

Death is a reality we don't like to talk about. It's an easy topic to avoid most of the time. We wish it would just stop happening. However, when death occurs it forces us to think about it and talk about it.

When death occurs to a love one it brings with it intense emotions. Often these feelings are negative such as: anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, confusion, and doubt. It raises a number of questions for the Christian, but perhaps the foundational question is: How should I view death?

This paper is an attempt to develop a brief theology of death. It is my opinion that the Biblical teaching on this subject can be grouped under two large headings:

- Death is Bad News
- Jesus is Good News

To understand the Good News of Jesus one must first understand just how bad death is.

### **Death is Bad News**

The Bible has a number of images to which death can be compared including:

- Greedy Conqueror  
The ruthless Babylonians are personified by the prophet as a greedy conqueror. His greed is compared to the greediness of death.  
*"Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied ..."* (Habakkuk 2:5).
- Snare That Traps Humans  
*"The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me"* (Psalm 18:4-5).
- Walled City That Imprisons  
*"Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death,..."* (Psalm 9:13).  
*"Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?"* (Job 38:17).
- Grim Rider on Pale Horse  
*"I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him"* (Revelation 6:8).

There are no good images of death in Scripture.

The first mention of death in the Bible is found in Genesis 2:17:

*"... you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*

Death is thus a consequence of sin. Paul elaborates on this thought in Romans.

*“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..” (Romans 5:12).*

*“For the wages of sin is death,..” (Romans 6:23).*

When God finished creating the world he proclaimed that it was “very good.” Death, however, was not a part of that creation. In this sense death is not natural. It is only natural in the sense that it is inevitable in a world corrupted and destroyed by sin.

*“... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..” (Hebrews 9:26).*

Since death is not natural in God’s created order it is thus neither easy for us to accept nor to understand. It is no wonder that death creates such horrible pain; it is not from God! We learn further from Scripture that:

- Death is our enemy (1 Corinthians. 15:26).
- Death is a power held by the devil (Hebrews. 2:15).
- Death holds us in slavery to fear (Hebrews 2:16).

Jesus was disturbed by the effects of death. At the tomb of his friend Lazarus he was visibly moved to tears. The Gospel of John tells us that, *“...he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (John 11:33)*. This is quickly followed in the narrative by the shortest verse in Bible, *“Jesus wept” (John 11:35)*. Why is he crying? He’s about to raise Lazarus from the dead! It appears that Jesus is hurting as he empathizes with the family and friends who are deep in grief because the one they love is dead.

When death occurs we are often tempted to offer platitudes. For instance we might tell people how they should feel, *“Don’t feel bad; don’t cry.”* We might try to put a positive spin on death, *“Isn’t it great that he’s with God?”* It is certainly appropriate at times to say a word of encouragement to one who is grieving. However, perhaps we could better minister to one another if we talked less and wept more. Before his remarkable miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus took a moment to grieve with his friends. He entered into the pain that death had brought to their lives.

Once we embrace fact that death is evil we are in a position to understand the Good News of the Gospel.

### **Jesus is Good News!**

It is an almost unbelievable thought that the perfect Son of God, Jesus, entered this world of sin for the purpose of dying. It was not inevitable that he would die, as it is for us. Yet, he **voluntarily** entered into death



## A Christian View of Death

By Byron Fike

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*"No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18).*

*"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).*

Jesus died because we needed him too.

*"Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).*

*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).*

When God raised Jesus from the dead he shattered the gates of Death.

*"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:33).*

*"For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him" (Romans 6:9).*

*"'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).*

*"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15).*

This is indeed good news! But it does not mean all the pain and suffering is gone. Death is still our enemy. But because of Jesus' death and resurrection we have hope! The New Testament writers often refer to believers who have died as simply "fallen asleep." Consider this wonderful encouragement from Scripture:

*"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds*

*to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).*

It still hurts when we lose someone to death. We still grieve. However, we do not grieve as those who have not hope.

Death could be compared to a cave. You enter the cave with no light. You can't see what's ahead and as you walk through the entrance it closes behind you. You find yourself surrounded in darkness. The good news for the believer is that as the entrance is closing you see an opening ahead and waiting at the exit is Jesus himself. When Jesus rose from the dead he blasted a hole in the cave of death and made it into a tunnel. Satan's plan was that death would be the end of life! Jesus turned death into a *transition* from one life to the next.

The source of all our hope is found in Jesus' death and resurrection. Forgiveness of sins is found here. Eternal life is here. Reconciliation with God is here. We find our purpose and meaning for living on earth here. Jesus offers this hope to everyone who will come to him for salvation. It is fitting that God's design for a person to receive all the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection would be for that person to participate in the event itself.

*"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his **death**? We were therefore **buried** with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was **raised** from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4).*

As long as we live in this world we will experience pain, suffering, and death. Someday soon, however, this world will end and all pain will cease. The cry of the righteous has always been, "How long?" "How much longer do we have to wait?" God's answer is, "Just a little bit longer." What's he waiting for? The Bible tells us:

*"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).*

Is he waiting on you? Why not accept his invitation? Enter into his death and resurrection through baptism. Give him control of your life.