

Death: Our Enemy — I Will Not Fear Pleasant Plains 3-29-2020 *Nick Angel*

- ***READ Psalm 23*** I don't believe there would be much disagreement if I made the claim that this Psalm that we just read together is one of the most well known passages of Scripture in the entire Bible. This Psalm is known for its stylistic beauty, its imagery, and the all-encouraging message that it gives to its readers. It is so well written that we are able to put ourselves right in the shoes of the one who is being led by the Lord to lie down in green pastures, to walk through the grave valley without fear, to sit in the presence of our enemies without anxiety, and to have our cups truly overflowing with blessings from God. We love this Psalm, and we ought to love this Psalm.
- However, it is my fear that the confidence and surety that this Psalm ought to give us and does give us in the moment we read it is often forgotten the moment we step away from the pages of Scripture and begin to live in the real world and experience the real problems that we face therein. We read this text about not fear though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and yet we actually find ourselves scared to the point that we are literally paralyzed by fear. We read this text and are filled with confidence while eating among our enemies, and yet we find ourselves in that moment and we're all but hiding under the table, so to speak. Friends, this ought not be so.
- The confidence that this text and many other texts gives us ought to be felt when we are reading these texts in peace and when we are in the heat of battle in one form or another. They ought to be felt and embraced when our lives are good, and they ought to be felt and maybe even more embraced when we find turmoil and difficulties surrounding us in this life.
- I don't know how you feel, but I feel as if 2020 has simply been a disaster so far in these first three months. So many tragedies have taken place, and many of those tragedies revolve around death. World famous basketball player and future Hall of Fame Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gigi, and a number of others were tragically killed in a helicopter crash in February. At the beginning of this month, tornadoes ripped through middle Tennessee taking the lives of dozens of people, some of whom I loved dearly. We are currently enduring a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of over 30,000 people with hundreds of thousands more suffering and trying to recover. Need I remind us that we are not even a quarter of the way through the year, yet?
- It isn't just that we have suffered great loss in these short three months, but this loss or the fear of loss has driven who knows how many people to act irrationally because of the fear that faces us. This has clearly been seen in how people began hoarding supplies at the onset of this pandemic in our country. How many grocery stores had bare shelves where toilet paper could once be found. How many people rushed to the stores to buy everything they could for themselves without considering the needs of others? All this is showing us is that people are either scared to death of the possibility of death or are willing to take advantage of other's fear of death, and it causes them to act in foolish ways.
- However, as Christians and followers of Jesus, we ought to have a different approach to the enemy of death...and that approach is that we should not fear it. To many people, such a statement sounds insane. *"What do you mean that you're not afraid of death or to die?!"* And yet, this ought to be our attitude as people of faith who believe in the God of heaven. In case you don't see things this way, let's open up God's Word together and see why I believe this ought to be the way we live as disciples. The Bible has much to say about death, so let's consider those teachings together. It might be good to simply begin by asking why it is that I have framed these thoughts in such a way that I state that death is actually our enemy. Why do I believe that death is the enemy of mankind?

I. Why Is Death Considered Our Enemy?

A. Before everything else, we can consider death as our enemy because Paul refers to it as such in **I Corinthians 15:25,26**.

1. Before we get into the theological reasonings as to why death is our enemy, let's first consider that Paul clearly states that death is our enemy. In **I Corinthians 15:25,26**, the Apostle Paul during a discussion on the importance of Christ's resurrection in relationship to our own (which we will discuss in more detail in just a few minutes), Paul writes, *"For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death."*
2. Yet, we might be left wondering what it means for death to be an enemy. Generally speaking, anything that is an enemy to something else is considered an enemy because it stands in opposition in some way, form, or fashion. Therefore, Paul's point is that death stands in opposition to Christ, and one day He will put an end to death and its power. Again, we'll talk about that in more detail in just a few minutes, but simply focus for the moment on the fact that death is an enemy because it stands opposed to God.

B. Death stands opposed to us because it is a result of sin and rebellion against God.

1. Death does not seem to have been a part of God's original design for mankind's experience in this life. There is no mention in **Genesis 1 & 2** concerning death except for mentioning death as a punishment for breaking God's commandment to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (**Genesis 2:15-17**) Everything that is described in these chapters, especially the presence of the tree of life (**Genesis 2:9**), seems to point towards life being God's desire for mankind so long as they dwelled in His presence.
2. Unfortunately, **Genesis 3** tells us of the origins of the first sin, trespass, and rebellion against the will of God as the woman took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and ate of it. Part of the pronounced punishment for this trespass was the introduction of life ending. *"You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."* (**Genesis 3:19**)
3. We can also read a couple of verses later that God recognized that men could continue to *"live forever"* if they had access to the tree of life, so He *"stationed the cherubim and flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life."* (**Genesis 3:22-24**) These actions taken by God have resulted in every person since that time dying on this earth, except for Enoch and Elijah who were both taken straight to the afterlife without suffering physical death. All of this simply goes to show that death was not part of God's original plan. He does not desire for our demise.

C. The Hebrew writer states that the power of death belongs to our adversary, the devil. (**Hebrews 2:14,15**)

1. Though, our loving Father might not desire our demise...we do have another being who certainly does and that is the evil one, the devil. In fact, it was he who was in the beginning and put temptation before Eve to go against the Lord's command to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve knew that her doing such a thing would lead to her death, and she even made that point to the tempter...and yet he contradicted God and said that she would know sure die...when he knew well that is exactly what would happen. (**Genesis 3:1-4**)
2. All of this matches up with what Jesus says in **John 8:44** as He identifies the devil as a murderer and liar from the beginning. The Hebrew writer further confirms this truth in **Hebrews 2:14,15** as he writes, *"Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death."* All in one these verses confirm our fears and death belonging to our adversary, the devil.

II. Why Do Men Fear Death?

A. Death is no respecter of persons.

- It does not matter where you are young, old, or somewhere in between - whether you are rich, poor, or somewhere in between - whether you are famous, a nobody, or somewhere in between - the old say remains true, death waits for no one. This fact of death causes us to at least pause and recognize that at none of us completely safe from death.

B. Death can come to anyone at anytime.

- This becomes even more of a frightening proposition when we include the fact that death can become our reality at any point in time in our lives. It isn't as if we are guaranteed any number of years before death comes. The young have died, and the old have died. Some have died in their prime, and some have died at old age with worn out bodies. Some have died while throwing caution to the wind, and even the most careful and cautious have succumbed. Death comes for all people, and is not waiting to be fit into our schedules. This scares us because it introduces true uncertainty into our lives.

C. Death is the final step of this life.

- We also fear death because it is the final step in this life. It means that what we have only ever known will no longer be our reality. Those things that we have often taken for granted: waking up, breathing, thinking, communicating, etc will no longer be taking place on that side of the veil. That proposition is quite unsettling for many people, and it might be quite understandable when we really begin to think about it.

D. Death affects those still living.

- We also fear death because we know that we will be leaving people behind. Though we might be gone from this life, there will remain a number of people who we love and have loved us. We will be leaving behind holes in the lives of so many. People who once depended on us will no longer be able to do so. Those relationships that we have poured years of work into will be no more. Just the thought of such a thing can send chills down one's spine.

E. Death comes with much uncertainty.

- Finally, people are scared of death because there remains much uncertainty about it. None of us have ever spoken with someone that we can verifiably believe has been dead and come back from that state. Now, I recognize that many have tried to make that claim, but I simply can't believe them when the proof just isn't there like it was in the case of Lazarus in **John 11** where he was so dead that he was beginning to stink! Since we don't have any eye witnesses to what death is like...we are filled with uncertainty and that uncertainty leads to fear.

However, though these aspects of death might be reasonable and true in regards to their facts, this does not mean that Christians and disciples of Jesus ought to be so gripped by the fear of death that we cannot function properly in this life. Now, I'm not saying that we would all live foolishly and invite death to our door. We would be wise to do our best to stay healthy and avoid dangerous situations in order to continue to live and serve the Lord, His people, and our neighbors, but we shouldn't do these things out of a desire to never experience death. Firstly, that would be a wasteful effort since we are all to day, but additionally it fails to live with a recognition of what God has shown us in the Scriptures that should lead us to be a people who do not fear death as the rest of the people in this world do. Let's finish by looking at four reasons God's people should not fear death as the world does.

III. 4 Reasons God's People Should Not Fear Death

A. Jesus's most often repeated instruction was for His followers to not fear.

1. Very similar to the first question I asked in this lesson and the first answer I gave...We should first and foremost not fear death simply for the fact that Jesus gave clear instructions to His

disciples that they were not to be a fearful people, and that must also include the overwhelming fear of death. In fact, at least eleven times in the Gospels the CSB records Jesus as having said word for word, *"Don't be afraid."* This number would grow if we included the rest of the Biblical text, and then it would grow even larger if we threw in other similar phrases such as, *"Do not fear."*

2. What does this show us? It shows us that Jesus is well aware of our propensity for being fearful in the face of danger or uncertainty. Again, just focus on Jesus and His disciples...how many different situations can we find in the Gospels where Jesus felt the need to address their fears and instruct them not to do such a thing? Being stuck in the sea in a storm...Them seeing Jesus walking on the water...At the transfiguration...After His resurrection...and the list could go on. We should not fear simply because Jesus says not to, but there has to be more than that, and there is more than that when we think from a theological perspective.

B. God has given us a "Champion" over death, the risen Jesus Christ.

1. The first point to consider is that God giving men Jesus is a sign that they shouldn't fear death because He was willing to go face to face with death, suffer a blow, but then Himself give a crushing blow through the resurrection. Jesus was sent here to this earth to be our "Champion" in the struggle against death, and this motif/theme/pattern can be seen through Scripture in various ways that point to Jesus, and the most well-known is probably the story of David (Jesus's ancestor) and Goliath.
2. In **I Samuel 17**, we find the Philistines having gathered against Saul and his army of Israelites. The Philistine champion name Goliath would come out and taunt Saul and his army, and the text tells us that the Israelites continually lost their courage and were terrified (**I Samuel 17:11**) by Goliath because he was such a mountain of a man, seemingly much larger than your average man today and even back then. He was confident in his abilities to kill anyone whom Saul might send out to fight against him. (**I Samuel 17:8-10**)
3. Yet, when David heard what was being said by this Philistine warrior he said to Saul, *"Don't let anyone be discouraged by him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine!"* (**I Samuel 17:32**) David was very much offended by what Goliath was saying, and he greatly desired to go meet this man to bring home a victory for the Lord and His people. I want us to notice that David was still considered a youth at this time (**I Samuel 7:33**), but he was entirely confident that the same God who rescued him from the lion and bear would rescue him from this Philistine. (**I Samuel 17:37**) David's confidence was strong in the Lord, and the Lord surely was with him as he took down Goliath and became the champion for Israel. (**I Samuel 17:48-51**)
4. Echoing this example, Jesus has stood up as our champion against a seemingly unconquerable foe, death. No man has ever on his own stood up to death and told it that it has no power over him...that is until Jesus broke the bonds of death and rose back to life. This was the crux of Peter's sermon in **Acts 2**, and it shows that God and His Champion Jesus have the power to defeat death. *"God raised Him up, end the pains of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by death."* (**Acts 2:24**) Knowing that the God we serve and Jesus our Lord possess this power over death ought to fill us with great confidence because we can know with certainty that death will once again suffer defeat when He returns to reunite with His people in the last day. *"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"* (**I Corinthians 15:54-56**) But what is this victory over death? It is that we will live again following our deaths here on this earth. Death will give way to eternal life & immortality!

C. We, as God's people, have immortality waiting for us in the next life.

1. The idea of having eternal life after death is something that people during Jesus's day were really catching onto. There is not a ton that is said in the Old Testament concerning life after the grave, but there are a few places where the idea is seen to be something that was at least generally understood. **(Isaiah 26:19)** However, it seems the teachings of Jesus led to the clear understanding of eternal life since the question the rich young ruler posed to Jesus was, *"Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?"* **(Matthew 19:16)** Jesus takes this question and affirms that eternal life is waiting for those who're willing to give up any and everything for Him. **(Matthew 19:29)**
2. Still though...our minds have a very difficult time understanding the concept of living forever since we all have experienced death in this life. Thankfully, we have **I Corinthians 15** preserved within the Biblical text for us to go think upon when we consider the transition we will experience from mortal life to death and finally to eternal life. In fact, the entire chapter is devoted to the idea of a resurrection to eternal life, and Paul has to first establish, as we noted earlier, that Jesus's resurrection gives us hope for our own resurrection. **(I Corinthians 15:12-28)**
3. We might and should gain great confidence from Paul's reasonings in that section, but there is still a question that Paul anticipates being asked later on in **I Corinthians 15:35**, *"But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have when they come?'"* Let's first notice that Paul states that this resurrection will only happen for those who have died which leads us to understand that death is a necessary evil to an extent in order for resurrection to happen. But notice later on that there will be a great change that takes place on that day of resurrection. **I Corinthians 15:42-54** states:

*"So it is with the resurrection of the dead: Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written, **The first man Adam became a living being**; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. Like the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; like the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body must be clothed with immortality. When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality..."*

4. All of this language is somewhat foreign to us because we live in a world where everything is temporary. Everything has an ending date. However, this language shows us that we can live without an overwhelming fear of death because our God has the power to give us a body that is incorruptible and allows for immortality! Instead of being fearful of the demise of this body, we ought to be thankful that Jesus has made it possible for us to live again and forever!

D. Death of the believer brings freedom from the pains and struggles of this broken world.

1. Finally, we should not fear death because, as I alluded to earlier, death is actually a point where we will gain greatly through our faithfulness to God. This is what Paul said in **Philippians 1:21-26** concerning his struggle between remaining in this life or moving on:

*“For me, to live is Christ and **to die is gain**. Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don’t know which one I should choose. I am torn between the two. **I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better**— but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that, because of my coming to you again, your boasting in Christ Jesus may abound.”*

2. Paul’s reasoning for moving on being far better must be because He would be with Jesus, in His presence, and enjoying perfected fellowship. But there is also a component of being able to shake off the pains and sufferings of this life. Paul was certainly someone who had experienced his unfair share of such, and therefore it makes sense that he would long to move onto something better. Paul’s true heart on the matter is surely seen in what he wrote to the Corinthians in **II Corinthians 4:16-5:10**:

“Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if our earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal dwelling in the heavens, not made with hands. Indeed, we groan in this tent, desiring to put on our heavenly dwelling, since, when we have taken it off, we will not be found naked. Indeed, we groan while we are in this tent, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment. So we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. In fact, we are confident, and we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

3. We don’t fear death because our faith allows us to look forward to that day with anticipation when we are able to no longer exist in a body where we will suffer the pains that are brought on by living in a sinful world. For this reason, we don’t fear death...but as we mature and grow in Christ, we might actually begin to welcome the thought of it.

Friends, I am all too familiar with the pain that we feel by the sting of death in this life. I have cried more this month than I have cried in a long time, maybe ever, because I have lost friends who were taken in the prime of their lives. Death hurts, and quite frankly I hate it, and I know God hates it, too, which is why His Son will come back one day and defeat it once and for all. I so long for that day when there will no longer be tears because of death, and I hope you look forward to that day, as well. It is not here yet, but until that time may we all take to heart the words of King David as he wrote about the Lord being his Stronghold in the face of uncertainty and death in this life. *“The Lord is my Light and my Salvation — whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — whom should I dread?...I am certain that I will see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the Lord.”* (Psalm 27:1,13,14)

I know none of us desire to lose friends and family to death and none of us what to leave friends and family behind in our own deaths, but dear brethren may we truly wait and trust in the Lord by recognizing that death is simply the threshold we must cross to enter into our Lord’s presence. May He strengthen us by this knowledge and keep our faiths strong and secured in Him until the end. Though we die friends...we shall live again and forever through the power of our God!