

## DEAD MEN WALKING

11/2003 By Mark Beard

**Text: Romans 3:23, 6:23 and 1 John 5:12**

**Perhaps you remember the movie from 1995, Dead Man Walking.** The storyline focuses on a Catholic Nun's work with a condemned man who is facing his own execution.

**Summarize Synopsis:** Honoring the request of a lonely and desperate man, Sister Helen Prejean writes to Matthew Poncelet, the condemned killer of two teenage lovers, and is wholly unprepared for the relationship which will follow. When the date is set for Matthew's execution, he asks Sister Helen to be his spiritual advisor and she complies. As she comes to see the terrified human beneath Matt's brash, unrepentant facade, Sister Helen becomes increasingly disturbed, not only by the terrible anguish he suffers during the long countdown, but by the rage of the victims' families, who seek retribution for their unbearable loss. With his scheduled execution fast approaching, she struggles for the life, the dignity, and the soul of a confused and angry man. In the end, it is her faith and her fierce courage that sustains her when she stands with Matthew and with the victims' families.

--<http://www.hollywood.com/movies/detail/movie/174152>

### **additional Synopsis:**

Sister Helen Prejean (Sarandon), a compassionate New Orleans nun, is the spiritual advisor to Matthew Poncelet (Penn), a vicious, angry and complex murderer awaiting execution. Her dedication is to help others, like Matthew, find salvation. But as she attempts to navigate Matthew's dark soul, she encounters a depth of evil that makes her question how far redemption can really go. Can she stave off the fateful day of execution long enough to save Matthew, or will she discover a truth that will rock the very foundation by which she lives her life?

[http://www.dvdelivery.com/dead\\_man\\_walking.htm](http://www.dvdelivery.com/dead_man_walking.htm)

The phrase “dead man walking” come from the scene which is played out each time a condemned prisoner begins his journey from his cell to the place of execution. The words “dead man walking” are called out as he walks along the corridors of the prison. Everyone knows that he will not be coming back. Though he is alive at that moment—because the sentence has been passed and the time has come for the penalty to be paid—he's as good as dead.

Every human being is under a similar judgment of death before they come to know Jesus Christ. Although those who do not know Jesus Christ may be “alive and well” they are in reality “dead men walking” because the judgment of God is upon them.

Yet, the good news is that when one who is condemned accepts Jesus Christ there is freedom from that condemnation and judgment. As strange as it may sound, the one who accepts Christ is free because of the death of another. To better understand this let’s look at what it means to live under condemnation and the sentence of death.

## **I. THE DEED HAS BEEN DONE AND THE SENTENCE HAS BEEN PASSED.**

### **A. For the condemned, guilt has been established.**

#### **This can actually be a good thing....**

True guilt is a valuable asset for living. It helps us when we hurt others or betray our own standards and values. God uses guilt to influence us to change our minds about what we are doing, leading us to repentance. If we never felt guilt, we would not follow rules or standards, obey the law, or have good relationships with loved ones.

-- Brenda Poinsett in Understanding a Woman's Depression. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 4.

### **B. For the condemned, the condemnation is warranted.**

**Oswald Chambers wrote**, “The essence of sin is the refusal to recognize that we are accountable to God at all.”

■ Oswald Chambers, Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 11.

## **II. THE CONSEQUENCES ARE BOTH IN EFFECT AND INEVITABLE.**

### **A. For the condemned, death “reigns” because sin reigns.**

**Romans 7:14-25** “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to **sin**. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is **sin** living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is **sin** living in me that does it.”

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of **sin** at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!” NIV

## **B. For the condemned, though alive, he is as good as dead.**

In the movie *Casualties of War*, Michael J. Fox plays Private Erikson, a soldier in Vietnam who is part of a squad that abducts and rapes a young Vietnamese girl. He didn't participate in the crime.

Afterward, as he struggles with what has happened, he says to the other men in his squad, "Just because each of us might at any second be blown away, we're acting like we can do anything we want, as though it doesn't matter what we do. I'm thinking it's just the opposite. Because we might be dead in the next split-second, maybe we gotta be extra careful what we do. Because maybe it matters more. Maybe it matters more than we ever know."

Death, for all of us, is a breath away. And the nearer death is, the closer we are to answering to God for all we have said and done.

-- Joel Sarrault in *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching* (Baker), from the editors of *Leadership*.

## **III. THE ONLY WAY OUT WOULD BE IF ANOTHER DIED IN HIS PLACE.**

**A. For the one in search of liberation, freedom is only a reality once the penalty has been paid.**

**Romans 6:1-7** “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” NIV

**Romans 8:1-4**, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of **sin** and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a **sin** offering. And so he condemned **sin** in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.” NIV

**B. For the person who has been freed, there is longer any reason to live under condemnation.**

**Paul writes in Romans 6:17-23**, “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What

benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” NIV

## **CONCLUSION**

Is it not foolish to be living in this world without a thought of what you will do at the end of it? A man goes into an inn, and as soon as he sits down he begins to order his wine, his dinner, his bed; there is no delicacy in season that he forgets to order. He stays at the inn for some time. By and by, the bill comes due, and it takes him by surprise. "I never thought of that--I never thought of that!"

"Why," says the landlord, "here is a man who is either a born fool or else a knave. What! Never thought of reckoning--never thought of settling with me!"

After this fashion too many live. They eat, and drink, and sin, but they forget the inevitable hereafter, when for all the deeds done in the body, the Lord will bring us into judgment.

-- Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Quotable Spurgeon*, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, Inc, 1990)