



Peninsula City Church

A Kingdom Perspective

**Do You Realise that We are Part of the
Bigger Picture?**

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Do you Realise that we are Part of the Bigger Picture?

Q. Where is the hope in this world now with so much death?

An Introduction

During what the world has been going through, many people are fearful that they may die of the virus or some related illness. So, why do so many people live in fear of death? This fear of death is called thanatophobia. From a merely human perspective, it is in fact it is,

“a form of anxiety characterised by a fear of one’s own death or the process of dying.”

It has been said that,

“The fear of death keeps people off jets and into cars, a more deadly form of transportation. The fear of death exerts tremendous force over people in this world. It makes us irrational.”

As humanity have been humbled by a tiny microscopic virus, Christ-follower, and non-Christ-follower alike. We are all in a crisis together. Some have lived, and others have died. So, as a human race, we are not immune to dying.¹

Death entered the human race when Adam and Eve sinned, Gen 3:1-8; Ps 146:4; Eccl 3:21; 12:7; Rom 5:12; Heb 9:27. God had warned Adam that if he sins, he will die, Gen 2:17. We then see in the next chapter of Genesis that Cain was murdered Able, Gen 4:8. Later Adam finally physically died, Gen 5:5. This has been the unnatural case for humanity since then. That is, we all die. Whereas, from a Kingdom of God perspective, namely, we have hope in the truth that we are children of God. So, if that is the case, why are so many Christ-followers crippled by fear of death? As God’s children, we have been promised and given life.

Where do you stand on this matter of death? Do you find it scary, sad, or merely a moving part of life’s cycle? On this topic of death and the fear of death, we will review some of the biblical aspects that make up the matter. Some of the big questions that many will ask at some time in their lifetime are,

- What is going to happen to me after I die?
- Is death a bad thing?
- Is death the end of me?
- Should I fear dying?
- Is it ok to end my life?
- What is it all about?

But is there a better way to see all this matter of death? Let us look at what the Bible has to say on the subject. This is to be able to answer the question, “What would you say to someone who asked you, “Where is the hope in death?” How would you explain the idea of death to a new Christ-follower? Here we will look at a section of the Bible where two sisters lost their brother to death. They were grieving, and what is worse they had called on Jesus, but He did not answer in the way or in the time that they wanted Him to do so.

¹ “COVID-19: March 19, 2020.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LDJDxY-5Rk> (3rd May 2020).

a. The death Lazarus and raising of Lazarus: Jn 11:1-57

a. John sets the scene

John, in chapter 11, recorded the death of a dear friend of Jesus Lazarus the brother of Mary and Martha. It brings out a side of Jesus that at first reading, appears to be lacking in empathy. He stayed where He was for another two days, and Lazarus died. The reason is that we know from hindsight that Jesus never did a thing to please or appease others. He was only here to do the will of His Father. John recorded Jesus tell His followers the reason why He was doing what He did,

“But when Jesus heard it, He said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it’” (Jn 11:4 NASB).

This comes through again in Jn 11:40 when Jesus said,

“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’” (Jn 11:40 NASB).

So, John pointed out that the whole opening scene seems to be countercultural. Even His own followers could not understand what Jesus was doing at this moment. But Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and that, He would raise Lazarus from the dead. This would be the seventh and last public sign that John would record. This miraculous sign had only been recorded four times in the Old Testament.²

So, John called attention to the fact that Jesus was not doing things how one expected them to be done. If we heard about someone being sick, we would probably go to see them. However, Jesus did not do that, but He intentionally waited for Lazarus to die before going. This was due to as it has been said,

“Therefore, the implication is that in accordance with the Father’s will and purpose disclosed to Jesus, he waited for the death of Lazarus before setting off for Bethany; the delay was an expression of Jesus’ love for the family (v5).”³

This has now laid the foundation for Jesus most significant sign second only to His own resurrection. So, the disciples were about to be taught a massive lesson that life is really in the hand of God. There is no need for fear of death, but the love and trust in the owner and giver of life. However, even more, that, Jesus wanted to make sure that people knew that it was a miraculous sign from God and not leave any chance to Lazarus having just passed out. It has been said that,

“There is a tradition in Judaism (that still exists today), that the soul after death does not immediately depart the deceased, but hovers over the body for a period of three days, during which time resurrection is possible. Jesus arrived in Bethany near Jerusalem on the fourth day. This explains why, after hearing the news that Lazarus was very ill, “he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”⁴

² Köstenberger, Andreas J. “John.” In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. (Eds G.K. Beale & D.A. Carson). (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 467. These four times were, Samuel being raised by the witch to speak to King Saul 1 Sam 28; Elijah raising the widow’s son 1 Kings 17:17-24; Elisha raising the Shulamite woman’s son 2 Kings 4:32-37; and the raising of the dead man 2 Kings 13:21.

³ Harris, Murray J. *John (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament)* (Kindle Locations 6856-6858). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, Eli. *The Jewish Gospel of John: Discovering Jesus, King of All Israel* (p. 184). Jewish Studies for Christians. Kindle Edition.

b. Jesus glorifies the Father

John went on to record another of the 'I AM' statements made by Jesus. That is, 'I AM the Resurrection and the Life, i.e. *zoe* (v25). So, this means that Jesus does not merely give resurrection and life He is these things. On this, it has been said,

“The central theme of 11:1–44 is the lordship of Jesus over death. He is the pledge and agent of both resurrection and eternal life (v25a). Those who are united to him in faith are not immune from physical death but are guaranteed triumph over death through a future resurrection (v25b) and future immortality (v26a).”⁵

Both sisters had been struggling with Jesus, not coming in time. They must have discussed this as they said the same thing to Jesus. That is,

²¹ “Martha, therefore, said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’ ... ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died’” (Jn 11:21, 32 NASB)

The context of John chapter 11:17-44 is one of hope and victory and not one of fear and failure. Jesus, in doing the Father’s will has arrived at the right time. This did not appear to be the case for Martha v21, Mary v32 and the people v37. However, the Father’s timing is not our timing. Jesus wanted them and especially Martha to see that, Jesus knew what He was doing as He followed the Father’s will.

Jesus took the time during the painful situation to reach out to Martha. As a result, she made her peace with Jesus and believed in Him as the Messiah,

²³ “Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ ²⁴ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ ²⁵ Jesus said to her, ‘I AM the resurrection and the life; they who believes in Me will live even if they die, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ²⁷ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; I have believed (or *I have come to believe*) that You are the Christ (*Messiah*), the Son of God, even He who comes into the world” (Jn 11:23-27 NASB).

Then when Jesus came to Mary and she went out to meet Him. Then she and mourners began sobbing loudly with grief.

³³ “When Jesus, therefore, saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was angry (*groaned i.e. was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled; Lit. troubled Himself and shook with emotion, it is like a snorting a horse ready for battle*, [cf. also v38 where it is the same word]), ³⁴ and said ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ ³⁵ Jesus wept (*burst into tears* the only use in the NT)” (Jn 11:33-35 NASB).

Where John recorded that Jesus was angry and groaned in 11:33,38 it has been said that,

“is very strong in the Greek and possibly indicates Jesus’ anger against sin’s tyranny and death.”⁶

The word that is used here carries the idea of a horse snorting in battle as it is ready to charge into battle.⁷ It is to have intense anger and assault someone with a sharp rebuke. This is what Jesus

⁵ Harris, *John*, (Kindle Locations 6936-6938). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Cox, Steven L. & Easley, Kendell H. *Harmony of the Gospels*. (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2007), 143.

⁷ Harris, *John*, (Kindle Location 7047). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

was doing as He rebuked our enemy death. He was deeply moved in His spirit now. It has been said that,

“How burials occur within a particular culture tell us much about the people’s worldview. In Jewish culture, while the resurrection of the righteous is also affirmed, there is a strong belief that when a righteous man dies, the world suffers loss. The balance of righteousness versus evil tips in the wrong direction. Grief and the sense of loss are very real. There is no pretence here. Things are bad. Death is bad.”⁸

We also see Jesus’ humanity when He wept or burst into tears. It has been suggested that,

“The tears showed Jesus’ deep love for Lazarus (v.36) but also reflected his painful distress at the inevitability and destructiveness of death (cf. Heb 5:7) and at the persistent unbelief of his Jewish compatriots (cf. Rom 9:1-3).”⁹

The pain was evident as Jesus dealt with all these issues. Jesus, the person, was intense grieving, even though He knew what was about to happen. Jesus then exposed death in all its weakness. He showed the authority that He had as He did the will of the Father as He raised Lazarus to life.

Jesus was now at the point that He was aiming to glorify the Father. He would do this in such a way that it would show the people how close the Kingdom of God was to them. We will notice that Jesus partnered with Martha and Mary at this moment.

³⁸ “So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.”

Jesus involved them by telling them to do what they were able to do,

³⁹ “Jesus said, ‘Remove the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there will be a stench (*he stinks*), for he has been dead four days (*he is a fourth-day man*).’ ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’ ⁴¹ So they removed the stone...”

Then Jesus supernaturally did what they could not do,

“...Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around, I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.’ ⁴³ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth (outside here).’ ⁴⁴ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth...”

Jesus again got them involved to do what they could do themselves,

“...Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’” (Jn 11:38-44 NASB).

So, Jesus got them to do what they could do, and He did what they were unable to do.

The result was that the Father was glorified, and Lazarus was brought back to life. Consequently, there were those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and made their peace with God. As a result of the fantastic sign. But sadly, there were those who did not believe but ran off to report this news to the religious leaders, who then plotted to kill Jesus.

⁴⁵ “Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done” (Jn 11:45-46 NASB).

⁸ Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *The Jewish Gospel of John*. (pp. 188-189). Jewish Studies for Christians. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Harris, *John*, (Kindle Locations 7068-7069). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

2. Our Hope is in Jesus Christ

So, having looked at this issue of death from two angles. That is, the fear and anxiety that many have facing death. Then the story of the death of Lazarus. Here we will look at the victory that Jesus Christ has wrought of our common enemy death. It is important to see what Scripture has to say on the matter of death, Jesus Christ, and humanity. So, it says that,

- Jesus died: Jn 19:30; Rom 4:25; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Pet 3:18
- Jesus died that we might live: Jn 11:26; 1 Thess 4:14
- Jesus Christ broke the power of the devil, who had the power of death:

“Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;” (Heb 2:14 NASB).

- The sting of death has gone for the believer:

⁵⁴ “But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:54-58 NASB).

Paul was quoting from the letter of Hosea as he saw Christ as the fulfilment of a passage of Scripture,

- “Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight” (Hos 13:14 NASB).

- Jesus now holds the keys of death:

“and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev 1:18 NASB).

- Death will be thrown into the lake of fire:

“And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire” (Rev 20:14 NASB).

- There will be no more death for the believer:

“And He (God) shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Rev 21:4 NASB).

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. Where is the hope in this world now with so much death?

It is a fact we will all die someday. This is whether we are a Christ-follower or not. However, how can we share our faith as we serve our community if we are gripped with the fear of death during and after this crisis? Maybe we must get a bigger perspective and see how Jesus Christ has bought hope to the world. To realise that we are always the hope carriers, whether it is hard or not. So, how can we be a more hope-filled and humble people moving forward?

We need to think and live from a Kingdom of God perspective. That is, we have hope in the truth that we are children of God who though we will die physically, we will live forever with Him. The following thoughts are based on a message from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,¹⁰

- We are a global human race made up of many parts which will die one day. Some have already come to the realisation that we are children of the Father, but there are others who have not.
- How do we band together as the one body of Christ to find these ones? Then point them to the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit before they die?
- All of us as people have been humbled by a tiny microscopic virus, Christ-follower, and non-Christ-follower. Many have died or will die because of it. Maybe as people, we have gotten too big for our boots, and this event has humbled us. So, how can we be better and more humble people moving forward not in fear but with hope?
- We are all in crisis this together. Some will live, and some will die, but as a human race, we are not immune to death.
- How can we better serve our fellow human beings during and after this crisis?

However, remember that we are part of a bigger picture. Jesus said that,

²⁵ “I AM the resurrection and the life; they who believes in Me will live even if they die, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. **Do you believe this?**” (Jn 11:25-26 NASB).

In closing, I think that it would be helpful to say out a loud what David wrote in the 23rd Psalm and especially verse four,

¹ “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

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

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps 23:1-6 NASB).

¹⁰ “COVID-19: March 19, 2020.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LDJDxY-5Rk> (3rd May 2020).