word 'eternity' in the most beautiful writing. Many people were struck by this man's simple work.

What Arthur Stace did struck a chord with them. People who saw what he wrote knew that eternity in their hearts.

And if we are honest we would have to say that we know it too. We know that there is more to life than the last breath we draw. We know that this life is too complicated - too beautiful to just end.

God has put that sense of eternity on our hearts so we will seek him. He made us so that we could acknowledge him as God and creator.

God has not left us in the dark about who he is. He has made himself clearly known because as the God and creator of this world men and women should revere him.

God sent his Son, Jesus, into this world so that we could know God. When Jesus came into this world God said:

"This is my Son. Listen to him."

Jesus has come into this world so that the feeling of eternity that we have within us will make sense. Jesus has come so that we can know

the God who made this world.

Jesus himself said these words:

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life... (John 6:40)

#### **Funeral Message—1 Thess 4**

There's no doubt a mixture of emotions that we feel when we face the death of someone we love.

There is thankfulness for having had the pleasure of knowing this person. There is thankfulness among the members of his family for the love and the times that they shared together - thankfulness for love of a mother and grandmother.

But each of those emotions are tinged with grief. There will always be grief when we have to face the death of someone we have known, loved and respected.

But in that Bible passage Paul says that for those who trust in Jesus our grief is different. He says this to his friends:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

Paul is not saying that we shouldn't grieve at all. Christians should grieve when someone dies. It is a natural and normal thing to do.

We will be saddened by the death of a person if they've been close to us or an important part of our life.

What Paul says is that Christians shouldn't grieve like people who have no hope - because Christians have a wonderful hope.

The hope that Christians have is not just not just a desire about how they would like things to turn out. It isn't just wishful thinking - it is a certainty, something you can know for sure.

Christians know for certain that when this life ends they'll go to be with Jesus. Some people think it is arrogant or presumptuous of Christians to say that you know you are going to heaven.

But Jesus wants us to have that confidence - he wants us to have that certainty - because in the end it doesn't depend on what we have done but on what Jesus has done for us.

And how do you get that confidence? How can you have that hope for yourself?

Paul gives us the answer to that question in this passage:

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

How do you have that hope? How can you know for certain what lies beyond this life? By being in Jesus - by having your trust firmly placed in him.

Those who trust in Jesus can be sure that they'll go to be with him when they pass from this life.

As I said earlier today is a day of both sadness and joy. It is a day when we ought to grieve the death of someone who was loved deeply by his family. It is a day when we grieve the death of a delightful person who was a part of this church for many years. But we do not grieve like those who have no hope. Today we can acknowledge the hope that there is in Jesus. We acknowledge that this person was someone whose hope was in Jesus. We know that she is now in a better place because of that hope in Jesus. Our grief is mixed with joy and thankfulness because they are now with their Lord forever.

### **Wedding - 1 John 4:7-12**

If you were to ask the average person in the street what was the most important ingredient for a marriage to work my guess is that say love.

And I guess that most people here today would agree with that. We'd all agree there are other things that are important that help make a marriage work. Things like communication, honesty, faithfulness, not leaving the toilet seat up, etc. But love would rate as probably the most important thing.

But love is one of those difficult words to define.

What does love mean? Is it that deep feeling that you have inside? Is it when you go weak at the knees at the sight of that person you love?

That is the idea that our world has about love - that it is a feeling I have that it is an emotion deep inside me.

You only need to turn on the radio to realise that is how our sees love. Just about every song on the radio seems to be about love.

Mind you I'm not sure that people like Madonna and J-Lo have a whole lot to offer on the topic. But that doesn't seem to stop them singing about it.

The idea of love that you get in songs on the radio was summed up beautifully in the classic song by Wet, Wet, Wet. It was a song made famous in the movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

I feel it in my fingers  
I feel it in my toes  
The love that's all around me  
And so the feeling grows

And the chorus goes on to say:

You know I love you, I always  
will  
My mind's made up by the way  
that I feel

(I would like to stop at this point and make two apologies. First, can I apologise to all the people who had that song at their wedding. Second, can I apologise to all those people who are now going to be humming that song for the rest of the day!)

But that is the idea we get about love, isn't it? Love is a feeling that I have - a feeling down to my fingers and toes. I can say that I love you because I have made my mind up based on the way that I feel.

But that is not what love is. And that is certainly not the kind of love that is needed for a marriage.

The kind of love that you need for a marriage is the kind of love that gets talked about in the passage that was just read for us.

I am not sure if you noticed this when the passage was being read - but it doesn't have the word marriage, husband or wife in it.

But it is a great passage to have read out here today because it tells us everything we need to know about love.

Let me pick up on two things about love from this passage, two things that tell us about the kind of love that is needed for a marriage.

### **1. Love Shows Itself in Actions**

How do we know that God loves us? Is it because he has that twinkle in his eye? Is it because he says "I love you"? We know that God loves us because of the way he acted towards us - because of what he has done.

Let me read you two of those verses again:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God sent his Son into this world for us. God acted out of love. Even when we were not worth loving God sent his son Jesus into this world to pay the penalty for our sin.

God sent his Son so that we could be forgiven and so that we could have a relationship with him. He could not have done anything to show his love to us more clearly than sending his Son.

This is the love that you will have to show to each other in your marriage. You need to show your love in actions. It needs to be practical...

You can say "I love you" as many times as you like but unless it is shown in your actions then it is not really love.

## **2. Love is Self-Sacrificing**

The second thing about God's love is that it was sacrificial.

The love that God showed to us was costly love. It was love that

showed itself in self-sacrifice. There was no pressing need for God to show love to us. It's not as if he needed us. We were the ones who desperately needed him.

We were the ones who had sinned against God. Yet he was willing to take the first step – he was willing to make the move toward us.

And that is the kind of love that you will need in your marriage. You need to be ready to love – even when you feel you have been **WRONGED**. You need to love – even when it may cost you. You need to love in a way that put the interests of the other person ahead of your own.

When two people come together in a marriage they bring with them a number of *assets* to the new relationship. There is furniture, cars, cooking utensils, perhaps even property or some savings. Without a doubt the most valuable asset that you two bring to this relationship is the fact that you

know what it is to be loved by God.

You have a great reason to show love to each other. You know what it is for God to love you.

If you can remember how much God has loved you through his Son, Jesus, then it will give you a model for how they are to love each other, it will help you to not be selfish, it will help you to give priority to the interests of your partner.

Let me read those two verses again:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

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