

Facing Death With The Peace Of God

'Jesus suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous so He could bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit' (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains by itself alone, but if it dies (then germinates) it bears much fruit. Those who love their earthly life will lose it. Those who disregard their life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves Me let them follow Me. Where I am, there will My servant be. If anyone serves Me the Father will honour them" (John 12:24 to 26). This imagery gives us a simplistic view of eternal life. If we hold onto an unsown grain of wheat it can never produce more wheat. The husk is hard and unusable but it is ours. We own it. We can control it. We can decide what to do with it but if we keep it, it will never grow. In this parable, Jesus likens our earthly life to a grain of wheat. Our life is ours. We own it, we can control it, we can destroy it through bad life choices or we can let go. We can hand our life to God and let our carnal life 'die' so we can rise to a new life in God and allow Him to take control. His promise to us is, we will be given a new life that will produce a lot of spiritual fruit (Ephesians 5:9). Our new life is not temporal for earth but an eternal life with God in His Kingdom forever. 'God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in our Messiah Jesus before times eternal, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Who abolished (spiritual) death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel' (2 Timothy 1:9 & 10).

Do you flinch at the thought or mention of your own death? Does the fear of death fill you with dread? Are you trying to squeeze the very last breath out of this life on earth? If that is you, you need to open your heart to this message. In our modern Western culture there has been a great deal of effort to erase anything about death that is unpleasant. People do not like to talk about it. They do not want to accept it. Why? Because they are so fearful of their own death. More pleasant sounding 'memorial gardens' or 'resting place' has often replaced the words tomb, crypt, mausoleum, gravesite or cemetery. Before burial, the effects of death are covered by make up so the deceased person looks nicer. There is one unchanging fact we can never forget – if there has been a conception, one day there will be a death of that person any time from birth to about 120 years. Death is real, it is cruel, it can be painful, both physically and emotionally, and cannot be avoided by anyone. Any view of life not able to accept this fact is deceptive and unrealistic. Any religion not able to give a redemptive answer to the harsh reality of death is inadequate to meet the spiritual needs of humanity. What distinguishes Judaism and Christianity from any other religion is the positive answer to death.

The Bible offers us the spiritual answer to the extremely negative and sorrowful topic of death, which we all have to face. The cause of all death is sin. 'Sin entered the world through one man (Adam) and death came through sin, so death passed to all mankind because all have sinned' (Romans 5:12). Death came as a result of sin. If there had never been sin there would never have been death, but because all mankind are sinners, death comes to all mankind. 'All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). All mankind were cursed with both physical and spiritual death as a direct result of Adam's disobedience. Jesus came to abolish spiritual death not physical death. No one can go to heaven unless their body dies because no flesh and blood can enter the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). People who believe a Christian funeral will usher the deceased into heaven are quite wrong. Nobody can get into heaven unless they first repent then obey God while still alive on earth. A fancy funeral will never save anyone's soul.

When we seek modern medicine for any reason, we are given a diagnosis to reveal the cause of the illness, a prognosis to predict the course of the illness and a treatment or remedy to cure the illness. The spiritual diagnosis for death is sin as we read above. The spiritual prognosis of the course of life comes in three stages. The first stage is spiritual death. At his creation, Adam became a living being after the Lord blew His Spirit of life into Adam's nostrils. 'God formed man (Adam) from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life then man became a living soul ... God commanded Adam, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat but of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you will not eat of it for in the day you eat of it you will surely die"' (Genesis 2:7, 16 & 17). Adam lived approximately 900 years after he sinned so he did not immediately die physically but he did immediately die spiritually. From the day Adam disobeyed God and ate fruit from the forbidden tree, he was separated from God and was cast out of the beautiful, perfect Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). All mankind are in the same state of spiritual death so we all need to be reconciled to God. By accepting the blood of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross, we can be reconciled with God and receive spiritual life or as the Bible says, 'made alive'. 'You were made alive when you were still dead in transgressions and sins in which you once walked according to the course of this world ... doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of God's wrath, even as the rest (of humanity). But God being rich in mercy for His great love for us, even when we were dead through our iniquities, He made us alive together with Jesus so by grace you have been saved and He

raised us up with Him and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places in our Saviour and Messiah Jesus' (Ephesians 2:1 to 6).

The second stage of spiritual prognosis is physical death. Once mankind was alienated from God because of sin, our physical life slowly died too. Mankind is already suffering from spiritual death because of Adam, then death physically followed his disobedience. Physical death is what we can observe when we are with someone who dies. It is the permanent separation of the soul from the body. We are all made up of spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). We cannot see the spirit or the soul but we can see the body. The flesh and blood decomposes but the spirit and soul remain unchanged and stay together. They do not remain on earth. The righteous soul immediately goes to heaven to await the final judgement and rewards for obedience and await a new immortal body to be given at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14; Revelation 20:6). Wicked, unrighteous people and everyone who has rejected God while on earth go straight to Hades to await final judgement (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). The spooky entities people assume are ghosts of the dead on earth are in fact the evil spirits that had inhabited the body of a deceased person. Evil spirits need a body to inhabit and they choose sinful people in which to dwell (Luke 11:24 to 26). When that unsaved person dies, the evil spirits roam around looking for a new body to inhabit (Luke 11:24). That is why some people believe they are 'reincarnated'. They were not reincarnated but the evil spirits that once inhabited a person who died, then the evil spirits inhabit someone else, can make people think they have been in a certain place before when in fact it is the evil spirit within them that has been there before giving them a false 'memory'.

The third stage of spiritual prognosis is called the 'second death' when the unsaved and unrighteous with their new immortal body will end up in the Lake of Fire to be separated from God forever (Revelation 20:15). This stage is only revealed to those who can fully understand the revelation of Scripture. The unrighteous consider this to be such foolishness they refuse to believe it or accept it. 'The Word of the cross (of Jesus) is foolishness to those who are dying (in the second death) but to us who are saved it is the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1:18). The second death is the final end of those who have rejected God while living on earth. This is what the Bible says about the second death. 'The cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, slave traders, perjurers, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars will have their part in the Lake that burns with Fire and sulphur, which is the second death' (1 Timothy 1:10; Revelation 21:8). It is final, eternal, irrevocable banishment from the presence of God. There is no way back from the second death. It is forever and ever. The only way to avoid the Lake of Fire is to accept Jesus while you are alive on earth. Every non-believer, the devil and all evil spirits will end up in the Lake of Fire along with Hades and death itself (Revelation 20:10, 14 & 15).

The second death is not the end of consciousness because there is no possible way of killing off a spirit. The soul containing the personality and character of the deceased person remains intact and feels all the pain and anguish of being in Hades. The deceased person remains conscious in this life and after death. There is no escape. The following factual account spoken by Jesus gives us an insight to the torment of unsaved people after death. 'There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. A beggar named Lazarus lay at his gate, full of sores and desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The beggar died and was carried away by the holy angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, he lifted up his eyes being in torment and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. He cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus so he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame."

But Abraham said, "Son, remember in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus, in like manner received bad things. But now here he is comforted and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed so those who want to pass from here to you are not able and none may cross over from there to us."

The former rich man said, "I ask you therefore father Abraham, send him to my father's house for I have five brothers, to testify to them so they will not come into this place of torment."

Abraham answered, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them."

The former rich man said, "No father Abraham, if Someone goes to them from the dead they will repent."

Abraham said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if One rises from the dead" (Luke 16:19 to 31). We can see the rich man felt torment, thirst, anguish, pain, regret and was concerned about his family. He was not in a state of unconsciousness. What is worse, even after death and while in torment, the wicked person will continue to behave wickedly. 'He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still' (Revelation 22:11).

After the spiritual diagnosis and the spiritual prognosis we come to the spiritual treatment or remedy for both physical and spiritual death, which is called salvation. First we must have a healthy fear of God. 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear God who is able to destroy both

soul and body in Hades' (Matthew 10:28). Jesus is the sole remedy for spiritual death. He did this by taking our death onto Himself and paying the price of eternal judgement for us. He set us free from the stinging fear of death. After the resurrection of the righteous, all genuine believers will be given a new incorruptible, immortal body. 'When this corruptible body will have put on incorruption and this mortal body will have put on immortality, then what is written will happen. "Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus' (1 Corinthians 15:54 to 57).

How did Jesus accomplish this amazing victory? The entire Bible was written as the guidebook to salvation by atonement, first by sacrificing animals then by the sacrifice of Jesus' blood on the cross. The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, when He lost a great deal of the blood He had in His body after being tortured, whipped, lashed, stabbed, nailed, He had His beard ripped off His face and was left to die a horrible death, culminated in His explosive, triumphant resurrection. Jesus was victorious over death (1 Corinthians 15:54). His resurrection overcame the curse of spiritual death for all people who will accept it. His atonement opened the way for mankind to be reconciled to God, but only for those who accept the sacrifice. Jesus has already paid the ultimate price (1 Corinthians 6:20). He died for all of us (Hebrews 2:9). His job is done (Revelation 21:6). It is finished (John 19:30). Jesus is our spiritual door to salvation. He is the only way to salvation and nobody can be reconciled to God except through Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He said, "Be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears (listens to) My voice and opens the door, I will come in to them and will dine with them and they with Me" (Revelation 3:19 & 20). However, although the spiritual door is open wide to anyone who wants to walk through it, only those who actually accept Jesus as their Saviour will be saved. Jesus said, "Strive to enter in by the narrow door, for many I tell you, will seek to enter in and will not be able. When the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door and you stand outside and knock at the door saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' then He will answer you and tell you, 'I never knew you or where you come from' (Luke 13:24 & 25). 'The door was shut. Afterward the other people came saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But He answered, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you" (Matthew 25:10 to 12). If people refuse to believe or they reject Jesus on earth then on Judgement Day that spiritual door will be shut to them and will never reopen. Only those who accept Jesus and continue to do His will, will find eternal life (1 John 2:17).

Accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour is the only way to be forgiven, to receive peace, strength, deliverance from evil influences, liberty, freedom from worry, freedom from grief, we receive sanctification, justification, righteousness and holiness. None of these things are available to people who do not have the peace of God in their soul. The peace we receive from God is more than a sense of calm, it is so strong it passes all concept of human understanding. 'Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Jesus our Messiah' (Philippians 4:6 & 7). Only through the blood of Jesus can we be righteous or holy. There is absolutely no goodness, righteousness or holiness in any of us. We can only receive these through the blood of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The resurrection of Jesus was the ultimate victory over death. It was the greatest event in all of mankind's history. It is the heart of the New Testament message. It was prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus Himself foresaw His resurrection (Mark 9:31). Jesus' resurrection is historically true and accurate. It was witnessed by hundreds of people living at that time. Mary Magdalene was the first person to see Jesus after His resurrection (John 20:16). Thomas saw and spoke to Jesus after He had risen (John 20:20 to 27). Historians wrote about the resurrection (John 21:25), the apostles and other witnesses wrote about it several times (Luke 1:2; 2 Peter 1:16; Acts 1:22; Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 10:39 to 41; Acts 13:31; 1 Peter 5:1). The suffering, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is not a religious theory or fantasy, they were real events that happened for the purpose of saving our souls from the second death. Jesus did not come to save our physical body, He came to save our soul. Our physical body will return to dust (Genesis 3:19) but our soul lives on. When Jesus hung on the cross, He came to give us eternal spiritual life. He did not come to give us physical eternal life. The curse of physical death cannot be undone. The flesh and blood bodies of all people will eventually die. Jesus came to give us eternal life only in the spiritual realm.

The key factors of the Gospels are revealed through some factual historical events, which are; Jesus was born to die as our Saviour, His ministry of teaching, preaching, healing and deliverance began when He was thirty (Luke 3:23) and ceased at His death about forty months later. He was buried immediately and was resurrected on the third day. These facts makes Christianity differ from any other religion on earth. Christianity centres around One Person. He is the Son of God, the Son of Man and the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 19:5) Yeshua/Jesus of Nazareth. We cannot remove the facts about Jesus from the Gospels or the New Testament, which would not exist without Jesus and did not exist until after Jesus was resurrected. The first coming of Jesus was rooted in history and was written about hundreds of years before He was born. Believing in Jesus will transform the lives of everyone who accepts Him and continues to walk with Him.

Sadly, there are many millions of people who reject God and thus refuse to accept His Son for three main reasons. Many people do not want God to be part of their lives. They reject the notion of having to submit to a High Authority they cannot see, nor do they want to be responsible for their own behaviour and give an account to God on Judgement Day for the things they have said, done, or their bad attitude. It is the innate rebellion, the sin all mankind was born with, that rejects the willingness to give their lives up to be overseen by God. We all have to allow His will to become our will, and the deep-seated inborn rebellion makes that thought repugnant to many unsaved people. Another reason people reject God is a spiritual 'blindness'. 'The (wicked) god of this world (the devil) has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so the Light of the Gospel of the glory of Jesus, Who is the image of God, should not dawn on them' (2 Corinthians 4:4).

A third reason people reject God is unforgiveness. If a person has suffered terribly at the hands of a wicked person, or a severely bad parent, or experienced the death of someone very dear to them like their child, or suffered from a dreadful life-changing illness, those people tend to blame God. Instead of blaming God, blame the perpetrator, challenge the bad parent, accept the death of the loved one or a severe illness as part of this fallen world, put the incident behind you and move on, leaving the wicked person to the Lord to punish them for their evil (2 Timothy 4:14). We cannot move forward when we are holding onto a heavy emotional load that holds us back. Blaming God will not change the situation but will make it worse for the person who refuses to forgive God. Holding a grudge against God will never end well. When Adam sinned, he blamed Eve then Eve blamed the serpent. Had they faced up to their sin and repented, this world would be entirely different but they did not repent, they hid from God and look how that ended up! They were rejected. That is what many people do when they do not want to face either their own sin or the person who sinned against them. They blame God and think they can hide from Him. Every person on earth goes through difficult times but how we deal with it is the key, not the event itself. We must understand, Jesus came to give us eternal life so it is not God Who harms us, it is the devil that comes to steal, kill and destroy lives (John 10:10). Wicked people are inspired by the devil to do harm so we cannot blame God for what wicked people have done to us. God encourages us to keep going and not to give up (Luke 18:1 to 8). If anyone is holding a grudge against God, let it go. Blame the devil. Turn to God for healing of your physical or emotional pain.

Our eternal destiny depends on our personal relationship with Jesus. We have the choice to choose to enter heaven on our death or we can choose to reject Jesus and the only way of salvation, but in doing so you may well end up in the Lake of Fire. If someone rejects God while on earth, He will reject that person on Judgement Day (Luke 12:8 & 9). If you want to face death with peace and God's assurance, there are some steps you will need to take. Firstly, face the fact all of us will one day die. Very few people are prepared for death. Every person lives through their life knowing full well they are going to die one day yet many never make adequate spiritual preparation. It is not morbid to face up to our own mortality, it is realistic. It is foolish to live without making spiritual preparation for the inevitable. There is no reason why people should be afraid of death if they know Jesus. If we are walking with God, the day of our death will be better than the day we were born (Ecclesiastes 7:1). After suffering on this earth for many years, it is natural for genuine believers to long for the day when they will be released from the difficulties of this life (Philippians 1:23). The second step we must take is to accept the loving offer of salvation through the blood of Jesus. There is no other way humans can be saved from eternal death. We cannot have access to God the Father unless we go through the pathway of salvation God's way (John 14:6). We cannot save ourselves (Titus 3:4 to 6). To enjoy eternal life we must accept Jesus while we are on earth. If we leave it until we have died it will be too late and we will miss out. It is imperative to take the steps of salvation while we are alive. After salvation, God expects us to serve Him using our abilities. We need to have the correct motive and we need to serve God His way not our way. We need to do what He wants and fulfil the ministry He lays out for us, not the work we choose. No matter how long we try to serve God, if we do not do His will for our lives, He will reject us. We need to discipline ourselves. 'I discipline my body and bring it into submission, lest by any means, after I have preached to others I myself should be rejected' (1 Corinthians 9:27).

We must do what God wanted mankind to do right from the beginning at creation – He wants our unrestrained obedience. It was disobedience that saw Adam and Eve ejected from paradise. Listening to God and obeying His voice is better than any kind of sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). If you are following a religion that does not centre around Jesus and His sacrifice then you are following a false religion. No matter how hard or hurtful your life has been, once you give your life to Jesus and know you are in His will, then no matter what life throws at you, it can never be compared with the glory we will experience once we are with the Lord of Heaven. 'The sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us' (Romans 8:18). 'The Lord is my Shepherd ... When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your (shepherd's) rod and Your staff comfort me' (Psalm 23:1 & 4).

Amen and God bless you.

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