



"Only the unknown frightens men."  
—Antoine de St. Exupery

19-Mar-10

## *Death Is Not the End (Part Two)*

As we begin our study, we need to consider the perspectives of death of two righteous individuals. These viewpoints are included in the Word of [God](#) for our admonition, so that we can begin to understand, appreciate, and imitate them in our own lives. Of course, we must examine Jesus Christ's approach to death, and in Part Three we will review the apostle Paul's outlook. These should help us to see the ideal, giving us an idea of what changes need to be made to our own views.

[Matthew 16:21](#) encapsulates how Jesus approached His own death. Here He apprises His disciples of the coming events of the next year or so. "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."

Looking at this as objectively as possible, it seems a good deal like a checklist! Matthew's manner of recording Jesus' declaration is rather unemotional and straightforward, yet he is penning the fateful itinerary of the Lamb of God, the Savior of [the world](#)! As we saw in Part One, Jesus Himself suffered intense emotional pain the evening before He was arrested, anticipating the torture and [the crucifixion](#) that awaited Him, as well as the terrifying absence of the Father from His life. However, at this point in His ministry, His attitude is more dispassionate.

The next verses highlight a striking contrast between Jesus' approach and Peter's: "Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord;

this shall not happen to You!" ([Matthew 16:22](#)). Upon hearing what Jesus revealed about His impending death, Peter became angry, and his language took on a rough, aggressive tone against His Master and Teacher. Like most men, he encountered death with fear and hostility, gearing up to fight it with all his being.

However, notice Christ's response to Peter's rebuke: "But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, [Satan!](#) You are an [offense](#) to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" ([Matthew 16:23](#)). He considered His own death was a work of God, and to regard it with the fear and hostility that Peter did was offensive to Him! It was a major event in God's plan; He *had* to be treated monstrously and die agonizingly to pay for the sins of humanity. Beyond that, He had to be raised from death to immortality to ensure eternal life for all whom God would call.

It was all part of the plan; it was God's will. Thus, there was no need to approach it with great fear, the source of which He pinpointed in Satan the Devil. That evil spirit was heightening Peter's natural fear of death in an attempt to dissuade Jesus from fulfilling His Father's will. As Jesus says, at the moment Peter had jettisoned all thought about what God was doing in order to obsess on a human misunderstanding of death. Jesus, though, approached the matter with great calm and purpose. He would live out His life and die such a death to fulfill the will of God.

A person might say, "Well, that was Jesus! He knew His death was necessary to God's plan from early on! That doesn't apply to the average person." Perhaps, but only in terms of degree. For a converted member of God's Family must follow the same path as "the captain of their salvation" ([Hebrews 2:10](#); "captain" from Greek *archegos* suggests a leader who forges ahead so that others can follow). Peter writes, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" ([I Peter 2:21](#)). Just as Jesus lived a life of sacrifice, suffered death, and was raised to eternal life through resurrection, so must we go through the same process to reach the same goal (see [I Corinthians 15:20-23](#); [Philippians 3:8-11](#)). In this way, our deaths and [resurrections](#) to eternal life are also part of the plan of God.

John 11 contains another example of how Christ approached death, this time the death of a beloved disciple, Lazarus:

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory

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of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ([John 11:1-5](#))

Obviously, quite a close bond existed between Lazarus and Jesus. [Luke 10:38-42](#) shows that Jesus had spent time with the family, eating, talking, and perhaps even staying with them occasionally during His travels around Judea. Twice in these five verses, it is mentioned that Jesus loved Lazarus, and this fact is connected with His approach to this man's death. For, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, even knowing it was a fatal illness, He remained where He was for two more days ([John 11:6](#))! John describes Jesus' attitude toward death as calm and confident, an assessment again depicted in verses 11-13.

What He says to His disciples in [John 11:14-15](#) takes it still further: "Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.'" He was glad that Lazarus had succumbed to this illness! It was not a macabre pleasure but a positive outlook, a kind of righteous [joy](#), since He knew that the resurrection He would perform would bring about a great deal of good: Lazarus would live, the disciples' [faith](#) would be bolstered, a great witness would be made, and the path to Calvary would be set firmly in motion.

Jesus surely took a different approach to death than we do!

Later, John records that "Jesus wept" (verse 35), and many people blithely assume that He was grieving for Lazarus, but they are mistaken. He had no need to weep for Lazarus because He knew the miracle He would soon perform. Verse 33 says, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled" when He saw Mary and the Jews with her weeping. A word study of "groaned in the spirit" shows that He was upset, even angry or indignant, rather than grief-stricken, and His emotion came out in tears. The context shows that He wept for their unbelief and their lack of [hope](#). Even Mary, who had hung on His every word, did not understand His power or the true hope of the resurrection. Jesus is Master over death ([Hebrews 2:14](#)), and still they disbelieved!

In summary, Jesus views death through the lens of hope and the good that lies beyond it. Next time, we will find that the apostle Paul's approach echoes His Savior's.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Love's Emotional Dimension](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh focuses upon the emotional dimension of love, reiterating that love doesn't become 'love' until the thought, or the feeling, motivates the person to act. Love is an act. If we don't do what is right, the right feeling will never be formed, because emotions are largely developed by our experiences. The right emotions require God's Holy Spirit. Like a marriage relationship, our relationship with God grows more and more intimate as we give it time and attention, conforming to the other person's preferences in the relationship. We are never going to know God unless we do the same kinds of things with Him, keeping His Commandments, devoting time to prayer, Bible study, and meditation. If we are working on our relationship with God (giving it our time and attention), then God's love for us will be reciprocated back to Him in the form of obedience, totally trusting in Him to shape our lives for His purpose.

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### [Works of Faith \(Part 1\)](#)

by Staff

Many think works and faith are incompatible, but the Bible instructs us to do works of faith. What are they? These are things we MUST do during the process of salvation.

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