

The Light of Life in the Shadow of Death

Gospel Ministry at Funerals

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I. Introduction: Luke 1:76-79

II. Preliminaries

A. Pre-mortem ministry

- Read familiar passages
- Address subject of death; speak into ear
- Don't overstay; talk to spouse/children separately
- Talk about funeral service, songs, and texts (esp if unbelieving family)
- Be familiar with local funeral customs

B. Post-mortem ministry

- Arrange to meet with family next day
- provide template for funeral service
- In Ontario, meet with family before first public visitation (e.g., 2 Cor.4:16-5:8; John 11)
- Meet with family 15 min prior to funeral, read and pray (e.g. Phil.1:21-22)

C. Funeral Service

- Church Order, art. 65: "*Funerals are not ecclesiastical but family affairs, and should be conducted accordingly.*"
- The funeral service is not a worship service since it isn't called by *office-bearers* of the church and isn't a gathering of the covenant community, but is called by the *family* (with the church's support) is a gathering of family/friends of deceased.
- Welcome (Psa.16:9-11) and order

Funeral Service Template

Welcome
Song
Prayer
Song
Scripture Readings
Song
Text
Message
Song
Prayer
Words from the Family
Song

III. The Funeral Homily

A funeral homily is gospel preaching in a non-ecclesiastical service whose distinguishing objective is to administer hope and comfort to grieving family and friends.

A. Eulogy or Doxology?

- Eulogia/Eulogeo
- Boasting? (1 Cor.1:31; Jer.9:23-24; Gal.6:14)
- Examples to Follow? (Matt.5:16; Phil.3:17; Phil.4:9; Phil.2:14)
- How does one comfort?

B. Covenantal or Evangelistic?

- Acknowledge the covenant
- Don't manipulate emotional vulnerability
- Preach Jesus winsomely

C. Celebration or Lament?

- Acknowledge reality of grief and death
- Christian vs secularist construals of death

D. Heaven or New Earth?

- Penultimate vs ultimate hope

E. Miscellaneous matters

- Address homily to spouse/children or parents, etc.
- Adopt empathic posture to spouse, children, friend, co-worker, etc.
- Anticipate and address hard questions
- Intersperse stories of deceased in message (humorous, illustrative)
- Be sensitive to family dynamics and resist singling out a child
- Neither whitewash a person's life, nor highlight her shortcomings
- Lodge hope in the resurrection of Christ

Features of Funeral Homilies

- exposit text simply and pastorally
- anticipate and address hard questions
- admit pain of loss
- acknowledge reality of death
- honor memory of deceased
- recall personality and gifts of deceased
- empathize with grieving family and friends
- unveil Jesus winsomely
- anchor hope in Jesus resurrection
- locate hope in bodily resurrection

IV. Conclusion