

OUR COMMON ENEMYⁱ

Preparing for the coming transformation of death

Rich or poor, bond or free, every person falls prey to death. Like God, death is no respecter of persons. Whether you are a king or a pauper, you are not exempt. Every strategy of escape will become of little value when death knocks on your door. When death comes, medical discoveries, disciplines, or inventions will be of no consequence.

Death is so well established that neither wealth nor power can dissuade it. It cannot be bought, bribed, or defeated. You can't out-run it or out-smart it. Even love must step aside for death. You may choose to ignore it or even deny it, but when death calls, you must answer.

As a result of Adam's sin, death was made the common lot of all people; therefore it is our common enemy. The Apostle Paul wrote that death is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26¹). This means that death will be around for a long time. Therefore, it would be wise, in a preparatory sense, to get to know the enemy.

Like a military strategist, we must know our enemy and prepare for a victory. If we know what to expect and how to properly prepare for the appointed confrontation, we need not fear the dreaded enemy called death.

The Appointment of Death

Hebrews 9:27² says that it is appointed unto men once to die. This poses a question: Is a specific year, month, day, hour, minute or second scheduled for our time of death?

The word "appointed" comes from the Greek word *apokeimai*, meaning "to be reserved; figuratively, to await: laid up." This tells us that death has been reserved for man. It does not necessarily mean that a specific date or time has been set for each of us to die. It simply means that a reservation for our death has been made. Although dates or times for reservations are usually made in advance, reservations may be changed.

Many individuals have had their reservations rescheduled. For instance, Hezekiah prayed and fifteen years were added to his life (II Kings 20:1-6³). This still happens today through intercessory prayer and God's intervention. Enoch walked with God and had his reservation completely cancelled because God took him (Gen. 5:24⁴; Heb. 11:5⁵).

¹ **1 Corinthians 15:26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

² **Hebrews 9:27** Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

³ **2 Kings 20:1-6** In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'"

⁴ **Genesis 5:24** Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

⁵ **Hebrews 11:5** By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

These examples relate that a time or date for one's death is not set in concrete, but that it is reserved for each individual. Many variables make the time of death flexible. If a specific, unchangeable time for our death were already set, the word *sterizo* ("fixed") or a similar word would have been used in Hebrews 9:27⁶.

Considering the exception of the Rapture, of which Enoch is a type, death is approaching for each one of us.

We Do Not Have To Fear Death

A man became so consumed with the fear of dying that he entered the medical field in an effort to avoid death's eventual grip. Death was a very fearful thing to him. Death is "the boogeyman" to many; they see it as a terrible, mysterious monster that is ready to gobble us up at any moment. Others try to befriend death through participation in various cults and cultic rituals - only to be duped by its grip. In most cases, involvement in such activities is nothing more than an expression of the fear of death.

But there is good news: We don't have to fear death! We are not left without answers, nor are we left without the opportunity to have confidence when death comes. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Behold, I shew you a mystery" (I Cor. 15:51⁷), and "I would not have you to be ignorant" (I Thess. 4:13⁸). In these instances, Paul was referring to death. The key phrases here are "shew you" and "do not be ignorant," which reveal that death is not a mystery; it is a ready revelation for all who will sincerely inquire.

According to Scripture, it was God's righteousness that demanded the severe penalty of death as a result of sin. Then it must be God who issues the remedy and healing for the fear and plight of death.

Watered-Down Ideas?

Someone who truly cares about your well-being will lovingly tell you the truth. Therefore, God, who loves the world (Jn. 3:16⁹), does not provide sugarcoated or watered-down ideas. In His infinite love, He tells the truth. God is the very embodiment of truth (Titus 1:2¹⁰). He lets us know that death will indeed bring glorious rewards to those who are prepared for it, but He also reveals that death will yield horrendous consequences for those who are not prepared. The outcome depends upon whether we have trusted God's plan concerning our lives and our futures.

Moreover, God's Word, the Bible, revolves around a Man who died, was buried, and resurrected three days later. His name is Jesus. All Old Testament writings point to Christ Jesus. An old adage concerning the Old and New Testaments goes something like this:

"The New is in the Old contained and the Old is in the New explained." The New Testament brings the Old Testament to light in that the expected Messiah was fulfilled in Christ Jesus, the only begotten of God. It was Jesus who actually experienced death and arose from the dead three days later. It's this very

⁶ **Hebrews 9:27** Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

⁷ **1 Corinthians 15:51** Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--

⁸ **1 Thessalonians 4:13** 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.

⁹ **John 21:16** Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁰ **Titus 1:2** a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,

same Jesus who ascended into heaven and has promised to return.

It must be noted that the death Jesus experienced was more than a near-death or an out-of-body phenomenon. His was a complete physical death, yet He arose. This would seem absurd to the natural man. How can someone be dead for three days and then arise to life? This is impossible, isn't it? It would be impossible if it were not for Jesus' amazing identity.

He is far more than a teacher, a philosopher, or a redeemer, as many religions teach. Jesus is God who became flesh (Jn. 1:1-14¹¹) and who arose by His own power (Jn. 2:19-21¹²). He is the Creator of all things (Col. 1:12-17¹³).

Jesus' death was witnessed by multitudes. But the witness didn't stop there. He resurrected from the dead and revealed Himself to many. Jesus spent 40 days on the Earth during the time between His resurrection and His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9-11¹⁴). During this time, Jesus was seen by Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:11-18); by other women (Matt. 28:9-10); by Cleophas and an unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus, and again with the disciples (Lk. 24:13-35); by ten of the disciples - without Thomas (In. 20:19-25); and by the disciples with Thomas (Jn. 20:26-29). He was also seen again by Peter (Jn. 21:1-25). The resurrected Jesus breathed, walked, talked, ate, and was touched by human hands. He was also physically present at the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20); He was seen by 500 at one time (1 Cor. 15:3-6) and He was seen ascending into heaven (Acts 1:4-11¹⁵).

After the ascension, Jesus revealed himself to Paul, then called Saul, on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), and He later revealed Himself to John on the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:10-18).

¹¹ **John 1:1-14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹² **John 2:19-20** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"

¹³ **Colossians 1:12-17** giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁴ **Acts 1:9-11** After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

¹⁵ **Acts 1:4-11** On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

We can trust Jesus through life, through death, and through the events that follow. He has crossed the river of death and returned. He alone holds the keys of death (Rev. 1:18¹⁶). This same Jesus became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21¹⁷) and removed the sting from death on our behalf (1 Cor. 15:55-56¹⁸).

Death: A Result of Sin

Scripture reveals that death is a result of sin. God warned Adam to not eat of the forbidden fruit, stating that if he did he would die. "*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*" (Gen. 2:17¹⁹). Adam *did* eat and was cursed with death (Rom. 6:23²⁰). The first aspect of human death was spiritual: separation from God. This separation, as well as physical death, was passed on to every individual from every generation (1 Cor. 15:22²¹). Thanks be to God that a way of escape has been made from the curse of sin and death.

Preparation for Death is a Must

Death should be greatly feared by those who aren't prepared. It is more than a mere passing of life; it is the doorway from the temporary to the eternal... eternal life or eternal death. This makes death very serious business. Preparation must be taken seriously and acted upon quickly.

"Turn to the Lord one day before you die," was the advice given by a sage to his followers. *"And who can know the day of his death, Master?"* asked one who heard his counsel. *"True,"* said the sage, *"and for that reason, you should turn to the Lord today, for you may die tomorrow"* (see Proverbs 27:1).

May God richly bless you as you study His Word for... *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

ⁱ From "When Death Comes" by Keith Harris; The Olive Press Columbia, SC 29228

¹⁶ **Revelation 1:18** I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

¹⁷ **2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

¹⁸ **1 Corinthians 15:55-56** "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.

¹⁹ **Genesis 2:17** but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

²⁰ **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

²¹ **1 Corinthians 15:22** For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.