

CAN DEATH BE A HAPPY EVENT? ON THE THEOLOGY OF DEATH WITH NATHANAEL EMMONS (1745-1840)

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ABSTRACT. Death is inescapable. This is an axiom. No matter how one might turn one's life around, at one point in life death will occur. That has triggered a number of perspectives, some more colorful than the others. In some peculiar cases the grim aspect of death turned the debates into despair. Some laugh at it, some do not. The Christian divines meditated on the subject of death and produced works of theological value under the name of "funeral sermons". Some of these sermons name the date, the place, and the name of the dead person/s. We can read what sermons were in the days of Nathanael Emmons, in the 17th century, and draw more or less useful ideas for our use today. Different times required different perspectives on death. Regardless of the times, death leaves an emptiness that must be filled either with hope and peace, or with desolation and anger. Nathanael Emmons presents death in many ways. It is an event that one must think about and prepare for it properly. It is not about sobriety, but about truth. Therefore, he argues in favor of death as a happy event that takes the soul of the believer from this world into eternity and the presence of God. On the same note, death should not be seen as a simple loss for those left behind, but as an opportunity for the renewal of one's values and morals. Death can be happy if considered in the right context. Faith in Christ transforms the terror of death into a joyous event, for the departed, as well as for the living. This essay describes the various ways Nathanael Emmons explains death and its consequences for the living and for the departed. The aim of the essay is to offer a new perspective on death, in the light of contemporary issues.

KEY WORDS: death, hope, sobriety, faith, God

Introduction

Death is an occasion for sobriety, introspection and a sense of darkness and separation. Deep thoughts about life and death, worth and value, gain and loss, all peruse the mind when confronted with the death of a person. One does not expect words like 'happiness' to be connected to words such as "death", especially in the context of a funeral, where darkness and respect for the loss are paramount. Yet, Emmons is quite able to explain what he means by "happy death" in the context of the Christian life. For him happiness is not only about the present life, but mainly about the future life. In fact, perfect happiness cannot be achieved in this life. However, perfect happiness is guaranteed through faith in Christ in the next life. Therefore, death is happy

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because it is the beginning of perfection, of perfect happiness, of fulfillment, of an eternity in the unaltered presence of God.

The title of the sermon makes a striking note with the occasion. He preached this sermon at the funeral of Mrs. Lydia Fisk, the wife of a fellow reverend, Elisha Fisk. The sermon is dated July 13, 1805. Emmons structures his sermon on two main points, followed by reflections, as a combination of applications and conclusions. Each of the two main points has a number of sub-points. The main verse for the sermon is Revelations 14:13, which refers to the rest and peace of the saved, once they pass from this life into eternity (Emmons, 1842a: 67). Emmons begins his argument by stating that the Apostle John received the vision about the afterlife with a precise purpose, namely to give assurance and hope to those who are still in this life. There will be a time of peace, there will be a time of rest, and there will be a time of perfect happiness. They will begin from the moment of death. The presence of God, Christ, and all holy beings will ensure a different kind of fellowship, a new world altogether. This is the point where Emmons begins explaining what a “happy death“ is (Emmons, 1842a: 67).

What It Means to Die in the Lord

Emmons begins his argument by stating that all humans are naturally in a state of alienation from God. There is no natural desire to draw close to God, through one’s own reason or emotion. The alienation is of such nature that it makes man to draw further away from God. On the other hand, argues Emmons, to be in the Lord implies reconciliation with God. The ontological peace is the result of being united by faith with Christ. Once peace with God and unity with Christ are achieved, the result is the right to have eternal life (Emmons, 1842a: 68).

A Conscious Belief in the Being and Perfections of God

Emmons looks at what man does in everyday life and concludes that there is a natural desire and inclination towards disbelief in God. It is not manifested against the idea of God, but against God as the creator, upholder and master of creation. This means that man is naturally inclined to reject God, rather than to accept Him as He is. This leads Emmons to believe that many of his contemporaries, which means, many who lived in England - defined as a “land of light”—lived their lives in utter disbelief and “practical infidelity”. He refers to their relationship towards God as “infidelity” because they are not of God and are not saved. By not knowing God, they do not know what God could do for them. Their lives were not only lived out in infidelity towards a God they knew, but whom they reject, but they did not know that God existed altogether (Emmons, 1842a: 68).

At this point Emmons turns his argument into a harsh discourse. He concludes his previous statement with judgement, according to which those “who live without faith must die without hope” (Emmons, 1842a: 68). This statement places a final sentence on the way people think about salvation, death, and the afterlife. Death can be in Christ or not. The renewal of one’s soul starts from the death of Christ (Emmons, 1842b: 86). From a Biblical perspective, eternal life depends on one’s belonging spiritually to Christ. The image depicted by Emmons has to do with extremes, exclusions, not middle ways and inclusions. There is no possibility for any man to die outside of Christ and reach heaven. This language is quite clear in Emmons. The warning is stern and harsh. The only possible way to get to Heaven is by awakening from “natural stupidity”. It goes together with a knowledge based awakening. Stupidity is manifested also through a vain lust for the earthly riches. These do not aid the spiritual life and death, in this context, is the event that relieves them from such desires (Freeman & Cary, 1820: 12). First there is a spiritual awakening from a state of spiritual death, followed or connected by a knowledge awakening, which implies that one will know that there is a God and that this God is righteous. This is moment that signals the beginning of another type of living. From now on deeds will have a different value than before, because God will judge the saved as His own. There will be no exemption from His judgement. In this context, deeds matter due to the new spiritual life of the believer. Yet, in spite of this context, the God Emmons describes is still merciful, but towards whom He chooses (Emmons, 1842a: 68).

The difference between the believer and the non-believer, according to Emmons, is that the later, in spite of being created by God, will not accept the view of a Judge Creator or a merciful Creator. Instead their hearts are filled with enmity, anxiety, and distress. Man can walk a path that leads to death, even if they do not know about it (Emmons, 1842c: 421). At this point, Emmons uses another cruel image of God, and describes Him as a sin-hating and sin-revenging God. These terms are unambiguous. The God Emmons describes is not to be trifled with. He will judge sin as it is, and will not be swayed otherwise. God set the definition of sin, therefore the rule of faith is shaped according to His design. The created is under the right of the Creator, and Emmons argues that God retains the right of choosing whom He will save. Since God is the creator of life, He has sole right to choose and judge (Emmons, 1842a: 68).

Death as Love and Belief in Christ and God

After God has made Himself known to a human being, there is still a reaction of rejection of God, in spite of the fact that He had already convinced man of

His worthiness. This time the rejection is not due to a genuine sinful rebellion, but because one's life is not in full submission to God. In other words, they do not feel worthy in relation to the standard of God's holiness. Emmons mentions a context for such a feeling, namely the sick-bed. This might appear as a righteous and meek relation towards the holiness of God (Emmons, 1842a: 69). God does allow for sin and misery to happen in the believer's life, but also happiness and holiness (Emmons, 1842d: 287). However, Emmons argues that such a state of mind and heart must change, otherwise death will remain a cruel, terrible event, connected to eternal destruction. Although some value their lives only through the carnal and sinful joys of life, when faced with death some look upon all pleasure as futile and irrelevant, in comparison with eternity (Harris, 1736: 250). The solution Emmons offers has to do with a genuine reconciliation with God. On the part of man there is a renouncement of enmity, which has the result of a spiritual union with God. This new reality brings a sense of belonging *in* Christ. The dread and terror of death fade, and happiness in the contemplation of His perfections ensue (Emmons, 1842a: 69).

Death as Love and Dependence on Christ for Forgiveness

Emmons argues in favor of a redefinition of death and he succeeds in the sense that it takes away the unilateral perspective on death—the end/step-forward/gate—and wraps a theologically beautiful argument around it. In this sense he presents death in Christ as an action/event that presupposes, first of all, love for Christ and second, a dependence on Him for forgiveness and acceptance before the council of God. In this context, death becomes not a simple pathway between worlds, but rather an experience constitutive to the human spiritual and physical world. The relationship between Father and Son is displayed through the actions of Christ, ultimately by His sacrifice on the cross. To this relationship chain man is attached through the love of Christ, and through Christ, the love of the Father. Man joins the chain and becomes part of the life of God. The love of Christ is possible only through faith in Him. This aspect is manifested in life as a constant, and although it may fluctuate due to earthly problems, it remains consistent in the faith of Christ. The end is death, but not any kind of death, but a death in Christ. As death is an ever-present event, being in faith, means the believer is in Christ. That is done through the power of the Savior. It was the death of Christ that allows for our death to be happy or hopeful (Emmons, 1842e: 294).

Love and death seem to be intertwined, due to physical aspects, such as the decay of the body. As death is inevitable, the love of Christ leads one's life even through death. In other words, argues Emmons, one who loves Christ in truth, will also be ready to die in Him. In such a relationship death loses its dreadful significance of something that plunges the soul into darkness or

non-existence. Death is not an end for the spiritual life, whether one refers to heaven or hell. All faculties are restored and sharpened. Reason still works, but better (Urijah, 1910: 156). It rather transforms the perception of death as something positive. Death becomes the clarion that calls the believer to the fulfillment of life. Here Emmons quotes the biblical text that refers to the sting and victory of death, arguing that the sting is the sin and the strength is the law. Both lose their power before the believer, because it is Christ that one is in. Since Christ defeated death, the believer does not gain the same power, but is victorious through the Savior (Emmons, 1842a: 69).

Death as a Well-founded Hope of the Favor of God and the Enjoyment of Heaven

Emmons considers the moment of death from the perspective of God, not of man. He argues that God knows man will come into the hour of death, the moments before the passing. In this context Emmons believes God prepares man ahead of time for the moment of death. This event may work in favor of what spiritual life may be (Furness, 1845: 6). Man needs light and comfort in order to see death as God sees it. The change of perspective begins with one's salvation and the teachings about the God's care for His children. The adoption into the family of God, which means that the believer belongs to God, together with the teachings about the future life and the glory of the kingdom of God are meant to be repeated and developed throughout a believer's life, in order to build a conscious and well-argued case that would stand before the terror of death. The examples he gives from the Bible, from the Old as well as from the New Testaments, are to show that man can smile in the faith of death, not because death is easy, but because it is not the end, but a milestone on the path to eternity (Emmons, 1842a: 70–71).

Why Those Who Die in Christ Are Blessed

Knowledge of the Works of God Build the Foundation of Faith

Death can act as an absolute destroyer of hope, of prospects, of future, and, for some, of life. Some prepare for death, others do not, but all can sense death as darkness and the ultimate stumbling block. Nothing can be done to anything or anyone once death occurred. Emmons defines death as a king of terrors, from the perspective of those who are not in Christ. Because none have seen beyond the grave, Emmons considers that for the dying man it is not the physical pain that matters most in the hour of death, but the "apprehension of an opening eternity" (Emmons, 1842a: 70). For the unsaved, the prospect of death brings along a consciousness of meeting the God of wrath, who punishes the sinner in the full power of His judgment. In contrast to the unsaved stand the saved, who react to the same event with joy and happiness. The desire of the saved is to get to the place beyond death, as he/she is convinced that heaven awaits. Here Emmons turns to the patriarchs who desired death with joy after a long and hard life. He also refers to characters from

the New Testament, such as Simeon, Stephen, and Paul (Emmons, 1842a: 70–71). This kind of attitude must characterize each believer, because they deal in truth, not fantasy. The conviction of salvation and forgiveness, transforms their concept of death into one of hope and joy, due specifically to the realities of the after-life.

Death as Blessing Due to an Immediate Entrance into Heaven

Emmons argues with the main verse of the sermon in order to show that there is no sleep or intermediate state between the death of the body and the entrance of the soul into heaven. Rather, there is an immediate entrance into heaven. This is also pointed out with the examples of Enoch, Moses and Elijah. The examples carry on with Lazarus and the “penitent malefactor” who was crucified next to Christ. Any other state, including that of “insensibility” would not prove happiness, but the contrary (Emmons, 1842a: 71).

The reasons Emmons lists for happiness are related to the physical and the spiritual realms. First, he argues that those who die in Christ and are immediately sent to Heaven escape all physical sufferings, as well as all the troubles they face in the earthly life. Humans do not suffer beginning with a certain point in their life, but they are born into suffering. In this passage of the sermon Emmons starts all his statements with the word “here”—as a symbol of bodily life and the entire life of a person—and describes the sufferings, which are “innumerable pains, infirmities, and diseases of the body”, the “seasons and all the elements... armed against them”, the “public calamities as well as personal afflictions”. He turns out to be quite poetic when writes “here they lived and died in a state which was designed and calculated to fill their eyes with tears, and wring their hearts with sorrow” (Emmons, 1842a: 71). The future life of the soul in the presence of God is guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Christ (Hayes & Nagelschmitt, 1914: 138). The “here” is contrasted with the after-life, in which all the sorrows, ailments, and pains of the earthly life are canceled and forever lost. Heaven will offer “pure and positive enjoyments”. The moment of death must be thought of in the light of the promises of heaven. These build themselves in practice of everyday life.

If Emmons defines the first blessing as an escape from physical pain, the second blessing is about the escape from natural evil. Take the holiest and most pious man that has ever lived on Earth, place him/her on Earth and, as Emmons points out, even if this man had the greatest love for God and fellow man, the adversity of the world would cause interruptions. Death is seen also as the avenger of broken law (Bethune, 1895: 187). These would eventually amount to a halt in the progress of holiness and love. Thus, one cannot reach the peak of what love could be, due to the troubled life lived out on Earth. However, once death has done its job, the soul is free to be fully holy and

fully conscious of the joys and benevolent affections of Heaven. To this Emmons adds that the relationship of the soul with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit will be perfect and uninterrupted. There will be no instinct to do evil, no desire to replace holiness with sin and there will be no falling away from grace. The intensely longed for perfect relationship with God and one another shall be achieved, without any shadow of evil within it (Emmons, 1842a: 72).

The third blessing is work related. Earthly chores are done in great distress, due to the curse God laid in creation after the fall of man. However, Heaven comes with an end for this kind of labor. However, work will not cease completely. Emmons believes it will be replaced with a different kind of work, and it will be related to the “holy and devout exercises” (Emmons, 1842a: 72). Emmons believes that the saints who will dwell in heaven will be in constant, perpetual activity. Perfect love and perfect admiration towards God will be manifested in constant praise. The saints will then be kings and priests, therefore it will be their duty to act in perfect submission and perfect obedience towards God (Emmons, 1842a). If this image is not a flattering one, and one might consider that there will be no time for one’s freedom, there is an aspect that is impossible to avoid. The interpretation of the after-life is, for the time being, altered by sin. Humans cannot conceive what life without can be. Therefore, the images of heaven must be considered in this light. They do not depict only the riches of Heaven, but appeal also to the issue of submission out of a perfect love, and responsibility towards heavenly matters as a privilege offered by God.

The fourth aspect of the heavenly blessed life has to do with the perfection of one’s nature. All intellectual capabilities were limited and affected by sin. Heaven comes with a better offer. Any good thought and holy desire one had on Earth will be expanded and reach “proper vigor and maturity”. This implies that all “natural and moral excellence” that was nurtured and implemented in the earthly life will become, no more, no less, than perfect. However, the next life will not provide equality. The souls will not be “equally great, equally good, and equally happy” (Emmons, 1842a: 72), because the justice of God will have rewarded each believer in accordance with their deeds. The justice of God will reward in such a way that none will receive more than due, but all be “perfectly great, perfectly good, and perfectly happy” (Emmons, 1842a: 72).

For Emmons, Heaven is open to those who died at any age. He lists the infant, the child, the youth, the man, the middle-aged, and the aged, as those who will have their natures made perfect. The natures will not be perfected as soon as they die, but in the moment they pass into heaven. At the second coming of Christ there will be no death for those who live in Christ (Shand,

1845: 172). There is no place for imperfection in Heaven, therefore the natures of those who died must be perfected. Emmons uses the story of the Apostle Paul who was taken into the heavens. He then argues that on Earth no man can fully comprehend what is the perfection or the maturity of the human nature. Man cannot know what the perfect mind and the moral perfections are. This will not be the case of those who enter Heaven. The perfect nature will fully understand the history of God's actions in the history of man and the Church (Emmons, 1842a: 73). The blessing, in this case, is the perfection of that was blemished and harmed by sin. This is the final reason Emmons names those who die in Christ as "happy" and their passing as "happy death".

Applications

Life and death are connected in the theological system that Emmons presents. Life is the time span in which one orders one's life and prepares for the moment of death. On the other hand, death is only a moment, but the crucial event that determines eternity. If in life one is a believer in the existence of God, death is the doorway to eternity in the presence of God. This is a defining desire and it should be considered while man is still alive. In this context, Emmons argues that infidelity towards God is stupid, as well as criminal. The only connection between this world and eternity with God is the faith that He bestows upon men. The other side of that eternity is a dark one, in spite of knowing all about God. The knowledge and desire to follow God is based solely upon the word of God. The Bible is a light, but when denied it leaves room for darkness (Emmons, 1842a: 73-74).

Darkness leads to despair and loss of hope. The deniers of God cannot find any rational explanation for anything spiritual, from the existence of God to the existence of the soul. For a Christian such realities are crucial, they are part of the reality of God's presence in one's life. Emmons believes that the more knowledgeable a man who denies God is, the more inner suffering one will have. Only a believer can approximate the pain of an eternity without God, by comparing it to the joy one must feel in Heaven. In this context, Emmons considers death as an antidote to infidelity. He argues in favor of a careful and intense thought process in order to achieve a favorable perspective on eternity (Emmons, 1842a: 74).

The second reflection of Emmons hits the core of false religion and false faith. He presents the case of those who "live soberly, walk uprightly before men, frequently meditate on the shortness and uncertainty of life, read the word of God, observe the Sabbath strictly, call upon God in private and in secret, and perform every external duty" with the specific purpose of "maintain peace of conscience, and banish the fears of death" (Emmons, 1842a: 75).

He labels such practices as “refuges of lies, which naturally tend to utter disappointment and despair” (Emmons, 1842a: 75). In such a context, death proves to be the ultimate destroyer of all false hope. In order to be safe and secure in one’s belief, a renovation of heart is needed, as well as reconciliation with God. Inner holiness is paramount for a secure life of faith and a healthy spiritual perspective on life and death. In other words, Emmons concludes that “no external duties, no selfish desires, no mercenary hopes of future happiness, will fit men for heaven”, however “nothing short of holy love and purity of heart” (Emmons, 1842a: 75) will prepare the believers for this life, as well as for the next.

Regardless of one’s life and endeavors in living with oneself and others, the most important moment to realize what true faith and honest living is or what dying in the Lord represents, is to actually see one die. It might seem macabre, but many have already seen others die before their eyes. Such an event can be a soul searching, eye opening experience. Peace with God is the result of Christ’s death, but salvation is the result of His resurrection (Gurley et al., 1865: 196). Emmons does not go against religion, but rather emphasizes that a religion that removes the fear of death, and replaces it with joy in the face of death, must be a good and desirable one. Death is seen as moment or an event that requires a thorough examination. Consolation is valid for both the ones dying, as well as for the ones who are concerned about their friends (Emmons, 1842a: 76-77).

Emmons mentions Mrs. Fisk only in the ending of his funeral sermon, as a natural conclusion and proof of application of his principles enumerated in the speech. He praises her for the way she conducted her life and for the way she prepared for death, in her case, an expected one. He also mentions that she is like a voice of God for the living, both friends and enemies of God. There is no time to lag behind and postpone preparing for death. Today is the best time, because tomorrow might be too late. The last advice is to accept the call of God, if one hears it (Emmons, 1842a: 76-77).

Death is an unescapable moment. Emmons argues in favor of thinking about this moment well before it ever has a chance to take one by surprise. Since all will die, it is well worth meditating upon it. Regardless of where one starts thinking about it, it is recommended for all to come to the conclusion that death must be considered in the light of who God truly is. Death has a positive and a negative connotation. The argument returns to the death of Christ. Due to his death, the benefits are given to the believers (Mason, 1870: 7). The positive connotation is that if considered correctly, death loses all terror and despair, thus becoming a beacon of hope and a healthy spiritual perspective regarding eternity with God. However, the negative connotation is that if considered improperly, it will only lead to sure despair and negativity, nihilism and an untrue perspective on eternity. The advice that Emmons

gives for all who ponder upon death is that the result must be oriented towards the word of God, the reality of God's justice and the work of Christ on the cross. A true reflection will lead to the inevitable conclusion that God offers hope and joy in face of inescapable death (Emmons, 1842a: 78).

Death in Other Sermons of Nathanael Emmons

Sermon III. Death without Order (Emmons, 1842a: 29–40)

This sermon was preached on November 7, 1802, at the funeral of Mr. Daniel Thurston. He was 54 years old and the biblical text used by Emmons is Job 10:22, but only the words “without order”. The main point of his sermon is that God does not reveal to men any design by which he allows death on Earth. However, Emmons argues that there is, indeed, an order, but that is only known by God, while humans can only understand that nothing escapes the sight of God, not even death's order. While sick, Job meditates on death and Emmons becomes the revealer of this ill man's thoughts. First, Emmons shows that God does have an order in distributing death among men, because death is much too important to be left without control. Death has no preference for age or any other category. However, it strikes only in accordance to God's plan. God is the creator of man, and this implies He is sovereign over man's life. Second, Emmons believes God has no regard for one's bodily strength. Third, God has no regard for one's public or other kind of social status. Fourth, death comes in many forms, and it has not a specific kind of means to kill a certain person. Fifth, God does not take into consideration the character of men. Sixth, there is no specific circumstance in which any man must die. Seventh, God does not consult men before taking one's life.

The second part of the sermon enumerates four reasons for which God sends death without a specific order. First, God proves to man that He does not need the aid of man in order to fully accomplish His plans. Second, God hides the ways He delivers death, to prove His control over creation. Third, God strikes the pride of man, by proving that humanity is and can achieve nothing without Him. Fourth, God hides the way He delivers death in order to make humanity think wisely about the hour of death and being prepared for it.

In this sermon Emmons manages to explain that there is no reason to fear death, even simply because it does not matter when and how one dies. Death is a certain event, it is inescapable, but meditation upon it, in the context of personal and spiritual experience with God, can aid one's understanding of the values that God upholds and explains throughout history. Emmons' sermon is on a positive note, because it aims to prove that this life is passing, but life eternal with God is the ultimate goal of one's faith.

Sermon XI. Hope in Death (Emmons, 1842a: 129–143)

This sermon was preached on October 14, 1814, at the funeral of Mr. Oliver Shepherd, who died at the young age of 27. The main verse of the sermon is Proverbs 14:32. He begins the sermon by presenting an apparent axiom, namely that the source of happiness of all mankind is hope. This is in spite of all the shifts and turns of life. At this point he splits people into two categories, the wicked and the righteous. They each have specific hopes. The wicked hope in the trivial values of everyday life, which invariably lead to perpetual disappointments and despair. When faced with death, these false hopes will give birth to unfathomable despair. The righteous, on the other hand, have their hope built upon the spiritual and divine objects. These are the ones that take the believer over despair, the most serious crisis, and are steadfast, even in the hour of one's death. The first point of the sermon is to describe the character of the righteous. The first distinction between the believers and the wicked is in the heart. It is not about understanding, rather than character. The wicked have no trace of the holiness, which fills the life of the believer. One of ways the believers exercise their character is by putting others needs before theirs. Thus they are helping others before they help themselves.

The second main point of the sermon is to prove why the righteous have hope when facing death. Regardless of the way the righteous die, the point Emmons makes is that they should all have a firm foundation of hope in the hour of death. In this context death is an eye-opener, forcing the mind to prospect the countless offences one has done, the justice of the broken law, and the ensuing condemnation. Emmons quotes the Apostle Paul regarding sin as the sting of death. He uses the same quotation in the "Happy Death" funeral sermon. The righteous' thoughts will not distract them from the hope of eternity. The thought of eternity, in spite of the countless unknown facts about it, will not stray the mind and the certainty of one's righteous faith. This is due to the implications that the idea of unity with the holy creatures of Heaven. It is a unity and a fellowship which builds confidence, instead of detracting the attention from the obvious benefit the righteous will have by death. In the end, what Emmons explains in this funeral sermon is that in the face of death the righteous look with hope to what lies beyond it, while the wicked shatter in despair at the prospect of the impending eternity.

Sermon XXIII. Death in the Early Life (Emmons, 1842a: 287-300)

This sermon has a slightly different form than the previous sermons. It appears to have been a funeral sermon delivered at a young person's passing. However, neither the name, nor the age is mentioned, except for the hint found in the title of the sermon. It is dated November 21, 1824 and the main verse is from 2 Kings 4:20. It seems to be one of the hardest sermons, due to the young age of the departed. Judging from his previous sermons, Emmons

seems to favor the view according to which children can enter Heaven from an early age. There is a message of hope in the ideas of Emmons, because he argues that God must have a wiser plan that includes some sort of purpose for these youthful deaths. Emmons tries to explain some of the reasons God might have to allow the death of the young. The first obvious point he makes is that due to the fact that a great number of children. He even give the example of a most accurate calculation of deaths before the age of 8, done by a European physician, who believes that roughly half the number of the total population on earth dies before this age. If the number is true, than there must be a plan behind it.

One of the first reasons God acts in such a way is to give the appearance of a dying world. The purpose is to make the living more alert to the real spiritual and moral values. There should be a lively endeavor towards rectitude and honesty, not depression and depravation. The second reason is quite harsh, because Emmons argues that God allows the great mortality of children in order to teach humankind about the temporal favors that lie in His hand, not in the hands of men. This idea pictures God as capricious and prone to kill in great numbers just to prove His sovereignty and right to own man. However, Emmons talks about how man changes the values and the right property of God. His conclusion is that had man worshiped God properly, the high mortality rate would cease. A rather light reason is that God takes away children to save them from future evils. There is no doubt in the mind of Emmons that the children who die will go to Heaven. Due to the environment some children are exposed to, God intervenes either to save the child's soul or the life's of others.

The next reason is, again, controversial, because Emmons believes that God may take the lives of young children in order to "moderate" the affections of their parents. God creates a reorientation of affections towards remaining children. The next reason is about how God protects the life of a child by not allowing one's parents to produce a worldly character. In order to preserve the purity of the soul God decides to take away the child from this world. If some parents decide to favor some children in the detriment of others, it appears to Emmons that God is entitled to take one of the children, in order to reorient the parents' perspective on their other children. When God takes away a child, He does it, argues Emmons, to safeguard the purity of the parents' soul. In order to avoid idolizing the child and thus create a distorted character, both in the child and the parents, God may decide to take the child. The last argument that Emmons presents is that the death of a child may be the occasion for the conversion of the parents. Death or the perspective of death is a turning point in the life of any human being.

Regardless of how harsh the reasons God may have to take away the children, Emmons points out that the soul of the dead child is not in any spiritual

danger. He argues that regardless of when a child dies, his soul is safe in heaven. The parents and the close family need to think thoroughly about the reasons the child passed, but the main point is that the soul of the child is safe in heaven. There is no need for any other deed or ceremony to aid the soul of the young child to pass into Heaven, as if the soul would be in a dark place, or a world between Heaven and Hell. The soul of the child is safe with God. It is not the same for those left behind. They can turn the event into something beneficial for their soul or into something that will plunge it into dark despair.

Conclusions

In the theological construct of Emmons death is seen from various perspectives. It occurs in various occasions and is caused by a multitude of reasons. However, for the believers death is only a moment that takes one from this world into the other. Death takes the believer from the world of pain and despair, into the world of Heaven and the presence of God. It is a moment for which people must prepare in due course. There is no proper age when men must think about death and prepare for it. Religion is not a proper environment for meditating of death. A proper consideration of death is the result of personal interaction with the teachings of the Bible and the personal interaction with God. These create a conviction based on the reality of life and the presence of God in this world.

Regardless of how God acts in the life of children or the life of the adults, those who are left behind should understand that God is the patron of life, the sole owner of the rights over men's life. Death is not a negative aspect of life, it is rather an eye-opening event that helps man re-orient one's values in order to better understand the spiritual values of God and the worldly values that must be placed in an orderly fashion with regard to the Creator. Emmons places high value on polishing one's life in accordance to the values of God. Death is not only the passage from this world into the next, but it is also an event that re-orient values, perspectives, morals, and even salvation. Reading his funeral sermons, one senses that in certain aspects he tries to explain too much, perhaps more than even the Bible describes, but in other he is placing his conclusions in good order. He apparently solved the issue of young children's souls, and places them in heaven, without a doubt. The death of children can be both for the good of the child and for the good of those left behind. He does not explain these aspects in the most acceptable manner for contemporary men, but he preached almost two hundred years ago. The religious, political, social, and even sanitary contexts were different. His sermons fell on a different kind of ears. Nevertheless, he was preaching in favor of hope, morals, salvation, and love, even when confronted with severe loss of life.

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