



You Will Never See Death

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John 8:48-59

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Let me begin by encouraging you to be thankful for pastors, elders and worship leaders who saturate you with the Word of God. *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If there is any good deed to be done in this church or in these cities, it will come from the Word of God through those who have faithfully ministered the Word of God. *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope”* (Romans 15:4). Faith. Hope. *“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”* (John 15:11). He spoke that we might have joy—faith, hope and joy—all coming from the Word. *“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”* (1 Timothy 1:5). Faith, hope, joy and love—all of these come through the Word of God. Blessed are the people who have a pastoral staff, an eldership and a worship team who cause you to hear the Word of God over and over again! Be thankful for your leadership.

Let me pray and ask God’s help in ministering the Word of God. Let’s pray.

Father in Heaven, I plead with You now that You would come give me strength, wisdom and liberty. May the hearts of the people in this room be in love with the Word of God. May they be so hungry, so ready and so eager to hear the voice of God that it would land on them with remarkable effect. We have sung glorious truths, and now Jesus has more to say to us. Come be our Teacher, I pray, through Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name, I ask it. Amen.

If you have a Bible and you’d like to follow along, we’re going to be focusing on the Gospel of John 8:48-59. I’m going to read that with you and then open it with you. John 8, beginning in verse 48 says:

⁴⁸ *The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”* ⁴⁹ *Jesus answered, “I do not have a*

demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”
⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

That’s amazing! I know why every one of you is here. That is, I know why God in His providence brought you here. He brought you here so that you would know you don’t have to die. That’s why you’re here. He brought you here so that you would know that the One Who says that is I Am, Yahweh, God Almighty, not John Piper. That’s why you’re here—those two reasons. That you may know you don’t have to die and that you may know that the authority behind that statement is not mine but God’s through Jesus God.

Then there are a few massive, total implications of that for your life. Nothing stays the same if you don’t think you’re ever going to die. Everything changes. You don’t live the same. This creates crazy people, wonderful people and wild people. I believe that!

There’s another piece to this text, isn’t there? It is the opposition and it’s terrible. John didn’t record the opposition Jesus was up against because it is not pleasant to read. It’s horrible! This was family, right? These were His people. He came as a Jew among Jews in order to save the Jews, bring the Kingdom to the Jews, present the Messiah to the Jews, and fulfill all the promises to His family. But they said, “You’ve got a demon!”

That’s not pretty. Have you ever had a family member say, “You’re crazy; you’ve got a demon”? It came to a fierce conclusion, right? Jesus responded, “I don’t have a demon; I’m God.” It came to a fierce conclusion because they picked up stones. What were they going to do with those stones? They were going to kill Him. According to Leviticus 24, stoning was the capital punishment for blasphemy. They weren’t confused about what He was saying. This was a very, very violent and scary moment, and it was all built around this crazy statement: “If you keep My words, you’re never going to die!”

I wrote an article a few weeks ago just because it was brimming out of my devotional life. I've been trying to memorize the Sermon on the Mount for months. I'm 68 years old—it doesn't come easy anymore. I was just so impressed by how utterly ludicrous it has been over the centuries for people to try to turn the Teacher of the Sermon on the Mount into a pleasant, comfortable, human teacher of ethics, the Fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man. And let's just all get together and love our enemies.

You get to the end of the Sermon on the Mount and He says, *“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’”* (Matthew 7:22-23). Who's talking? The Judge of the Universe is talking. At the last day, everybody reports to Jesus. That's in the Sermon on the Mount. That's the “ethical Teacher.” That is Him right here, saying, “If you keep My words, you never die.”

Vicious Opposition to Jesus

“Who do You make Yourself out to be?” they asked. That was a really good question. The opposition had already begun in this chapter, right? All of John 8 reports opposition and it came to an end at the beginning of the chapter. In verse 47, Jesus said to them, *“Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”*

They had already shown themselves deaf to the Word of God. They weren't listening to the Word of God and Jesus said, “The reason you're not is because you're not of God.” They responded in verse 48, which says, *“The Jews answered him, ‘Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”*

Now, what was that? A Samaritan? Where did that come from? It was a multi-layered slur. At one level, the Samaritans were Jewish half-breeds who intermingled with the Gentiles 600 years earlier, formed their own little Bible and decided to worship in a way that was inappropriate for the worship in Jerusalem. So the Jews hated the Samaritans. They were calling Jesus “one of those half-breeds.”

Here is another layer: Several times in the Gospel of John, the issue that Jesus was born of Mary and nobody quite knew who got her pregnant was under the surface. It is as if they were saying, “We don't know who your father is. For all we know, he was a Samaritan.”

To cap it all off, they said, “You've got a demon.” So there was a racial slur, a slur against His mom and His origin, plus a slur against the power He had—“You're just demonic. That's Who You are.” This was pretty ugly and pretty powerful stuff.

Jesus responded in verse 49, *"I do not have a demon..."* I asked you a minute ago if you have ever had a family member say to you, "You're crazy!" It's just a light form of "you've got a demon." What do you do at that moment? No matter what you say, they will accuse you of being defensive. Jesus was just very settled and steady, saying, *"I do not have a demon..."* "I don't have a demon. I'm not crazy."

"I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. [That's an understatement!] Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge." In effect, he was saying, "I don't need to defend myself. I have a Defender, namely, my Father. And He is seeking My glory. My Father will seek My glory. My Father will vindicate Me. My Father will defend Me. I don't need to win this argument. My Father will win it in the end and He will be your judge."

It's just a warning, isn't it? He was saying, "You dishonor me. My Father is glorifying Me. So if you dishonor Me, you're setting yourself at cross-purposes with God, and He will be your judge." That's the cluster of thought here, which is saying, "Don't do that! You don't want to have God as your Judge. You don't! He's God; you're not. You don't ever want to meet Him as your Judge. Therefore, get in line with what He's doing, namely, He's glorifying Me not dishonoring Me like you are." This is a warning not to align yourself with any who dishonor the Lord Jesus.

That word, "judgment," in this Gospel has a special ring to it because most of this Gospel is written to say, "Jesus didn't come into the world to judge. God is withholding judgment and sending a Savior." That's John 3:17 where Jesus said, *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."* God was not in the moment of judgment here. He was still gathering. "Oh, that Jerusalem would come and gather like little chicks under My wings (Matthew 23:37). I'm not here to condemn you; I'm here to gather you."

Verse 51 is beautiful. It begins, *"Truly, truly, I say to you..."* Let this sink in. This is the "you" who had just called Him a Samaritan, a racial slur—"You're a half-breed." It is the "you" who were not even sure who Jesus' dad was, the "you" who accused Him of having a demon, and the "you" who was about to come under the judgment of God if they did not turn. Jesus said to them, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."*

In other words, "You blaspheming, dishonoring people do not have to see death. You just have to keep My Word." That's amazing to me! The reason it's amazing is because there are other occasions in the Gospel where Jesus said, "I won't even talk to you anymore." Do you remember that? They said, "By whose authority do You do these things?" And He said, "Well,

let me ask you, by what authority did John the Baptist preach?" At the end of that, He said, "I'm not talking to you anymore." He told us, "Don't cast your pearls before swine. Don't give dogs what is holy" (Matthew 7:6). These were dogs. These barking dogs in front of Jesus said, "You've got a demon." That's a dog talking. In mercy, He didn't walk away until they picked up stones.

This is Jesus right now in this room doing that for you. Whatever you brought here, are you feeling like, "I have called Him that"? You don't have to feel like He's walking away from you. Not yet. That's why I said, "You're here to know." This is a moment of grace for you.

A Remarkable Promise: You Will Never See Death

"If anyone keeps My Word, he will never die. He will never see death," Jesus said. Now, what did Jesus mean by, "He will never see death"? The adversary's here. Repeat it in the second half of verse 52. They said, "... [Y]ou say, *'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'*" They shifted from "see" to "taste." I think Jesus was okay with that because He did not correct them. He didn't say, "No, you misquoted Me. I didn't say "taste"; I said "see." I think if you want to use either "taste" or "see," it's okay. He was saying, "If you keep My Word..." That is, "If you believe what I say, embrace what I say, treasure what I say, honor what I say, and hold on to what I say as your great value, you're not going to see or taste death."

I'll give you a little clue as to how I read the Gospels. I think that all four Gospels were written with the expectation that the Church would read them again and again and, therefore knowing how it ends (except for the first time they read it). Therefore, any effort to read any part of the Gospel without knowing the importance of the end would go against the Author's intention.

So when Jesus said, "If you keep My Word, you live forever; you never die," He was not saying, "You don't have to know anything about the cross." The Gospels ended there; this story ended there. He already said, "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." So when He says, "My Word," that's one of them. "So if you keep My Word, do you remember what I said about laying down My life for you? I'm going to be the Shepherd—substitute for you. I'm going to destroy death for you. I'm going to rise from the grave for you. Nobody takes My life from Me. I lay it down of My own accord. If they take it, I'll take it back. All those are My words."

It's not just "do's" or commandments, like, "Keep the commandments." That's not the point. Keep His Word. Love His Word. Love the revelation of the Son of God in His totality. If you embrace what He said about Himself, His death, His resurrection and His commandments, you live forever. You never, ever die. You never see death. Really!

I woke up this morning. I got out my phone and went to Google News. Click! First thing at the top of the list was “NASCAR driver dead last night.” Crash. The next thing I read in the news was “Forty people dead in Iraq in a plane crash.” I didn’t even catch whether it was our guys trying to bring food to the trapped Christians. There are daily Ebola deaths, daily deaths in Gaza, daily deaths in the Ukraine, daily persecutions of Christians all over the place. “What do you mean, Jesus? I won’t see death? I see it!”

Every day, 50,000 people die in the world. It’s not like death is a surprise. So what did He mean when He said, “You will never taste death”? Look at verse 51. Let’s see His words. He did not say, “Falsely, falsely, will I say to you.” He said, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see [or taste] death.*”

One of the most powerful moments in my seminary life (a long time ago now) was the funeral of James Morgan, who had been my systematic theology teacher. I think he was 36, he had four kids. He got stomach cancer. I had played handball with him in those days. [Have you ever played handball? It hurts!] We had played handball together; we argued together and he had taught me important things.

I was at his funeral and Lewis Smedes, who taught me ethics, stood up with his long, flowing white hair and, in his booming voice, said, “James Morgan is not dead!” My 24-year-old spine tingled. His wife and kids were sitting on the front row. I just tingled. “He is not dead!” I’ve never forgotten that moment. It just landed on me like an avalanche of truth and power and grace. My question was, “Okay, if he’s not dead, what happened? We were talking together just a few weeks ago and now he’s in that box up there. What happened if he’s not dead? What do you call it?”

Jesus gave us the answer in front of Lazarus’ tomb in John 11. This is a very familiar text; most of you probably know it by heart. In John 11:25-26, Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*”

Wait a minute. Come on! Though he dies, he shall never die? Which is it? “*Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*” So yes, we die, and no, we don’t die. Lazarus’ body was there in the grave and he was not dead. And he was dead.

John 5:24 has even more important insight from Jesus. It says, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has [not ‘will have’—has] eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*” Believers in Jesus have already passed from death to life. That’s over; that’s done. The passing from death to life

is over. It's over; it's done. They already have eternal life and eternal life cannot, by definition, stop. Right? Eternal life can't stop. Believers don't see death. They don't taste death. Their bodies die. They lie there in the coffin, and they look like they're asleep. Right? That's why the Bible frequently treats death as sleep. It looks like sleep and it is as simple as sleep for God to take care of. Their bodies are there. The trumpet will sound; the dead will be raised imperishable, and they shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52). The bodies die, but we don't die. We've passed from death to life. We have eternal life. Eternal life is unbroken and unending life.

Back in John 3, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again. You must be born of the Spirit." What does that mean? It means life must come into you that will never stop being. "You must have a new kind of life, Nicodemus." It isn't just this physical, heart-beating, brainwave thing. That is not the life that is the main life. You need a life that is so woven into you as a person that you will never die. You—the essential you—will never die. If you have to lay down your body for a brief season, that's not ideal. It's not the goal but you will be alive. To die is to be with Christ and that is far better (Philippians 1:23). Apart from the body is at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Paul loved the thought that he could never die.

This takes a lot of faith. I have not physically died yet, and I pray about it a lot. Like R.C. Sproul used to say, "I'm not afraid of death; I'm afraid of dying." I know exactly what he means and so do all you older folks. I've got the death issue fixed, but what will this dying thing be like? I want to say to you on the basis of this text (and I'll give you the person who's giving it in just a minute), there will not be one millisecond of broken fellowship with Jesus. That's amazing! There will not be one. You only have to wait a few minutes. Your heart stops beating.

[I almost wanted to correct the song we sang earlier. It's not wrong, but when it says "we awake in heaven," I thought, "That's not suggesting we fell asleep, awoke and there was time in between." It maybe doesn't mean that.]

There is no time in between. You're His now. You won't see the end of your eternal life; you won't taste the end of your eternal life because there is no end of your eternal life. You can't see and taste what isn't. Your eternal life never ends.

In just a minute, we'll come back to close out our time with the implication of that but first, I want to address the mockery and what the mockery drew out. I don't know who you are but some of you may be feeling, "That's just weird mythology he's talking about."

In verse 52, the Jews said, "*Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make*

yourself out to be?" Now, that question is why we get the greatest revelation in the Bible right here. If they hadn't asked that question, we wouldn't be getting this amazing word about the Deity of Jesus. I'm thankful for this horrible opposition because of what it drew out. It came out in two unbelievably amazing steps.

Stage number one of Jesus' answer is in verses 54-56.

⁵⁴ "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

That's almost as amazing as the most amazing thing, but it's not the most amazing thing. It's just close. He what? "He saw My day." What's that mean? "He saw the time when I am alive. My day! My day! My triumph; My victory. He saw me in my day. My victory, My time, My throne, My reality; he saw Me and knew Me." Amazing!

The commentators on this just go all over the place trying to figure out, "What was the vision? Where did that happen with Abraham? And the promise? And the event? Where is that?" Jesus did not pause to explain this at all. I think the reason is they didn't care at all. They were leaning in on the implication of it, and they were going to push it to the end.

Verses 57-59 say, "*So the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'* So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

Now, if Jesus had meant to say, like a good Jehovah's Witness, "I pre-existed Abraham," He could have easily said that. "Before Abraham was, I was." That's the way you say that, right? "Before Abraham was, I was, like Michael, an angel." There's no blasphemy in angels showing up in human flesh. Right? That's what they do. They take on appearances. There's no blasphemy in an angel showing up.

This is blasphemy unless it's true. They were ready to kill Him. You kill blasphemers by stoning. The reason they were ready to kill Him is because He didn't say, "Before Abraham was, I was," He said, "Before Abraham was, I am." This is weird grammar and He means it to be gloriously weird. Right? Because He knew what they knew. In Exodus 3:14, Moses asked God, "Whom shall I say sent me? When I go down there, they're going to say, 'Who sent you?'" God said, "Tell them, 'I am Who I am.' Say, 'I am sent you.'"

This is the clearest declaration in the mouth of Jesus that He is God; He is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. He is "I am." So we have two points in this text. You are immortal if you keep the words of Jesus. God said so! That's the point.

Closing Implication

Our closing implication is that the world needs you to believe that. They don't know what to believe. They don't need more cautious Christians. They don't need more Christians who just look like them, live like them, avoid all the troubles and risks like them, are afraid of death just like them.

In 1973, Ernest Becker wrote a Pulitzer Prize winner called The Denial of Death. Boy, that was a popular book when I was in graduate school! Becker was a sociologist, not a believer as far as I know. Here is the thesis of that book: "The main thesis of this book," he says, "is that the fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else. It is the main spring of human activity." Do you see what he's saying? The fear of death is the main spring of human activity. That's an amazing claim! The main spring of all we do is colored by this avoidance and denial. "I'm not going to die! I'm not going to die! I'm not going to die! Not today at least! Not today at least!" And that denial and fear permeates our lives.

Let me read for you one more sentence. Becker says, "The main thesis of this book is that the fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else. It is the main spring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man."

The writer to the Hebrews agreed with that analysis of the human condition. In Hebrews 2:14, he said that Jesus took on flesh and became like us, in order that "*through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*"

That's amazing! That's exactly what Becker said the human race is. It is enslaved to the denial of death. We just can't let this in on our daily consciousness because it is so discouraging and horrifying. We don't know what's on the other side if there is another side. We love our sex; we love our food; we love our family; we love our everything. Death may take it all away so we cannot let that in. It is going to ruin our lives. That is true unless you will never die. And if you will never die, you are the freest people in the world. "Make my day, Mr. Martyr Maker!" Seriously, if we believe these things, so many of our little anxieties would look so foolish.

I close by saying the world needs Christ and the courage of Christians who believe they will never die. Let me say it again. Wherever you lie, wherever you work, do you know what they need from you? They need a life of courage, risk-taking, radical, wild, crazy Christianity, and they need the Christ of a heart who knows I will never die.

Father in Heaven, I know I preach above my capacities here. I am as prone to anxiety, prone to murmur and prone to fear death as much anybody. I'm praying for myself and for all of us now. God, would You cause this glorious Word from the glorious Divine Savior to sink in deeper than it has in the past? Go down deep now, I pray, and cause us to walk in the liberty that Hebrews is talking about: To set us free, He came to "*...destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*" Do that deliverance now, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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