

JESUS: DELIVERER FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH
Sermon Outline

Text: Hebrews 2.14-16

Thesis: Compared with desperate solutions to the fear of death, the Christian has confidence of victory over death through the power of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Romans 7.21-24

Discussion

- I. People fear death.
 - A. The fear of death is universal.
 1. Primitive tribes plant arrows around a sick person to keep death away. Some tribes try to catch the demon of death by hooks suspended from roofs and trees.
 2. In the ancient Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the hero laments the death of his friend Enkidu: “Now what sleep is this that has taken hold of you? You have become dark and cannot hear me. When I die shall I be like Enkiku? I am afraid of death.”
 3. “Say not a word in death’s favor” (Achilles).
 4. “I would rather be a paid servant in a poor man’s house and be above ground, than a king of kings among the dead” (Homer’s *Odyssey*).
 5. La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) observed that “neither the sun nor death can be looked at with a steady eye.”
 6. “It’s not that I’m afraid to die, I just don’t want to be there when it happens” (Woody Allen).
 - B. The fear of death is illustrated by evasions.
 1. The topic of death is excluded from conversation.
 2. Euphemisms abound. People do not die, they expire. Undertakers are called funeral directors. Coffins are caskets. Hearses are labeled coaches or professional cars. Corpses are loved ones.
 3. Death is explained away.
 - a. Death is natural, a biological necessity.
 - b. Death is unification with the great life force of the universe.
 - (1) The Stoic philosophers taught that people should be indifferent to everything except virtue and vice. Sickness, pain, and death should be ignored (cf. Christian Science).
 - (2) Epictetus viewed death as “the time . . . for matter once again to dissolve into the elements out of which it was composed.”

about a loss of good things which is amply made up for by so great a blessing as the relief from every trouble. There is nothing dreadful in that which delivers from all that is to be dreaded. There is no need to be in an alarm about death if you have no knowledge that it is evil. The dread of it is the proof that you are aware of its evil. You would never think it evil—you would have no fear of it at all—if you were not sure that after it there is something to make it evil, and so a thing of terror.”

b. “To die: to sleep.

To sleep? perchance to dream; Ay, there’s the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause . . .

The dread of something after death” (Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*).

E. The fear of death is rooted in the fear of facing God.

1. Either God must be faced (biblical theism) or God must not be faced (atheism). The latter alternative postulates nothingness after death and raises once again the problem of fearing nothingness.
2. Behind the door of death lies judgment (Hebrews 9.27).
 - a. Some try to deal with the fear of death by lessening the severity of judgment.
 - b. Others postulate a “second chance” doctrine.
3. God’s holy wrath and judgment are upon sin.
4. Sin and death work hand in hand (Romans 3.23; 5.12ff.).
5. The sting of death is sin (1 Corinthians 15.56).

II. Victory over the fear of death is found in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2.14-16).

A. Through the experience of death himself and his subsequent resurrection from the dead, Jesus destroyed or rendered powerless the one who has the power of death.

1. To die, Jesus assumed flesh and blood (the necessity of the incarnation).
2. Paradoxically, through death, Jesus drew the sting of death.
 - a. The resurrection of Jesus is implied. “If ever death had appeared to be triumphant, it was when Jesus of Nazareth, disowned by his nation, abandoned by his disciples, executed by the might of imperial Rome, breathed his last on the cross. Why, some had recognized in his cry of pain and desolation the complaint that even God had forsaken him. His faithful followers confidently had expected that he was the destined liberator of Israel; but he had died—not, like Judas of Galilee or Judas Maccabaeus, in the forefront of the struggle against the Gentile oppressors of Israel; but in evident weakness and disgrace—and their hopes died with him. If ever a cause was lost, it was his; if ever the powers of evil were victorious, it was then. And yet, within a generation his

followers were proclaiming exultingly the crucified Jesus to be the conqueror of death and asserting, like our author here, that by dying he had reduced the erstwhile lord of death to impotence. This sudden change from disillusionment to triumph only can be explained by the account which the apostles gave—that their Master rose from the dead and imparted to them the power of his risen life” (F. F. Bruce).

- b. Jesus invaded the strong man’s fortress, disarmed him, bound him fast, and robbed him of his spoil (Mark 3.26-27; Luke 11.21ff.).
 - c. The gates of Hades were broken (Matthew 16.18; cf. Acts 2.24).
 - d. In his powerful hand, Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1.8).
 - (1) Jesus broke the devil’s grip on humans when by death he became the death of death.
 - (2) “He Hades in Hades laid low,
Made sin, He sin overthrew,
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death, by dying slew.”
3. Jesus destroyed the works of Satan (1 John 3.8; John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11).
- a. Satan, as the author of sin, had the power of death, the consequence of sin.
 - (1) It is not that Satan could inflict death at his own pleasure (i.e., not power over death; see Job 3.6). Rather, Satan exercised dominion in his own realm, the realm of sin and death.
 - (2) Satan used death to accomplish his goals and ends. “Death as death is no part of the divine order” (B. F. Westcott).
 - (3) Satan was lord of death, because sin which produces death was under his control.
 - b. Satan was the accuser (Zechariah, chapter 3).
 - (1) Satan brought sin to remembrance; he acted as council for the prosecution.
 - (2) The fear of death as punishment for sin and rejection by God is seen distinctly in the Old Testament.
 - (3) The accuser exercised sway and kept God’s people in bondage as long as they were oppressed with the fear of death as indicating the lack of full acceptance with God.
 - c. Christ, by the offering of himself (Hebrews 9.15, 26), made a perfect atonement for sin and so brought to nothing the power of the devil.
 - (1) “To destroy” (Greek *katargeo*) means “to make ineffective,” “to render powerless,” “to put out of use.”
 - (2) This is not the ultimate destruction of death (1 Corinthians 15.26, 54ff.; Revelation 20.14; but cf. 2 Timothy 1.10). Rather, Satan’s accusations (e.g., that humans because of

sin deserve death and punishment) were rendered null and void.

- (3) The holy demands of God's justice were satisfied (Romans 3.21-26; 4.24-25; 8.1-4).
- (4) For the descendants of Abraham, death is no longer the unconquerable penalty for sin, the door to God's unfavorable judgment, nor separation from the blessings of God (Romans 8.31-39). But note that appropriation of this deliverance is individual and based on faith (Galatians 3.26-29).
 - (a) Atheist: "I do not believe what you are preaching."
Preacher: "Then tell me what you do believe."
Atheist: "I believe that death ends all."
Preacher: "So do I."
Atheist: "What! You believe that death ends all?"
Preacher: "I certainly do. Death ends all your chance for doing evil; death ends all your joy; death ends all your projects, all your ambitions, all your friendships; death ends all the gospel you will ever hear; death ends it all for you, and you will go out into the outer darkness. As for myself, death ends all my wanderings, all my tears, all my perplexities, all my disappointments, all my aches and pains; death ends it all, and I go to be with my Lord in glory."
 - (b) Knowledge of what lies beyond death determines a person's attitude toward death.

- B. Thus, Jesus delivers those who through the fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.
 1. The legal religion of Judaism, based on law, produced servility and fear.
 - a. "In this life death will not permit a man to be glad" (a rabbinical saying).
 - b. With sin unaccounted for and death as the punishment for sin to look forward to, life is a bondage.
 2. Christ sets us free from this bondage. To death itself, we still are subject, but in Christ all the terrors are removed.
 - a. Christians should not fear death; anger and sorrow, yes; but fear, no!
 - b. The apostle Paul is a good example (2 Timothy 4.6-8, 18).
 - c. The early Christian martyrs are good examples (e.g., Polycarp).

Conclusion

1. Romans 7.21-25.
2. “The body is dead because of sin.”
3. Do you fear death? Prepare yourself for judgment and overcome the fear of death.

Resources:

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Nuland, Sherwin B. *How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

Wolff, Richard. *The Last Enemy*. Washington, DC: Canon Press, 1974.