

***EASTER IS GOD'S ANSWER TO DEATH***  
**Hebrews 2:14-15**

**Read Hebrews 2:14-15**

**Intro:** Fiona calls me Papa. It's a sweet sound for me. It's also a badge of honor. We called my maternal grandfather Papa and I like sharing that moniker with such a good man. Even though I was just a little over three when he died and I remember very little of him, what I remember, and what my parents and older siblings have related about him is that he was a very kind and loving man. I want to be just like him for my grandchildren.

Papa's was the first funeral I remember. I was in my dad's arms and I remember looking at him in his casket and thinking he was sleeping. But I remember that the first funeral I attended that actually affected me in a negative way was when I was perhaps 8 or 9 years old, when I went with my sister to the visiting hours of the husband of our cousin who had died, far too young, of cancer. I remember looking at him in the casket and it was at that point that death began to haunt me. Why? Well, beside the point that I had a kid's mind and kids process things differently because they understand less, I simply didn't know that Easter is the answer to death. That is a problem that a lot of people have. If you don't have a developed concept of the promise and the reality of the resurrection, you will have a well-developed, though probably misunderstood fear of death. As a result we avoid the subject and, in a lot of cases, refuse to ever deal with it until it slaps us cold and hard in the face.

**There are many things related to the fear of death – even for people who know Jesus.**

- They are things like:
- Fear of dying alone – this is understandable – who likes loneliness and even more so, who wants to die alone?
- Fear of dying a painful death. I can honestly say, I don't fear death, but I don't want to suffer. And who would? A masochist maybe.
- Fear of what may happen after we die. For a non-Christ Follower, this is a legitimate concern. It's the classic fear of the unknown. We fear the unknown and death is the ultimate unknown for someone who does not know Jesus. But even for a believer, we'd at least like to know the procedure, right?
- Fear of leaving our loved ones behind. This is completely understandable. Who doesn't want to see their kids grow up? Who doesn't want to see their grandkids?
- The fear of death because of sin. I just finished John Steinbeck's *EAST OF EDEN* and the one character is wracked with guilt and fear about his sin. Fanny Crosby wrote hundreds of powerful songs and we sing many of them. My picture of her is one of a saintly and kindly person like my old friend Rosie Wolfe who I could never imagine contemplating sin, let alone committing sin. But apparently Fanny struggled with fear since she wrote the sweet and plaintive prayer,

*Pass me not, O gentle Savior,  
 Hear my humble cry;  
 While on others Thou art calling,  
 Do not pass me by.  
 Trusting only in Thy merit,  
 Would I seek Thy face;  
 Heal my wounded, broken spirit,  
 Save me by Thy grace.  
 Savior, Savior,  
 Hear my humble cry;  
 While on others Thou art calling,  
 Do not pass me by.*

Knowing about what Easter is about will REALLY help with this particular fear. But as we see in Fanny Crosby's words, sometimes, when we feel low, even Christ Followers can find this is a huge sticking point.

- And finally, many fear standing before God after they die. Again, Easter is the answer, but I get ahead of myself. Let me continue in this depressing vein a little longer. . .

**Death is a problem we all have to deal with**

- Death will come. Death is no respecter of persons. The statistics don't lie – one out of every one person will die someday. No one gets a free pass. The King James Bible puts it this way, *It is appointed unto man once to die.* Hebrews 9:27 (KJV) which is an indicator that death is the great equalizer. The richest man will die and so will the poorest man in the poorest hamlet in Haiti. It's an appointment no one can skip and no one can postpone.
- Yep, death is a problem. It always has been. Two weeks ago we talked about Lazarus dying in John 11. We didn't go far enough into the passage that morning, but we know that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but not before grieving loudly over death's rude attack on humanity. Humanity was created to live and not to die. Adam and Eve messed it up. But Jesus fixed it. He died on what we call Good Friday, but .

### **He came back from the dead on Sunday**

- This is what deals with the fear and the problem of death. Unless Jesus returns before we die, we all will experience death. I just pointed out – the death rate for human beings is 100%. But that one death is all that's necessary before we experience eternal life. That's the beauty of Jesus's resurrection, we get to do it too! Easter is God's answer to the problem of death.
- The scripture I read as I began this talk isn't your run of the mill Easter text, but it's got Easter all over it. Hebrews 2:14 says Jesus came to *break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.* Commenting on this, Ray Pritchard says, *“Satan has the power of death. He uses the fear of death to keep people enslaved in sin. Every time you pass a graveyard, you see mute testimony to the reality of Satan's power. Death belongs to Satan's realm. But Jesus has broken that power. He did it 2,000 years ago on Easter Sunday morning by rising from the dead. The devil still has the power of death in that we will all someday die, but he has been rendered powerless over the children of God because if you know Jesus, though you die, you won't stay dead forever.”*
- That is how Jesus broke the bondage of death by delivering us from the fear of death. Even though we don't know when, or, in most cases, how we will die, we can have the assurance that we will be with him in glory. We have this assurance because, by his sacrifice on the Cross, his blood has covered all my sins, and he has given me his own perfect righteousness. Don't get me wrong, we are not perfect, **but he is**, and that perfection is our promise for eternal life. I referred to Fanny Crosby a bit ago. She knew in her heart of hearts about God's promise and I think she had it in mind when she wrote:

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine  
 O what a foretaste of glory divine  
 Heir of salvation, purchase of God  
 Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood  
 This is my story, this is my song  
 Praising my Savior all the day long  
 This is my story, this is my song  
 Praising my Savior all the day long*

- And because he rose from the dead on Easter, we have that promise we sang about in the dawn service – *Because he lives, I can face tomorrow, because he lives, all fear is gone! Yes . . .*

### **The fear is taken away – Jesus came to break the bondage of death**

- I mentioned Ray Pritchard earlier. In his sermon from which I got the idea for this talk, he quotes a powerful hymn written by Richard Baxter in 1681 entitled *Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care*. Baxter wrote the hymn at the time of his wife's death and noted with the song that it was her joyful testimony. Listen,

*Lord, it belongs not to my care  
 Whether I die or live;  
 To love and serve Thee is my share,  
 And this Thy grace must give.  
 If life be long, I will be glad,  
 That I may long obey;  
 If short, yet why should I be sad*

*To soar to endless day?  
 Christ leads us through no darker rooms  
 Than He went through before;  
 He that unto God's kingdom comes  
 Must enter by this door.  
 Come, Lord, when grace hath made me meet  
 Thy blessed face to see;  
 For if Thy work on earth be sweet  
 What will Thy glory be!  
 My knowledge of that life is small,  
 The eye of faith is dim;  
 But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
 And I shall be with Him.*

- Jesus broke the bondage of death. So when he wasn't there when the ladies arrived at the tomb, the two men in gleaming clothes that Evan read about in Luke 24 earlier were not being sarcastic when they told the women . . .

### **You're looking in the wrong place**

- Because they **WERE** looking in the wrong place! On our trip to Israel back in 2015 perhaps the most powerful experience of the entire trip – and there were lots of powerful experiences, was on our last day at Golgotha and the Garden tomb. They are perhaps 100 yards apart. This place where many people believe Jesus was crucified and then buried nearby just oozes with holy awesomeness. I'm convinced that was the place. So when we went into the tomb I was particularly moved. But one of the best things about that tomb is the wooden door that covers the entrance when tours are not happening has a sign in English that says "HE IS NOT HERE FOR HE IS RISEN!" Essentially saying, "if you're looking for evidence of Jesus here, YOU ARE LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACE!"
- Jesus isn't on the Cross anymore – the cross is empty. Jesus isn't in the grave anymore – the grave is empty. (this is the inside of the Garden Tomb btw) Jesus isn't in a church building – he is in the hearts of his people. That's what Easter did. It opened the tomb and Christ arose and the Holy Spirit came and He IS here, in the lives of his people.

**Conclusion:** So there it is Church! Easter is God's answer to death. We've had people near and dear to us die in just the past month. Yesterday, on Holy Saturday, Al Farnham's funeral was held. Does Al's family miss him? You bet! But he faced down death, knowing it would come very soon, with a courage and joy because he knew his Savior. He knew Paul's promise to the Thessalonians when he wrote, *For 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.* 1 Thessalonians 4:14. How is that for a promise?!

*Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Savior.  
 Waiting the coming day, Jesus My Lord!  
 Up from the grave he arose  
 With a mighty triumph o'er his foes.  
 He arose a Victor from the dark domain,  
 And he lives forever with his saints to reign.  
 He arose! He arose!  
 Hallelujah! Christ Arose!  
 Take that death! Amen.*