



"Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway."
—John Wayne

12-Mar-10

Death Is Not the End (Part One)

Looking at life from God's point of view, He stacks the deck in man's favor. He says with such positivity that He desires to redeem all people, if they will have it. This appears in [I Timothy 2:4](#): ". . . who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He also says in [II Peter 3:9](#) that He "is [longsuffering](#) toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to [repentance](#)." He is confident that He can bring every human being to salvation as long as each person yields to Him.

On the other hand, there is the equally wonderful expectation of [God](#) destroying all evil, including all unrepentant people, from earth for all eternity. The Bible terms this destruction the "[second death](#)" ([Revelation 21:8](#)), the Lake of Fire ([Revelation 20:14](#)), "everlasting fire" ([Matthew 18:8](#)), "[hell](#) fire" ([Matthew 5:22](#)), or the "resurrection to condemnation" ([John 5:29](#)), which we have called the "third resurrection." At some point in the future, after the Millennium and the White Throne Judgment period (see [Revelation 20:4-13](#)), everything that is sinful and evil will be wiped away, and the Father Himself will then descend from heaven and live among redeemed humanity ([Revelation 21:3-4](#)).

We cannot imagine life without [sin](#). Except for a very brief time after God created Adam and Eve, some sort of wrong or evil has always existed in the hearts of human beings. We have lived with it for so long that, sadly, we do not understand how to live without it. Even seeing the reality of the moral perfection of [Jesus Christ](#) is extremely difficult for us, and trying to live our own lives sinlessly is a task beyond our power.

Knowing how sin begets evil and death (see [James 1:15](#)), those of us whom God has called yearn for life without sin, but we know that such a time, when God's [goodness](#) infuses the whole world and everything in it, remains years in the future. The Bible prophesies that, between now and that wonderful day of gladness, dark days of tribulation and destruction—a time of woe that [the world](#) has never before seen ([Mark 13:19](#))—will come to pass.

For mankind to reach this promised Utopia, a great deal of dying must occur. Billions of people have already died in various ways throughout history, and billions more will perish in the meantime. Death is inevitable for human beings, as the author of Hebrews writes: "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. . . ." ([Hebrews 9:27](#)).

It has been roughly calculated that upwards of fifty billion people will rise from their graves in the judgment. In this general resurrection will rise Israelites and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, from all eras of history and from every race, tribe, nation, and language that has ever existed on the face of the earth. Among their few common traits is that they will all have died.

Death is not generally considered to be an uplifting topic. However, there is no reason to approach it from a morbid point of view, or from one that invokes fear or grief. God is always positive, and His point of view concerning death is based in reality and hope. If we have the proper perspective, we can actually have a healthy, positive view of death.

Certainly, God calls death our enemy ([1 Corinthians 15:26](#)) because it is a result of sin. Death entered the world once Adam, as mankind's representative in the Garden of Eden, ate of the forbidden Tree of the

Knowledge of Good and Evil ([Romans 5:12](#)). However, before creating humanity, God had realized man would sin, bringing upon him the penalty of death, for the redeeming sacrifice of the One who became Jesus Christ "indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world" ([I Peter 1:20](#)). God, then, allowed sin and thus death to occur, and He has incorporated death into His plan.

In doing so, God has made something positive out of it. Sometimes, what we consider to be a curse ends up being a blessing. This occurs because we often look at matters from the wrong end, not considering that even the worst of circumstances may work out quite positively when all is said and done. In the end, even death can be seen as a good thing in some respects.

Notice [Hebrews 2:10](#), 14-15, which ultimately casts death in a positive light:

For it was fitting for Him [God the Father], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation [Christ] perfect through suffering. . . . In as much then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

All men have been subject to the fear of death, and it is something that we have to strive to overcome. When we are called out of the world, we do not immediately shed all of our wrong, human perspectives. It may take years to overcome our fear of death, and most of us never do. However, Christ has freed us from the fear of death, and now we live in the fear of something else, the fear of God ([II Corinthians 7:1](#)).

Even so, we still fear death a great deal. We often take a loved one's or a friend's death very hard, and personally, we fight death with a vengeance. These are natural, human things to do, and we are not bad people if we do them. Nevertheless, there are situations and reactions that we need to learn to approach from God's perspective. Normal reactions like deep grief or denial are hard to let go because we have all our lifetime been enslaved to the fear of death.

Even Jesus, facing the horrific death of crucifixion and the crushing penalty of humanity's sins, reacted with strong, visceral emotion:

And He was withdrawn from [His disciples] about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ([Luke 22:41-44](#))

[Jesus was God](#) in the flesh ([John 1:14](#)), and at this moment, His flesh cried out in anticipation of the suffering and pain He would soon encounter. Not only that, He had never experienced a moment of being forsaken by His Father ([Matthew 27:46](#)), when He would be absolutely alone to undergo the cessation of His life in payment for all iniquity. How frightening a prospect that must have been! Yet, even in His desire to avoid these physical and emotional pains, Jesus illustrates perfect submission to His Father's will, realizing its necessity for the success of His plan. Knowing God would raise Him to eternal life [after three days](#), He did not fear death—what He feared most was life without God!

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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