



### On Death

*By David Cook*

Robert Dessaix is the latest prominent person to give us advice about death and dying.

Like Kerry Packer before him, Dessaix reports that in 2001 following a heart attack, he died twice. ‘What happens is nothing, because there is nothing that can happen.’ When pressed by the interviewer, Stephen Romei, he goes on, ‘Look, I think we should accept that life is going to end forever...but if I am wrong, well, that’s fabulous! It’s a win, win situation.’

But Romei responds, ‘What if you end up in hell?’ ‘I don’t think anyone believes that any more’, replies Dessaix.

Remember Kerry Packer’s response to interviewer Ray Martin following Packer’s death experience: ‘The good news is there’s no devil, the bad news, there’s no heaven. There’s nothing.’

This is popular theology, there is nothing there, or if there is, it is only pleasant. Look at the Death notices in the newspaper, ‘Gone sailing’ or ‘he’s up there playing cricket with Bradman’, or ‘she’s up there looking down on us’. Every pastor has experience of grieving people expressing the belief that their loved one is now in a ‘better place’.

The typical Aussie response is to trivialise the weighty issue. Whoever said, ‘I like heaven for the climate, hell for the company’, was probably Australian.

All the above is true, on two provisos, namely that Jesus and the apostles were deluded, cruel liars; and that the Bible is thoroughly untrustworthy, a bad joke. These would have to be the case if nothing follows death.

But if neither of these provisos is true, then Dessaix’s win, win is a terrible eternal loss, loss.

The Bible says the Christian will experience:

1. Birth.
2. Rebirth.
3. Physical death, to be with Christ.
4. Accompanying Christ at his return.
5. Standing before the judgement seat of Christ, where there is the verdict of, ‘no condemnation’.
6. Being clothed with our resurrection body.
7. Living eternally in the new heaven and new earth.

That is our certain expectation.

When John Wesley was asked why his churches were growing so rapidly, he replied, ‘because our people know how to die well’.

There is a prayer in the Anglican Prayer Book, Litany service, ‘... from war and murder and from dying suddenly and unprepared, Good Lord deliver us’.

Increasingly we have the privilege of preparing ourselves for death. It is good to remind ourselves of our certainties so that the last lesson we teach our children and grandchildren is, how to die well.

The last time I saw a good friend and family member of mine, he was greatly encouraged by these words, ‘Remember that for the believer, this world is as close to hell as you will ever get’.

However, for unbelievers this world is as close to heaven as they will ever get. Only the believer has these certainties because central to our faith is Christ’s defeat of death. Only Christians

are experts on death and dying.

Either the Bible, Jesus and the apostles are right or it's Packer and Dessaix.

Both can't be true!

*David Cook was the former principal of SMBC.*