

3 Life Lessons From Jimmy Carter's Cancer

I have been privileged to meet with President Jimmy Carter on two occasions. When I was a pastor in Atlanta, a church member invited me to join him as he filmed Mr. Carter's tribute to a donor whose finances helped fight river blindness. The former president was remarkably gracious with his time, and his spontaneous words of gratitude were both brilliant and sincere.

Some years later, I was part of a group that met in Mr. Carter's Atlanta office to discuss denominational missions. After the two-hour meeting was done, he recapped everything that had been discussed, in detail, without notes. Once again I was impressed by his intellect and gracious spirit.

Last week, Mr. Carter announced that cancer has spread to his brain. After describing his disease, he stated, "It's in the hands of God, whom I worship, and I'll be prepared for anything that comes."

How can you and I be "prepared for anything that comes"? Consider three life principles:

One: We can pray for those with whom we disagree.

I disagree strongly with Jimmy Carter's recent pronouncement that Jesus would have affirmed gay marriage. I also disagree with some of his statements regarding Israel. But I admire the sincerity of his faith and consistency of his witness. If we could pray only for perfect people, for whom would we pray? Who would pray for us?

To prepare for anything that comes, ask people to pray for you. Pray for them. Seek God's power and peace together.

Two: We are all mortal.

President Carter receives the best medical care available, but nonetheless finds his life threatened by disease. President Ronald Reagan suffered from Alzheimer's disease; Richard Nixon died after suffering a stroke. John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Unless the Lord returns first, every president, king, prime minister, and dictator on earth will die one day. As will I. As will you.

Jimmy Carter's condition is no more terminal than ours. There may be a difference in time, but not in result. That's why "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Mother Teresa: "Each of us is merely a small instrument; all of us, after accomplishing our mission, will disappear."

To prepare for anything that comes, admit your mortality and fulfill your mission today.

Three: For Christians, eternity is reward.

At his press conference, Mr. Carter testified, "I'm ready for anything and looking forward to a new adventure." His motto is clear: "Hope for the best, and accept what comes." Christians can face death with such optimism, knowing that eternity is reward (2 Timothy 4:6-8). When we remember that death is only the doorway to paradise, much that we fear in this world loses its power. Justin Martyr testified to the Roman Emperor, "You can kill us, but you cannot hurt us."

Charles Spurgeon: "Depend upon it, your dying hour will be the best hour you have ever known! Your last moment will be your richest moment, better than the day of your birth will be the day of your death. It shall be the beginning of heaven, the rising of a sun that shall go no more down forever!"

That day is coming for us all. Denying death does not change its reality, but living for eternity redeems it.

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