

# Things Our Pastor Taught Us

Reflections from Pastor Brian Brodersen

Over the past 6½ decades, Pastor Chuck Smith taught the Bible and preached the Gospel, but there were so many other things that he did: countless weddings; multitudes of baby dedications; visitations to homes and hospitals; and the memorial services that he conducted. If you ever attended a service that Pastor Chuck officiated, you know that he followed a standard outline, and his emphasis was always on the glory and the joy of entering into the presence of God. I can tell you exactly what he would have said if he were able to speak at his own memorial because he preached it hundreds of times over.

Pastor Chuck would begin by saying that the passing of a loved one is a time of questioning. When someone dies, so many questions come to the surface: *What is the meaning of life? Why does death occur? What happens to a person after they die?* Men have been asking these questions since the dawn of time; we know that because of a verse from Job, quite possibly the oldest book in the Bible: “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14a). In Job’s time, there wasn’t a clear answer. And as you read the Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament, they spoke of a time coming when death itself would be destroyed, but the message was ambiguous and incomplete. If we reference that golden age of philosophy and the great Greek thinkers—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others—we conclude that they came and went, but there still was no definitive answer to Job’s question.

From the philosophers, we move on to the scene in the little village of Bethany where two sisters were mourning the death of their brother Lazarus. Pastor Chuck could tell a story so wonderfully, couldn’t he? We would be brought to the moment where Jesus met Martha and Mary: “Lord, had You been here, our brother would not have died.” And Jesus said, “Oh, he will live again.” Being good Jewish young ladies, they said, “Oh, Lord, we know he will live again on the last day at the resurrection, but ...” I can imagine in their minds they are thinking, *That’s not helping us right now, at this moment.* And Jesus looked at them and said, “Martha, Mary, I am the resurrection. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live again. Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (paraphrases from John 11:21-25).

From this story, Chuck would launch into the topic of death. What is death? We define it as the consciousness

being separated from the body. But the Bible speaks of a different kind of death. From the biblical perspective, death is the separation of the spirit and the soul from God. Our bodies house the spirit; and the body is the medium through which the spirit expresses itself and experiences relationships in this life.

There comes a time, however, when the body is no longer capable of expressing the spirit, and it’s at that time that God steps in and delivers. Pastor Chuck would remind us of 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 where Paul tells us that when our earthly tent is destroyed, “We have a building from God, not made with [human] hands, eternal in the heavens.” While we live in this tent, this temporary dwelling place, we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed with that heavenly dwelling. And when our tents wear out, then God moves us into new buildings.

At this point in the memorial, Pastor Chuck would say: “Now, if you get up some morning, and you read in your papers that Chuck Smith died, don’t believe a word of it. Bad reporting,” he would say. “More accurately, Chuck Smith moved. He moved out of a worn-out tent into a glorious mansion that God has prepared for him.” When our bodies break down—when they are no longer capable of doing the things they are intended to—God, in His mercy, moves us. And as we think of Pastor Chuck over the last few years, his body was weak. Weakness was something he could not handle because it was something he had never known.

He remarked to his daughter, my wife Cheryl, sometime ago in the hospital that he had enjoyed perfect health for 80 years! Think of that! Amazing. My wife likes to call her dad the John Wayne of the Christian church because he was a man’s man. His pain threshold was so high that he would refuse Novocaine at the dentist. He would never tell anyone he was in pain. But in these last six years, his health began to deteriorate. He went through the stroke, back surgery, and knee surgery. Against all odds, he came out on the other side and did well. The doctors would tell him in advance, “You’ve had a stroke, and this is what it means and what’s going to happen. You must do this and if you don’t, you’ll never recover.” He ignored everything the doctors told him; wouldn’t do a single thing. His family would tell him to stay down and



Grandson Charlo Brodersen enjoys dinner with his grandfather Chuck and his dad Brian Brodersen, left.

rest. But he couldn’t; he loved being at church. In the last several months of his life, he said, “I get energized when I come.” All the love that he experienced coming back to him gave him the strength to keep going on.

But as he began to decline rapidly, he became weaker and weaker. He was determined to be here on Sundays, but we didn’t know from week to week if he was going to be able to preach. One Sunday I came in and said, “What do you want to do today?” He said, “Go for it.” I didn’t quite get what he was saying, so I asked, “Okay, I go for it, or you go for it?” And he said, “I’ll go for it.” I said, “All right.” And he went for it. His last Sunday, he stood and gave it all he had.

Yet his body—the tool that expressed his spirit—was declining more rapidly than we thought. I mentioned to Chuck Jr. how great it was that the Lord arranged for him to be with his dad when he passed away. He replied, “It really was the Lord because I didn’t plan to be there ... none of us thought he would go that quickly.” We knew the week before that it was getting serious, but we didn’t expect everything to escalate so rapidly. All that to say, as Pastor Chuck told us so often, that when the body is no longer able to be the medium, God in His mercy would

then relieve the spirit and bring it to Himself and clothe it with an eternal, heavenly, glorified, perfect body. The Lord delivered His servant and brought our pastor into glory. That is where Pastor Chuck is right now.

Cheryl reminded me of something he would often say: We want to get to know our Bibles because we don’t want to show up in heaven and be clueless. Pastor Chuck also talked about wanting to be a tour guide of sorts for everybody. So he is there ahead of us, getting to know the landscape, getting to know the fruits on the trees of life, and seeing his mom and dad, his sister and brother. He’s with David and Paul, two of his heroes. And we will be with him and them as well. We will be together again; a great reunion is coming in the future for all of us.

Of course, we grieve. Of course, we’re saddened. But we’re not sorrowing as those who have no hope because we know the truth. We know Pastor Chuck is with the Lord, and that is where he longed to be. And we have that absolute confidence: To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. ✍

*This is a summary of a message given at CC Costa Mesa on the first Sunday after Pastor Chuck’s passing.*



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