

WHY YOU DON'T NEED TO FEAR DEATH

John 11:17-28

The Gospel of John – Week

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. **Jim Rohn** “Life is the struggle to keep death at a reasonable distance.”
2. Recently I’ve been reminded of the reality of death. Two of my friends from my home church passed away this summer. One died from the coronavirus, and the other died from pancreatic cancer.
3. The Bible refers to death in several interesting ways:
 - i. The way of all the earth. Josh 23:14
 - ii. Sheol. Ps 6:5
 - iii. The Pit. Ps 30:3
 - iv. The end of all mankind. Eccl 7:2-4
 - v. The departure of your spirit. Eccl 8:8
 - vi. That obligation. Eccl 8:8
 - vii. That dark battle. Eccl 8:8
 - viii. Resting. Is 57:1-2
 - ix. Falling asleep. Jn 11:11
 - x. Our earthly tent being destroyed. 2 Cor 5:1
 - xi. Being unclothed. 2 Cor 5:4
 - xii. Laying aside your tent. 2 Pt 1:14
4. Death will come to us all. All of us will experience death in two ways. We will experience the sorrow of death when our loved ones pass away. And we will experience the departure of death when we die and leave this earth for the next life (Phil 1:21).
5. Death was not God’s original intention for creation. Adam and Eve were created to live on earth forever. Death was the consequence of sin. When our first parents ate of the forbidden fruit, death became a reality for all of nature.
 - i. **Romans 5:12** “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.”
6. While death is a horrible thing, as Christians we don’t need to fear it.
 - i. Heb 2:14-15 – Jesus died to free us from the fear of death.
 - ii. 1 Cor 15:54-55 – Christ has defeated death.
 - iii. 1 Cor 15:57 – We have victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - iv. Rev 1:18 - Christ holds the keys of death and Hades.
 - v. Rom 8:38-39 - Even death cannot separate us from the love of God.
7. This morning we are going to take a closer look at the story of Lazarus and learn more specifically why we don’t need to fear death.

II. TEXT: John 11:17-28

1. 17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.
 - i. This is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.
 - ii. When Lazarus was still sick, his sisters Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus. "The one you love is sick."
 - iii. But Jesus did not show up for four days. In fact, Jesus intentionally delayed and did not come right away.
 - iv. Why did Jesus delay?
 1. We know that His plan was to bring glory to Himself by raising Lazarus from the dead, so He was waiting for Lazarus to die.
 2. There is another possible reason. The Jews believed that the soul hovered around the body for three days after death, hoping to reenter it. On the fourth day, after seeing that the body was beginning to decompose, the soul departed. Only then would death be considered completely irreversible. Jesus waited until Lazarus was dead for four complete days to increase the wonder of the miracle (John MacArthur).
2. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem (less than two miles away). 19 Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.
 - i. When a loved one died in Jewish culture, their home became "the house of mourning."
 - ii. As long as the body was in the house, eating meat or drinking wine was forbidden, as was engaging in any kind of study. No food was prepared in the house, and no one was allowed to eat in the presence of the dead. As soon as the body was carried out, all of the furniture was reversed, and the mourners sat on the ground or on low stools.
 - iii. Because of the climate, normally burial followed as quickly after death as possible.
 - iv. Funerals were extremely costly (William Barclay).
 1. First, there were the ointments and spices used to anoint the body. This was to temporarily mask the odor of decay.
 2. Even the poorest family was expected to hire at least two flute players and a professional wailing woman.
 3. The body was clothed in the most magnificent robes.
 4. All kinds of valuables were buried in the tomb along with the body. Nobody wanted to be outdone by a neighbor.
 5. This tradition was changed shortly after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The Rabi Gamaliel the Second gave orders to be buried in the simplest linen robe. To this day, at orthodox Jewish funerals, a cup is drunk to Gamaliel who brought release from this burden.

- v. As many as possible attended the funeral. If you could, you were expected to out of respect.
 - vi. The funeral included a procession – the transport of the body to the tomb. Everyone was expected to join the procession.
 - 1. The women walked first. Since it was held that women by her first sin brought death into the world, she out to lead the mourners to the tomb.
 - 2. At the tomb, memorial speeches were sometimes made.
 - 3. Everyone was expected to express their deepest sympathy.
 - 4. There was a rule that the mourners were not to be bothered with idle and uninvited conversation. They were to be left alone to mourn.
 - vii. The tomb was often a natural cave, or a man-made cave located outside the village. The floor would be leveled, and shelves for the bodies were cut into the walls – usually enough for eight bodies. It was sealed by a large round stone which was rolled in front of the opening to protect against grave robbers and animals.
 - viii. As the mourners left the tomb, all of the guests stood in two long lines while the principal mourners passed between them. As the mourners walked away they turned and said, “Depart in Peace.”
 - ix. The women alone would return to the house of mourning to begin the thirty-day period of mourning. The first seven days were the most intense, and many of the mourners would remain with the family for that entire week.
 - x. By this time in the story, Lazarus had already been buried, the funeral had already occurred, and the family was mourning.
3. 20 As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house.
 4. 21 Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. 22 Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”
 5. 23 “Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her.
 6. 24 Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”
 - i. What is “the resurrection at the last day”?
 - ii. Most Jews in that day believed in life after death.
 - iii. But Martha was a close friend of Jesus, so she had probably heard Jesus talk at length about the resurrection at the last day. This was going to be day when everyone who has died will be raised back to life to receive their just rewards – either heaven or hell.
 - iv. That’s what Martha thought Jesus was talking about, but Jesus was talking about his immediate resurrection.

7. 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. 26 Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
- i. This is the fifth of seven “I Am” statements. MacArthur calls them “deity claims.”
 - ii. In these two verses Jesus gives us two reasons we don’t need to fear death.
- iii. REASONS YOU DON’T NEED TO FEAR DEATH**
1. We know that death will not be the end.
 - a. Even if you die, you will live.
 - b. Jesus came and died for our sins so that we could have eternal life (Jn 3:16).
 - c. **Adrian Rogers** “Death is just a comma to a Christian, not a period.”
 - d. We also know that the afterlife will be infinitely better than this life.
 2. We know how to obtain eternal life. Believe in Jesus.
8. 27 “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”
- i. We don’t have to fear death because death will not be the end, and we know how to obtain eternal life.
 - ii. If death is not the end, then let’s talk about what happens to you after you die.

III. THREE THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO YOU AFTER DEATH

1. **The intermediate state: Conscious fellowship with God, but without a body.**
 - i. Not soul-sleep (aka psychopannychy): The loss of consciousness until the final resurrection. The body and soul are inseparable. Unconscious existence.
 - ii. Not annihilationism (aka soul-extinction; Jehovah’s Witnesses or 7th Day Adventists)
 - iii. **Cornelis Venema**¹: “Believers, when they die, do not cease to exist, but continue to enjoy personal existence and communion with God in heaven prior to Christ’s return and the resurrection of the body.”
 - iv. **Cornelis Venema**²: “Believers, in their soul or spirit, will enjoy a state of conscious and unbroken (even intensified) communion with the Lord Jesus Christ... It will be a state of great joy in the presence of the Lord.”
 - v. 2 Main Passages:

¹ Cornelis Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Banner of Truth).

² Cornelis Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Banner of Truth).

1. **2 Corinthians 5:6-9** “6 So, we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight, 8 and we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him.”
 2. **Philippians 1:21-23** “21 For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22 Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don’t know which one I should choose. 23 I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ—which is far better.”
- vi. **Wayne Grudem**³: “Death is a temporary cessation of bodily life and a separation of the soul from the body. Once a believer has died, though his or her physical body remains on the earth and is buried, at the moment of death the soul (or spirit) of that believe goes into the presence of God with rejoicing.”
- vii. **J.C. Ryle** “The very moment that believers die, they are in paradise. Their battle is fought. Their strife is over. They have passed through that gloomy valley we must one day tread. They have gone over that dark river we must one day cross. They have drunk that last bitter cup that sin has mingled for us. They have reached that place where sorrow and sighing are no more. Surely we should not wish them back again! We should not weep for them, but for ourselves (Luke 23:28). We are still in the battle, but they are at peace. We are laboring, but they are at rest. We are watching, but they are sleeping. We are wearing our spiritual armor, but they have forever put it off. We are still at sea, but they are safely in harbor. We have tears, but they have joy. We are strangers and pilgrims, but they are at home. Better are the dead in Christ than the living! The very hour the poor saint dies, he is at once higher and happier than the highest upon earth.”
- viii. **Thomas Watson** writes about the believer’s privileges at death (*Body of Divinity*):
1. At death, believers have great immunities and freedoms.
 - a. They are freed from the body of sin.
 - b. They are freed from all the troubles and encumbrances to which this life is subject. Death frees a believer from care, fear, labor, suffering, temptation, sorrow.
 2. At death, the souls of believers pass into glory.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Zondervan), p. 816.

- a. “The godly, after death, have a blessed change. They have a full acquittal of their sins and are put into an actual possession of their blissful inheritance. Oh, blessed change, from a desert to a paradise; from a house of mourning to a banquet house; from a bloody battle to a victorious crown!”
- ix. What about unbelievers? After death they will be in torment until the final judgment. (Luke 16:19-31 – The Rich Man and Lazarus)

2. The Resurrection.

- i. What is it? When Jesus comes back, He will give us new bodies, completely free from sin. (aka glorification)
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 15:51-53** “51 Listen! I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. 53 For this corruptible must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal must be clothed with immortality.”
 - 2. (See also 1 Cor 15:42-44.)
 - 3. This is also called “Glorification.” Salvation is often divided into three stages – past, present, and future.
 - a. Salvation past is called Justification; salvation from the penalty for sin.
 - b. Salvation present is called sanctification; salvation from the power of sin.
 - c. Salvation future is called glorification; salvation from the presence of sin.
 - d. **Reformation Study Bible** “Although Christians have already received salvation, they will experience the benefits of salvation in their fullness only when Christ returns.”
- ii. When will it occur? At the return of Christ.
 - 1. **1 John 3:2** “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.”
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 15:52** “In a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.
 - 3. (See also 1 Thess. 4:16-18 & 1 Cor 15:22-24.)
- iii. What will our new bodies be like?

1. Like Christ's resurrected body. **Philippians 3:20-21** "20 But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself. (See also 1 John 3:2.)
2. Similar to our earthly body. When Christ rose, the tomb was empty (Mt 28:5-6). Christ's disciples were able to identify the marks of his crucifixion and even eat a meal with Him (Mt 28:9, 17, Mk 16:9-14, Lk 24:11, 16, 31, Jn 20:19-23, 27-29).
3. A physical body. **Luke 24:38-39**; at one point when they saw Christ he said, "38 Why are you troubled?" He asked them. "And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have."
4. Immortal/eternal. **1 Corinthians 15:53** "This mortal must be clothed with immortality." (See also 2 Cor 5:1; Rev 21:4)
5. Sinless. **1 Corinthians 15:43** "So it is with the resurrection of the dead: Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, raised in glory."
6. Powerful. **1 Corinthians 15:43** "Sown in weakness, raised in power."
7. No pain. **Revelation 21:4** "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away."
8. No hunger or thirst. **Revelation 7:16** "They will no longer hunger; they will no longer thirst; the sun will no longer strike them, nor will any heat.
9. No sunburn or getting hot. **Revelation 7:16**
10. Glorious. **1 Corinthians 15:43** "Sown in dishonor, raised in glory."
Philippians 3: 21 "He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body."
11. **Wayne Grudem**⁴: "These new bodies will be imperishable, that is, they will not wear out, grow old, or ever be subject to sickness or disease. They will show no sign of aging but will instead be completely healthy and strong forever. The new bodies will be what God originally designed them to be: far more beautiful and attractive than anything we might imagine in this age. Those who are raised

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs* (Zondervan).

with Christ will forever live in bodies that have all the excellent qualities God created us to have.”

iv. What about unbelievers?

1. They will be raised for judgement.
2. **John 5:28-29** “28 Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice 29 and come out— those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of condemnation.”
3. **Acts 24:15** “I have a hope in God, which these men also accept, that there will be a resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous.”

3. The final judgment: Believers will receive their rewards and live forever in heaven with God, and unbelievers will receive their eternal punishment in hell.

- i. **Matthew 25:31-46** “31 When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 41 Then He will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! 46 And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
- ii. (See also John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2; 2 Thess 1:6-10)

IV. CONCLUSION

1. We don’t have to fear death because Jesus is the resurrection and the life.
 - i. It is not the end. It is only the beginning of a much better life. A promotion. An upgrade.
 - ii. We know how to obtain eternal life – believe in Jesus.
2. If you believe in Jesus, then there is no reason to fear death.
3. While you don’t need to fear death, you should take it very seriously:
 - i. It is door to eternity – an unalterable state.
 - ii. It is near. It is coming for you.
4. For those who reject Christ, death is terrible (Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*):
 - i. They lose the world and all its pleasures, comforts, and rewards.
 - ii. They lose their souls.
 - iii. They lose heaven.
 - iv. They lose all hope.

5. So, the question is, do you believe in Jesus?