

# Christ and the Fear of Death

by George H. Morrison

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*Christ delivers us from the bondage of fear, giving us hope of eternal life and redemption.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:4, John 11:25, Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 15:55, 2 Corinthians 5:8

**Topics:** "Fear Of Death", "Eternal Life"

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## Description

George H. Morrison delves into the two primary feelings evoked by the thought of death: curiosity and fear. He explores how curiosity about the unknown beyond death and the universal fear of dying have been ingrained in human hearts since ancient times. Morrison emphasizes that while the fear of death may lie dormant during times of joy or passion, it resurfaces in moments of crisis, serving a purpose in God's plan. He highlights how Jesus Christ addresses and alleviates the fear of death by offering comfort, assurance of eternal life beyond the grave, and freedom from the dread of judgment through His sacrificial love.

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## Transcript

THERE ARE TWO feelings which the thought of death has ever kindled in the human breast, and the first of them is curiosity. Always in the presence of that veil, through which sooner or later we all pass, men have been moved to ask, with bated breath, What is it which that veil conceals? It is as if the most diaphanous of curtains were hung between our eye and the great secret, making men the more wistful to interpret it. It has been said by a well-known Scottish essayist that this would account for the crowd at executions. You know how the people used to flock in thousands when a criminal was to die upon the gallows. And Alexander Smith throws out this thought that it was not just savagery which brought them there. It was the unappeasable curiosity which death forever stirs in human hearts.

But if the thought of death moves our curiosity, there is another feeling which is ever linked with it. Death is not alone the source of wonder. Death has ever been the source of fear. How universal that feeling is we see from this, that we share it with O animate creation. Wherever there is life in any form there is an instinct which recoils from death. When the butterfly evades the chasing schoolboy--when the stag turns at bay against the dogs--we have the rudiments of that which in a loftier sphere may grow to be a bondage and a tyranny. The fear of death is not a religious thing, although religion has infinitely deepened it. It is as old as existence; as wide as the whole world; as lofty and deep as the whole social fabric. It touches the native in the heart of Africa, as every reader of Dr. Livingstone knows, and it hides under the mantle of the prince as well as under the jacket of the prodigal. How keenly it was felt in the old world, every reader of

pagan literature has seen. The aim and object of the old philosophy was largely to crush it out of human life. In the great and gloomy poem of Lucretius, in many a page of Cicero, above all in the treatises of Plutarch and of Seneca, we learn what a mighty thing the fear of death was with the men and women of the Roman Empire.

### The Fact Of Death Ignored

Of course I do not mean that the fear of death is always active and present and insistent. To say that would be exaggeration, and would be untrue to the plain facts of life. When a man is in the enjoyment of good health, he very rarely thinks of death at all. When the world goes well with him and he is happy, he has the trick of forgetting he is mortal. He digs his graves within the garden walls, and covers them with a wealth of summer flowers, so that the eye scarce notices the mound when the birds are singing in the trees. We know, too, how a passion or enthusiasm will master the fear of death within the heart.

A soldier in the last rush will never think of it, though comrades are dropping on every side of him. And a timid mother, for her little child's sake, or a woman for the sake of one she loves, will face the deadliest peril without trembling. For multitudes the fear of death is dormant, else life would be unbearable and wretched. But though it is dormant it is always there, ready to be revived in the last day. In times of shipwreck--in hours of sudden panic--when we are ill and told we may not live, then shudderingly, as from uncharted deeps, there steals on men this universal terror. Remember there is nothing cowardly in that. A man may be afraid and be a hero. There are times when to feel no terror is not courage. It is but the hallmark of insensibility.

It is not what a man feels that makes the difference. It is how he handles and orders what he feels. It is the spirit in which he holds himself, in the hour when the heart is overwhelmed.

Nor can we be altogether blind to the purposes which God meant this fear to serve. Like everything universal in the heart, it has its office in the plans of heaven. You remember the cry wrung from the heart of Keats in his so exquisite music to the nightingale. "Full many a time," he sings, "I have been half in love with easeful death." And it may be that there are some here tonight who have been at times so weary of it all, that they too have been in love with easeful death. It may have been utter tiredness that caused it. It may have been something deeper than all weariness. Who knows but that even here before me there be not someone who has dreamed of suicide?

Brethren, it is from all such thoughts, and from all the passion to have done with life, that we are rescued and redeemed and guarded by the terror which God has hung around the grave. Work may be hard, but death is harder still. Duty may be stern, but death is sterner. Dark and gloomy may be the unknown morrow, but it is not so dark and gloomy as the grave. Who might not break the hedge and make for liberty were the hedge easy to be pushed aside? But God has hedged us about with many a thorn--and we turn to our little pasturage again.

When Adam and Eve had been expelled from Eden, they must have longed intensely to return. It was so beautiful, and the world so desolate; it was so fertile, and the world so hard. But ever, when they clasped repentant hands, and stole in the twilight to the gate of Paradise, there rose the awful form with flaming sword. Sleepless and vigilant he stood at watch. His was a dreadful and terrific presence. No human heart could face that living fire which stood in guardianship of what was lost. And that was why God had placed his angel there, that they might be driven back to the harsh furrow, and till the soil, and rise into nobility, while the sweat was dropping from the brow. So are we driven back to life again by the terror which stands

sentinel to death. So are we driven to our daily cross, however insupportable it seems. And bearing it, at first because we must, it comes to blossom with the passing days, till we discover that on this side the grave there is more of paradise than we had dreamed.

Christ then does not deliver us from the deep instinct of self-preservation. That is implanted in the heart by God. It is given for the safeguarding of his gift. It is only when that fear becomes a bondage, and when that instinct grows into a tyranny, that Christ steps in, and breaks the chains that bind us, and sets our trembling feet in a large room. The question is, then, how did he do that? How has Christ liberated us from this bondage? I shall answer that by trying to distinguish three elements which are inherent in that fear.

## Death And Dying

In the first place, our fear of death is in a measure but a fear of dying. It is not the fact of death which terrified; it is all that we associate with the fact. We may have seen some death-bed which was a scene of agony; it is memory which we shall never lose. We may have read, in a novel or in a play, a story of torment in the closing hours. And it is not what death leads to or removes, but rather that dark accompanying prospect, which lies hidden within a thousand hearts as an element of the terror of the grave. I think I need hardly stop to prove to you that this is an unreasonable fear. If there are death-beds which are terrible, are there not others which are quiet as sleep? But blessed be God, Christ does not only comfort us when we are terrified with just alarms: he comforts us when we are foolish children. Girt with mortality, he says to us, "Take no anxious thought about the morrow." Dreading the pain that one day may arrive, he says, "Sufficient unto the day is its own evil." He never prayed, "Give us a sight of death, and help us to contemplate it every hour we live." He prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread." Christ will not have us stop the song today, because of the possible suffering tomorrow. If we have grace to live by when we need it, we shall have grace to die by when we need it. And so he sets his face against that element, and says to us, "Let not your heart be troubled." "My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength made perfect in thy weakness."

## Is Death The End?

Secondly, much of our fear of death springs from the thought that death is the end of everything. It is always pitiful to say farewell, and there is no farewell like that of death. You remember how Charles Lamb uttered that feeling, with the wistful tenderness which makes us love him. He did not want to leave this kindly world, nor his dear haunts, nor the familiar faces. And deep within us, though we may not acknowledge it, there is that factor in the fear of death--the passionate clinging of the human heart to the only life which it has known. We have grown familiar with it in the years. It has come to look on us with friendly eyes. It has been a glad thing to have our work to do, and human love and friendship have been sweet. And then comes death, and takes all that away from us, and says it never shall be ours again, and we brood on it, and are lonely and afraid.

Thanks be to God, that factor in the fear has been destroyed by Jesus Christ. For he has died, and he is risen again, and he is the first-fruits of them that sleep. And if the grave for him was not an end, but only an incident in life eternal, then we may rest assured that in his love there is no such sadness as the broken melody. All we have striven to be we shall attain. All we have striven to do we shall achieve. All we have loved shall meet us once again with eyes that are transfigured in the dawn. Every purpose that was baffled here, and every love that never was fulfilled, all that, and all our labor glorified, shall still be ours when shadows flee away.

This life is but the prelude to the piece. This life is the introduction to the book. It is not finis we should write at death. It is not finis, it is initium. And that is how Jesus Christ has met this element, and mastered it in his victorious way, and made it possible for breaking hearts to bear the voiceless sorrow of farewell.

### Of Death And Judgment

Thirdly, much of the fear of death springs from the certainty of coming judgment. Say what you will, you know as well as I do that there is a day of judgment still to come. Conscience tells it, if conscience be not dead. The very thought of a just God demands it. Unless there be a judgment still to come, life is the most tragical of mockeries. And every voice of antiquity proclaims it, and every savage tribe within the forest; and with a certainty that never wavered it was proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Well may you and I fear death, if "after death, the judgment." Seen to our depths, with every secret known, we are all to stand before Almighty God. Kings will be there, and peasants will be there, and you and I who are not kings nor peasants. And the rich and the poor will meet together there, for the Lord is the maker of them all. It is that thought which makes death so terrible. It is that which deepens the horror of the tomb.

Dwell on that coming day beyond the grave, and what prospect of affright it is! And it is then that Jesus Christ appears, and drives these terrors to the winds of heaven, and says to the vilest sinner here tonight, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet." He that believeth hath everlasting life. He gives us our acquittal here and now. He tells us that for every man who trusts him there is now therefore no condemnation. And he tells us that because he died for us, and because he bore our sins up to the tree, and because he loves us with a love so mighty that neither life nor death can tear us from it. That is the faith to live by and to die by: "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep." That is the faith which makes us more than conquerors over the ugliest record of our past. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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