

How To Live Free From the Fear of Death

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Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ On Sunday, January 31, 2021

Introduction

This is the time of year for Halloween, so I thought we'd take a break from our regular series to discuss some things associated with this holiday.

This is the time of year for people who like to dress up in costumes. I find that there are several categories: One is "pretty". Sometimes young girls choose to be a princess. Snow white, Cinderella, you name it. You see little girls running around in satin dresses and wearing costume jewelry - Especially a crown or tiara. You all know how you should react when you see a young girl in a princess outfit, right? You say, "oh, pretty"! Then they smile.



Another category is "strong". Children who choose this category choose athletes and superheroes. In this case we have young people ready to save the world.

There are other categories, but historically, one of the most common has been "scary". When you see little children dressed as skeletons, ghosts, vampires, zombies, you say, "oh, scary". And they smile (if you can see under the mask).

Now, the reason that scary costumes have tended to dominate Halloween is that Halloween, more than anything else, is supposed to be scary. It represents fear. In fact, you could say that it's the holiday where people celebrate fear. Why is that? Where did that idea come from?

Today we have plenty of food. The ancient days of Europe were different. All over Europe, you had the changing of the seasons. In the summertime, you have lots of resources for growing your food. So there was a sense of life.

But in the fall, things started to grow colder, and the food was harvested. Hopefully you had enough food when you were done. Because if you didn't, you might run out later. When the weather gets cold, things start to die. The leaves fall off the trees. The fruit disappears. The ground gets hard. You can't grow any more food. -And whatever might have been found in nature disappears from the earth. Add to that, when it gets cold, people are more likely to get sick. All of this leads to potential death. And death is scary.

Death has never been popular, so people try to come up with ways to cope. The ancient people came up with all kinds of superstitious things they thought might ward off death. Carving a leftover pumpkin with a scary face might scare away evil spirits. Dressing up like something

dead, like a skeleton or the grim reaper, might give you the illusion of having some control over death.

You know what? It doesn't work. You can dress up as scary things all you want, and people still die. And people are still afraid.

Of course, now we live in the modern world. We don't do superstitious things, do we? Well, yes, we do. Some psychologists suggest that this is the reason we've kept Halloween around all these years. We still dress up as scary things. We hang scary decorations all over our homes. We watch scary movies. All in the hope that we can control our fears.

And you know what? It still doesn't work.

Today, we're going to talk about fear - In particular, fear of death. Let's ask a question: Do you need to fear death? Lots of people do. If you fear death, you have lots of company. If you've been hanging around churches for any length of time, you know the answer. The answer is: No, you don't have to fear death. In this article, we'll find out how you can become a person who does not fear death. In fact, we will learn how to be exactly the opposite: Courageous.

Before we go on, let's highlight a point: There are always two kinds of people reading our articles. There are people for whom this is new. You've never heard someone tell you that it's possible to be free from the fear of death. If that's the case, I have good news: You are in the right place! Keep reading!

Then there are the people who have been in church for a while. Those folks likely feel like they know the answers to these questions - Or, at least they think they do. So, it's tempting to stop reading and find something else to do. For those folks, hang in! Although **some** of the material will be familiar, you might be surprised what you'll learn today.

So, let's get started. How do you become someone who is free from the fear of death?

I. Trust God

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4 (ESV)

Look at that: "The valley of the shadow of **death**." The writer is King David. He was a man who found himself in danger many times. The picture here is a shepherd. King David, started out as a shepherd, so he knew what he was talking about.

David says God sometimes acts like a shepherd:

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. (In Psalm 95:7)

Every good shepherd had a rod, and a staff. The staff was a light, long stick that was used to gently redirect sheep when they weren't going to the right direction. You've all seen the classic picture: It has a hook on the end. That lets you catch a sheep if needed. If a sheep was slightly out-of-line, it got a tap from the long end of the staff. If a sheep was totally out-of-line, it got a hook around its neck.

The idea here is that sometimes we need to be redirected. ***We sometimes need to be protected from ourselves.*** That's because sometimes, we do unwise things. In that case, we need a tap to redirect us. Sometimes the things we do are so unwise, they might lead to death. In those cases, God can grab us with his hook. That's very uncomfortable, but the Good Shepherd knows we need it. David is saying, "I don't need to fear the valley of the shadow of death because God can redirect me when I'm getting myself into trouble."

Have you ever needed to be redirected? I have!

The rod, on the other hand, was much heavier. It was a club. The shepherd used it to attack any animal that threatened the flock. David knew about this firsthand. Years before becoming King, when he was a lowly shepherd, he visited the armies of Israel when they stood before one of their biggest enemies: The giant named Goliath. Goliath made the greatest warriors of Israel tremble in fear. Fear of what? Fear of death. Goliath looked like someone who could kill them, so the army of Israel was paralyzed in fear.

David got mad at them. He went straight to the King and offered to take on the giant. The King, of course, said, "Who in the world are you? He's a giant. He's an experienced warrior. You're a shepherd. In fact, you're a kid."

Here's how David answered:

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (I Samuel 17:34-37)

Let's note some things here: This says a lot about David. David, even as a young man, did not fear death. Because he did not fear death, he had incredible **courage**. Let that word sink in - **courage**. The other warriors of Israel were paralyzed with fear. But David was **courageous**. Why? He trusted God.

But what kind of faith did he have exactly? He believed that God could deliver him. Notice: David did not take credit - He gave all the credit to God.

Also, David cared about his sheep. In fact, he was zealous for his sheep. That made him want to risk his life to protect them.

Next, we learn some things about God. David believed that God was **powerful**. David believed that God was **able** to **deliver** him. He did it in the past, and David believed he would do it in the future.

Next, David believed that God was **willing** to deliver him. In fact, David believed that, in the same way that he was **zealous** about his sheep, God was zealous for him.

So, we see a man, David, who did not fear death. In fact, he was the opposite: He was **courageous**. David did not fear death because he trusted God. He believed that God was his shepherd. In the same way that he (David) was zealous for his sheep, God was zealous for him. God has something like a shepherd's staff. If David needed a gentle tap, he got it. If David needed a hook around his neck, (and that was sometimes the case) he got it. David believed that God was powerful. He had something like a rod that he was very willing to use to defend his sheep.

Let's stop and ask some questions: Do you believe that God is zealous for you? Do you believe that God is powerful? If so, does that make you **courageous**?

If not, read on.

II. Have faith in Jesus.

Next, you need something more specific than faith in a general concept of God. You need to believe in Jesus.

Here's something Matthew wrote.

...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Matthew 4:16)

Give special attention to that sentence: "...on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." The picture of the shadow of death looms heavy on many people. They want relief. They need light.

What is that light?

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
(John 8:12)

Jesus is the light. Do you want to live without the fear of death? Believe in Jesus.

Jesus had no fear of death.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (Matthew 16:21)

Jesus came to do many things, but one was to teach people about resurrection. He was not afraid of death because he believed that God was going to raise him from the dead. Because of that, Jesus could be **courageous**. If God wanted him to go, he could go to dangerous places - Places where he knew his life would be jeopardized.

The followers of Jesus were people who had no fear of death. Let's hear from the apostle Paul:

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:
"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

The followers of Jesus are people who don't fear death. Here are some other things they don't fear: "Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword".

"Angels or demons" (How's that for Halloween?)

The present – There is nothing that anyone can throw at you **today** to make you afraid. The future – There is nothing that anyone can throw at you **ever** to make you afraid.

“Powers” Ever hear the phrase, “The powers that Be”? Did you ever wonder who they are? Well, whoever they are, you don’t need to be afraid of them.

“Height nor depth”. Nothing is too big, nothing too hard.

I like this one: “...nor anything else in all creation” The writer here is hitting on everything he knows that might cause us to be afraid. He finally gives up and just says, “anything”. Followers of Jesus do not need to fear **anything**. Why? Because nothing “...will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our lord.”

So, how do you make this real in your life? How do you become someone who has no fear of death? How do you become **courageous**?

Here are the steps:

1) Believe in Jesus.

The first thing you need to do is believe in Jesus.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Believe. That’s it. Believe that God loves you. Believe that he loves you so much he sent his Son Jesus to die on a cross for your sins. If you believe that, you will have eternal life.

If you’ve never done this, come talk with us. We want you to become someone who is confident that you have eternal life in Jesus Christ. Eternal life means you don’t need to fear death. There are some important links at the end of this article.

2) Follow Jesus

Next, you must commit to be a follower of Jesus. That’s why we keep using the phrases, “followers of Jesus” and “Disciples of Jesus”.

That involves several things, so let me focus on one for now: You need to spend time with other followers of Jesus.

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

We are to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. We do that when we meet together. The easiest way to start spending time with other believers is to commit to coming to church. You can learn more about following Jesus from there.

Here's where things go wrong for a lot of people. Maybe someone is sitting in the crowd today and they're thinking: "I made a decision to believe in Jesus, but I'm still afraid sometimes – maybe a lot."

Again, this is a complex problem. Let's look at one potential part of that. Lots of folks come to church for an hour or two on Sunday. They spend that time with believers. But then, they spend the whole rest of their week with others.

One big problem is that old TV. Let me show you an article I ran into recently. It's from the online magazine "Psychology Today". It was written by a Dr. Deborah Serani, Doctor of Psychology. Here's the title: "If It Bleeds, It Leads: Understanding Fear-Based Media - Managing depression requires you to mind your media intake."

I would say that a better subtitle would be, "Managing fear". Here's an excerpt from the article:

"News is a money-making industry. One that doesn't always make the goal to report the facts accurately. Gone are the days of tuning in to be informed straightforwardly about local and national issues. In truth, watching the news can be a psychologically risky pursuit, which could undermine your mental and physical health.

Fear-based news stories prey on the anxieties we all have and then hold us hostage. Being glued to the television, reading the paper, or surfing the Internet increases ratings and market shares — but it also raises the probability of depression relapse.

In previous decades, the journalistic mission was to report the news as it actually happened, with fairness, balance, and integrity. However, capitalistic motives associated with journalism have forced much of today's television news to look to the spectacular, the stirring, and the controversial as news stories. It's no longer a race to break the story first or get the facts right. Instead, it's to acquire good ratings in order to get advertisers, so that profits soar."

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/two-takes-depression/201106/if-it-bleeds-it-leads-understanding-fear-based-media>) (accessed 10/28/2021)

Boy, did she ever say that well! Let's review the high points: Year ago, watching the news meant hearing people who tried their best to be accurate in presenting facts. Over time, that noble mission has been corrupted by money. Today, everything is about getting you to watch so that you'll buy things from advertisers. ***The best way to do that is to scare you.***

If you spend one hour in church, and then spend 30 hours during the week watching cable news, you will become a wreck. If you're a follower of Jesus and you wonder why you walk around angry and afraid all the time, maybe you spend too much time with godless people whose job is to make you angry and to scare you.

We'll expand on that in the future. For now, let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Halloween has become the holiday where we celebrate fear. Some people think they can overcome fear by:

- dressing up in scary costumes,
- decorating their homes with scary things,
- and watching scary movies.

It doesn't work.

If you want to live your life without fear of death, if you want to be courageous, you need to believe that:

- God loves you.
- He is zealous for you.
- He has the power to help you.

Believe in Jesus. Jesus triumphed over the grave. Let's close with this verse:

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

Trust God. Believe in Jesus. And you can live a life free from the fear of Death.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church: www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site: PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site: PeaceWithGod.net