

Sunday, August 24, 2025

## The Fear Of Death

Ethan the Ezrahite asks this: “What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.” (Psalm 89:48). And the answer is, with very few exceptions (Enoch, Elijah, and those alive at the return of Christ), every man will die. You shouldn’t presume that you aren’t going to die some day. Age, strength, riches, power, influence, gender, intelligence, personality, desire...none of these things can deliver a man’s soul from the hand of the grave. Sometimes death comes suddenly and unexpectedly; sometimes it hovers for a long time. But it will come. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27). And just as death is universal, fear of death is universal (at least among the compos mentis population). The people of the world deal with this in myriad ways – denial, escapism, distraction, humor, defiance, avoidance, philosophies, brave talk, etc. But they still die. And under all the facade, they still fear dying. Of course, death is used in multiple ways in the scripture – biological death (corporeal death, the death of the body), spiritual death, eternal death. I’m focusing today primarily on corporeal death, and my aim is to show you loved ones who are in Christ that you don’t have to fear death. In fact, you can face it with joy and confidence. That comfort is found only in our Lord Jesus Christ, and I hope to show you that starting with the following passage:

**Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18)**

Have you ever considered the incarnation of Christ? It is singularly amazing. In the fulness of time, that One “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2) partook of flesh and blood. Why did He do this? He didn’t take on the nature of angels. Why did He take on humanity - flesh and blood? The text tells us that the children that His Father had given to Him are partakers of flesh and blood, so He had to partake of flesh and blood. Don’t forget that we are gifts from the Father to the Son. The Father gave us to the Son so He could redeem us and reconcile us to God so we could be with Him forever. But why did He have to partake of flesh and blood to do that? Well, one answer to that question is so He

could die! The Lord Jesus Christ was made in the likeness of men so He could die. He had to partake of flesh and blood so He could die.

To understand why He had to die, we'll need to go back to the beginning of things, so we can understand what death is and why it exists in the first place. Death was not part of the original creation. You won't find a single word about it until God threatens it as a punishment for sin, disobedience, rebellion – “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:17). This is the thing that the liar Satan said God was lying about – “Ye shall not surely die.” (Genesis 3:4). And it is the thing that was, in fact, put into place as punishment for their sin – “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:19). It started with Abel in Genesis 4, and in Genesis 5, we run into a genealogy with the repeated refrain “and he died.” Death is not just some biological necessity. It is a punishment. It is there because of sin. It was not part of the original order of things – it was not originally just another sad part of life. It is an intruder. 1 Corinthians 15:26 refers to it as “the last enemy that shall be destroyed.”

Romans 5:12-21 has some difficult things to understand in it, but it is clear that Adam introduced sin and death into this world, and that death is the result of sin:

**Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**(Romans 5:12-21)**

And again, in Romans 6:23, Paul tells us this: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Death is penal. It is the thing that is owed to us because of our sin. Sin is personified here as a king or a master that you work for, and what you have earned by all your hard work for that master is death.

As a man, Jesus was well acquainted with many sorrows, including death. In fact, another reason for His incarnation is so He could succor (provide help, relief, aid) us when we’re tempted. Death is fraught with many temptations, and He faced those without sin. He knows what we’re going through when we face similar temptations, and He can help us. He knows what it is to have a beloved friend die, for example. I’m speaking of Lazarus.

**He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep...Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him... Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world...Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (John 11:11, 14-15, 20-27, 32-44)**

This is a familiar story to us, but there are a few things I want to highlight. You'll see that it says two times that Jesus groaned – "He groaned in the spirit...again groaning in himself." The root word means "to snort with anger" and means "to have indignation on...to blame...to sigh with chagrin." This isn't just some vague feeling He was having - He was angry. There are a lot of theories about what He was angry about, but one that is compelling to me is that at least part of His anger was at the carnage that Satan and the Fall of mankind have left in this world. He looked upon their sorrow and suffering due to this death, and He was indignant that it even existed. But we can't leave it at that – He was also "troubled," meaning that he was disquieted or distressed. No doubt, He sympathized with Mary and Martha's grief and their suffering was very distressing to Him. Remember that He was a human being. Everything that a human is, He was...except sin. Emotions in humans are complex and are hard to describe with words, but you very likely understand how He was feeling at this scene, with a combination of anger, pity, sympathy, distress, and other emotions. And He wept! That's what humans do in emotionally charged situations. He knows what it is to weep, so He can succor you when you weep. Incidentally, the word translated "weep" when Jesus wept is different than the word translated "weep" for the others. Their "weeping" was sobbing or wailing aloud, where His "weeping" was silent tears. We can't make too big of a deal of that difference because Jesus Himself wept aloud in Luke 19:41, but if your weeping turns into prolonged blubbering, you've probably taken it a bit too far.

So, I say He was acquainted with death, and of course, He submitted to death Himself on our behalf. He voluntarily took death as a punishment to satisfy the justice of God, and as our substitute, He endured that punishment on our behalf. As we are united to Him, when He died, we are reckoned to have died. This is why He had to become flesh and blood. Death entered the world as a punishment for mankind's sin, so He had to face that punishment as a man. Otherwise, the children that His Father gave Him would not be redeemed. Otherwise, the debt remains unpaid. Otherwise, we remain at enmity with God. Otherwise, we would never be with Him.

When He died, He changed the nature of death for us. The Hebrews 2 passage above tells us that He partook of flesh and blood "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15). It tells us that through His death, He did two things: 1. He destroyed the devil, who had the power of death. And 2. He delivered us who were subject to bondage all our lives through the fear of death. These two things (Satan's destruction and our deliverance) are inseparable.

What you have to realize is that Satan, sin and death are all intertwined, and Christ therefore dealt with all those things when He died. John tells us that "he that committeth sin is of the

devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8). Paul tells us that “our Savior Jesus Christ...hath abolished death.” (2 Timothy 1:10). The passage above describes the devil (i.e., the accuser) as having the power of death. It certainly doesn’t mean that he has any kind of absolute power over that or anything else, because he’s always subject to the sovereignty of God. But it at least means that it is because of Satan and his deceit in the Garden of Eden that death entered into the world in the first place. That’s one reason why Jesus calls him a “murderer from the beginning.” (John 8:44). He’s continued his murderous existence as the prince and god of this world (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4). It also includes the fact that he tempts us to sin and then accuses us and terrifies us about the consequences of sin. And to make things even more painful, his accusations are right – outside of Christ, we DO deserve death.

But the passage also tells us that through death, Christ destroyed the devil. Of course, He didn’t annihilate him – Satan is still there. But He destroyed him with respect to his power of death. In other words, Christ stripped him of that power. He rendered that power null and void. All of Satan’s power of death is tied to sin. Christ took the sin away! When He did that by dying in our place, He took Satan’s power away; He took away any claim that Satan would have against us. John Owen puts it well when he says, *“he ordered things so, that this death of Christ should pull out that pin which kept together the whole fabric of sin and Satan.”*

Included in all this is deliverance. By His death, He “deliver[ed] them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” This is talking about the children of God who had once been living their lives in slavery to the fear of death. Fundamentally, people are scared of dying because it’s embedded in their DNA that death is a punishment and they’re going to have to answer for their sins. Yes, there are a thousand ways that people can dodge and mask that reality, but they know, and they fear. In fact, the louder a person is with mocking death or denying their fear, the more they generally are afraid. And these unsaved people SHOULD be scared of dying. Death for them is a terrifying prospect. The only people who have been delivered from that crippling fear are those for whom Christ has died – He didn’t just die to forgive our sins; He also gained the victory over all the consequences of sin, including death. The wages of sin is still death – but for us, it is Christ’s death, and He rose from that death in victory.

So, I’ll repeat what I said at the beginning of the sermon – you don’t have to fear death. Christ died to deliver you from the fear of death. For you, Christ has removed the sting of death. That venomous enemy can no longer do you any harm. “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” (1 Corinthians 15:54-56). The law shows us what sin is and what the

consequences are, and it declares you guilty – it shows us how strong sin is. But you see, Christ fulfilled the law for you. He dealt with your sin for you. He took it away. Sin is the sting of death, and He took it away. There's no need to fear. There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). When it comes to His children, He transformed death from being a punishment for our sins to being a precious thing in the sight of God that ushers us into His presence. What was once a penal entrance to eternal death has been transformed into "an entrance [that] shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:11). Only God could take a horrendous thing like death and turn it into a glorious blessing. And we'll see the full realization of His victory over death in the resurrection.

Now, that is all good and comforting, but the reality is that we are still in this vale of tears. Christ has overcome all these things and we partake of that victory now, but it will not be consummated until later. So, for example, we've been delivered from the guilt and the dominion of sin now, but not from the presence of sin – that part will come later. As long as sin and weakness and little faith and unbelief exist, we may have bouts with fearing death. I don't believe we'll ever be in bondage to that fear like an unsaved person is. But there will be times when we must face it. The general solution is to keep your eyes of faith firmly fixed on Christ, and on His Father, and on His Spirit. But I'd like to go over just a few specific examples of the types of fears people might have and say a few things about those.

1. There is the fear that you're not really saved. That you're a fraud. That you haven't really repented, and that you haven't really believed on the Lord Jesus. That you're not one of God's elect. That as you approach death, whatever faith you think you have had will fail, and you will be lost forever. These types of fears may come throughout your life, but I imagine that as a child of God approaches death, Satan would delight in tormenting them with such thoughts. Let me approach this by focusing on John 6:37 – "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." First thing's first - if there's any question in your mind as to whether or not you've actually gone to Christ, today is the time to deal with that. Go to Him now. Trust Him, and Him alone, to save you, now. Go to Him for the first time or go to Him anew – but whatever you do, go to Him. If you have gone to Him and you do trust Him, but you have nagging thoughts like "maybe I'm not one of God's elect," put that nonsense behind you. The doctrine of election is never used in scripture to cause you to despair – it's there for your comfort. If you've gone to Christ, you are one of God's elect. That's by definition: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." If you have gone to Him and you're worried that you're still not going to be able to cross the finish line, mark what He says here: "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." No wise. It's emphatic. It means "there is no possibility that you're ever going to be

cast out.” In his book *“Come And Welcome To Jesus Christ,”* which is an extended exposition of John 6:37, John Bunyan has these helpful and comforting words:

*But I am a great sinner, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I am old sinner, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I am a hard-hearted sinner, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I am a backsliding sinner, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I have served Satan all my days, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I have sinned again light, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I have sinned again mercy, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

*But I have no good thing to bring with me, sayest thou.*

*"I will in no wise cast out," says Christ.*

2. There is the fear of leaving loved ones behind. And this fear can go both ways – from the one leaving, and from the one being left. I don’t know that I would characterize it as a “fear” on Paul’s part, but he raises a similar issue in Philippians 1:23-24 – “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” To help here, I can only say that death is no accident. It is appointed by God, along with all the rest of our days. Job describes it like this – “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.” (Job 14:5). The same God who determined the day of your birth also determined the day of your death. The same God who determined what family, what church, what city, what time period, etc. that you would be part of also determined when to remove you from those things. You don’t have to worry. There’s no one more faithful to commit you and your loved ones to than God. “Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” (Isaiah 46:3-4).
3. There is the fear of the unknown. In the grand scheme of things, the Bible really tells us precious little about the details of what happens when a person dies. I do know that

Jesus is preparing a place for us, and that when we are absent from the body, we are immediately present with the Lord. (John 14:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:8). So, I have to believe that since you have communed with Christ while you're here on earth, heaven will be familiar and comfortable to you. It is the presence of our Lord and our Friend that makes heaven heaven. The more you commune with Him now, the more these types of fears will melt away.

So, death entered the world through sin and the deceit of Satan, but our Savior has conquered all those things. For those who are in Christ, we are also conquerors. In fact, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37). There's no more need to fear. Each of us ought to be prepared to die, and the time for preparation is now. Think often of death, heaven, eternity – but never, ever think of those things without also thinking of Christ.

**Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:51-58)**