

# What Death Is - Death Says No - Christ Says Yes

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Now, in the 8th chapter of John, verse 51. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

Now I want to begin with death and go on with the life this evening. I begin by saying that death is a fact in the world. If we were to take the fact or the thought of death out of all literature, there would scarcely be a major work left in any language.

If we were to take the idea of death out of art, some of the greatest, most, I would say, or at least a large percentage of the great masterpieces of the centuries would collapse. If we were to take the idea of death out of music, some of the greatest compositions in all the world would collapse or would never have been written.

If we were to take the fact of death and the idea of death out of history, the whole of all human history would have to be rewritten, and if we were to take the idea of death out of religion, religion itself would be otherwise than what it is. Death is a fact.

Now the Bible makes it very clear what the origin of death is. It says in Genesis 2:17, But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat, because the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And in Romans 5:12, it says that sin entered into the world and death by sin.

So, the origin of death is sin. Sin is the father, and if the devil is the grandfather, sin is the father of death. We know that death is a fact in the world, a fact that is woven in to all the doings of mankind. And we know its origin, it came from sin.

And then we know something of the nature of death as well. Death is not a substance. Do not try to personalize it and make a substance out of it. If it were a substance, we might discover some way to destroy death. If death were a substance, a thing that we could get our hands on, that we could know how to deal with, we might be able to handle it. But it is not a substance, and it is not a being. Death is not a being.

Now right here you're going to have to do some thinking, and I recommend that we do some thinking. That is, we really use our minds and try to think ourselves, by the grace of God, free from some things that hold us in bondage. We are, for instance, in bondage on this matter of our concept of death. We think about death as a being, and we preachers haven't helped it any, and the poets haven't helped it any, and the artists haven't helped it any, because we tend to apostrophize death. They show death as a man with a skull for a head and a scythe.

Other concepts of death have been painted onto the canvases. And in Milton, death becomes a being that sits at the gate. And in all of our thinking, we talk about Adam opening the gate and death coming in.

We tend to apostrophize death and make death a being. Death is not a being. Death is not a personality or an individual that you could get a hold of and destroy. That's not possible, because death is not a being any more than death is a substance.

Death, my brethren, and this is infinitely worse, if death were a substance, we might destroy that substance with an atom bomb or a cobalt bomb. If death were a being, we might send some FBI throughout the universe and run him down and slay him. But death is not a being.

Death is separation. Death is eternal negation. Death is a rending. Death is a separation of the soul from God. Death is a separation of the soul from the body. Death is a separation of the total man from heaven and God.

In the garden there was a rending that could be heard in all the universe when the soul of the man was rent from God and God was separated from man and the light went out in the hearts of mankind. And in that second death yonder, which is yet to be, there will not be a great being walking with a scythe. There will be something infinitely worse than that.

If it were a great being with a scythe, we might call on the archangel Michael, who might come with his hosts and destroy him. But it will not be a being with a scythe. It will be an ultimate separation, a final rending of the soul from God, never to be reunited, world without end, and that is the second death.

The whole being of the man will be separated from heaven, so that he will never unite again with the heaven which in Adam once he knew when he was in fellowship with God.

I say that death is a negation, death is an everlasting, "no." Death says no to everything.

If it is continuance, and there is something in the human bosom that wants to continue, that wants to go on, a man wants to live on and go on, and death says no. If it is fulfillment, a man feels that he is only a blueprint, and that the great structure hasn't been erected, and he's got to go, he gets old before the building is erected. He feels there is work to be done, and he hasn't finished it yet, and he wants to continue. But death is a negation, death says no.

And he talks about happiness. He feels that he was made of God to enjoy, to let his whole being enter out into something that God has given him to enjoy. But death says no. It says no to light, and it says no to peace, and it says no to life. And the whole being of the man pants after more and fuller life, but death says no.

And the presence of God, which is the heaven of all beings, I do not hesitate to say that if God were to go into the hell below and smile, it would turn into a heaven immediately by the light of that smile. And if God were in his heaven above to turn his holy face and frown, heaven would turn into a hell by the darkness of that frown. It is the smiling presence of God that makes heaven, heaven, and it is the absence of God's smile that makes hell the hell that it is and will be.

So, to the presence of God, after which the soul of mortal man longs as a fish longs after water, as a bird longs after the freedom of the air, so the soul of man longs after God.

God has made us in His being, in His image, and our beings will never find fulfillment until they find it in union with God. But death says no to that as it says no to everything. Death, I say, is an everlasting negation, an everlasting no.

And death is our enemy, of course, for that reason, 1 Corinthians 15:25, 26, that Jesus Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death. And it tells us, we know from what I have just said, why death is an enemy. It's an enemy to me, it's an enemy to my permanence. Everybody wants to live on.

A man builds a building and moves into it and says, I'm going to live here, I'm here permanently. He gets a job and says, I'm here permanently. But when he uses the word permanently, he has to cross his fingers because he knows it's not so. Death says, no permanence for you.

Here's a man with his family, his little children, and his good wife around the table, and he dreams, this will never be anything but what it is. This will be permanent, but death is in the world, and death says no. The enemy says this will not be permanent.

And the man stands up on the earth and feels the wind on his cheek and sees the rain as it falls from heaven above, and the surging, leaping life in him, and he feels, I'd like to live on and on.

But death says, no, your body is going to be separated rent from your body with a rending that can be heard in heaven and hell, and your friends will gather around your bed, and you'll separate from your body. Body and soul will be torn apart with a bloody, ripping, rending, and you will not keep that body of yours.

His mind wants to be at peace, but death says, no, and his soul wants to be his own, but death says, no, it's to be separated. You are to be shredded and torn and blown.

No, death is an everlasting enemy, an everlasting negation, with an eternal no on its lips. It's against everything, against God and against man and against life and against peace and against happiness and against permanence and against fulfillment and against fruitfulness and against growth. Death is everywhere in the world and always it's saying, no, no, no, no.

No wonder then, I say, no wonder that it's the chief source of all fear. Hebrews 2:14, 15, tell us, those verses tell us, that the devil had the power of death, that all men fear death, that fear brings bondage, and therefore the devil through death keeps men in bondage. That's what it tells us in Hebrews 2:14, 15.

The devil had the power of death. I said, has, but I change it, had the power of death, and all men fear death, and fear brings bondage, and the devil thus through fear and through death keeps men in bondage to fear.

And we also learn in the Scriptures that death is universal. I read five words in the old King James Version yesterday, five words that are forever and ever to take away any thought of permanence, any thought of this world or the satisfaction that this world could give. It's these words: so death passed upon all, so death passed upon all, and that is the word that goes throughout all the universe.

There isn't a tribe anywhere in the wide world that doesn't have its death and its burial customs. There isn't a city anywhere that doesn't have a place where it takes out its dead and lays them respectfully away to await the judgment of the great day. Death passed upon all. This enemy, this negation, this no that follows all the races of mankind.

Yesterday was Lincoln's birthday. We didn't say anything about it today. I do not preach Abraham Lincoln. I preach Jesus Christ. But it's an illustration anyhow. Here's Abraham Lincoln, the great Lanky, the rail splitter that lived so long in Illinois.

Well, he was a great man and a good man, and I read an article today by Dr. Murch, editor of Action magazine, in which he proved that Lincoln was not only a Christian but that he had been a baptized member of the Campbellite Church. Did you know that? A baptized member of the Disciples Church. Well, Lincoln's gone.

Why couldn't they keep a great man like that around? We've got rats calling themselves men. Rats boring and chewing and gnawing their way through all Chicago society, everywhere, and a great man like that couldn't stay. Death said, no, and the world said, we need Lincoln.

But death said, no, negation, negation, he can't stay, I'm against it. So, separation, negation, no, is everywhere in all the wide world. And it's the cause of fear. Men are kept in bondage to fear because death, separation, a breaking down, the destruction, annihilation is going, not annihilation, please, for I do not believe in annihilation.

I wonder in the light of this, that there isn't a spot in all the world where death is not. Death has passed upon all. There isn't a tribe, however small. There isn't a city, however large. There isn't a race, however cultured. There isn't a group, however pure. But death has passed upon them, death the enemy, death the destroyer, death that yells its everlasting bold, "no" to all the hopes and plans of mankind.

How could this text be? And yet it is, and our Lord not only gave it, but he buttressed it with two of his famous verily, verily, twice. He says it verily, verily, if a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death.

And I looked up some other translations, and I have the Riverside translation, if a man keep my sayings, he will not look on death. Barclay, if a man keep my sayings, he will in no wise taste death forever. And Knox, if a man keep my sayings, to all eternity he will never see death. And another British translation, if a man keep my sayings, to all eternity shall never come in sight of death. That's what he said, all right, all the translators agree.

I never like to get caught on a possible bad translation. If I'm going to bear it down and make a fact hinge upon a text, I'm going to check that text back into the Greek and out into the translations to see if that's what He said.

Brother, that's what He said, all right. And there isn't anybody that can say anything else. That's what He said, that if a man keep My sayings, he shall never experience death, he shall never look upon death, he shall never come in sight of death, he shall never taste death forever. Now here's a solemn promise, a solemn promise, a declaration is here, as trustworthy as God and as good as the One who made it.

I have said a hundred times from this pulpit that a promise is only as good as the one that makes it. It is not the word of the promise, but the character of the one that spoke the word that makes the promise good. And there are many promises in the Bible, and the God who made the promises was not trustworthy, not one of the thousands would amount to anything. But the character of God gives body and meaning and foundation and assurance to all His promises.

So, when He says he shall never see death, the character of God is back to that. The Triune God who made heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible, God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, and also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, these three persons, the Holy Three, the character of God, all that God is, all that holds up the moral universe, all that makes heaven heaven, all that keeps the vast universe from being hell, is back to this, the character of God is back of this.

God said, if a man keep my saying, he will never see death, he will through all eternity never come in sight of death, they who are the beneficiaries, a man keep my sayings, what do you mean by that? Ah, that's the Book of John, is a little different from the other books of the Bible. It has a different terminology, and its phrasing is a bit different.

So, what He said here, those who are the beneficiaries of atonement and who confirm it by obedience, the beneficiaries of atonement, oh, there have been some great historic facts in the world, listening friends, great historic facts. One of the great historic facts of the world was the fall of man.

When by sin he was rent from God and a vast gulf separated. That became one of the great epochs of the world and one of the great facts of the world, that sin broke God and man apart and that man, like a little island breaking loose from a continent, began to drift away further and farther from the mainland into the seas. That was one of the great facts of the world.

Another great fact of the world, perhaps the greatest of them all, was that God gave His only begotten Son to make atonement for that sin and to bridge the gulf, or rather not bridge the gulf. That is again where we get into semantic trouble, we get into the trouble that imagery brings us. For Jesus is not a bridge between God and man.

A bridge means that there are two bodies of ground, a bank here and a bank over there and something flowing between, and a bridge to carry across. It is only by straining our metaphors and figures that Jesus Christ is a bridge between God and man, for when He

in His atonement is through with the soul, there is no river flowing between God and the soul of a man. There is union there.

If we could build a bridge between Dakar, Africa, and the coast of North Carolina, we would call that a bridge. Two continents lay hundreds of miles apart, but there were now bridges so we could drive over them. In one sense we could say they are one now, made one by the bridge.

But don't think of Jesus Christ as One who bridged the gulf. He destroyed the gulf, He put it out of the universe, and God and man are now united in Jesus Christ, not by a bridge but by an everlasting union.

So, Jesus, in His atonement, the great fact of atonement. And Jesus said, he that keeps my sayings, he's my follower, he's joined himself to me, he's my believer, he's given himself to me, and he's a beneficiary of my atoning work, he shall never see death. That's what he said, and I believe that. I can die believing that and die in peace.

So here is the solemn declaration. And so, he enters now the world of the everlasting affirmation. Death is an everlasting negation, an eternal no, and life is an everlasting yes, an eternal affirmation. And that's the difference.

And in Jesus Christ, they that keep his sayings, they that trust in Him, they that have identified themselves with Him in believing union, they have entered a new world, the world of the eternal yes, the everlasting affirmation.

So now, when we cry, O God, my soul longs to continue, and God says, yes! And when we say, O God, something in me wants fulfillment, I desire that this germ within me, this beginning, this bud, should blossom into the vast possibilities that lie in my nature. Eternal life says, yes, it shall be so, it shall be so, for they shall look upon me, and when they see Him, they shall be like Him.

And something in my heart says, I want light, light, darkness is everywhere, gross darkness is upon the people, and I'm a child of the light. I'm not a flatworm or a blind fish or a mole. God made me in His image and made me to inhabit the light, but sin has shrouded my soul, and I cry out of my bewilderment and confusion. I cry to the Son of God, oh, I want light, and Jesus Christ says, yes, to my cry after life.

And when I say, O God, I want peace, I'm not a man of war, I'm a man of peace. I want to live in peace, I want to be in peace, I want to be where there is peace. And I want to inhabit a level of life where there are no keys necessary, and nobody needs to swear an oath, we'll know he isn't lying and then suspect that he is; where we don't need policemen and don't need armies and don't need navies.

I want to inhabit a world where I can be at peace and fulfill that for which I was created. And Jesus Christ says, it shall be so, life, ye shall have life, and life is the everlasting, yes, and the everlasting union, and death is the everlasting separation, negation, and life is the everlasting affirmation and union. So, life is not a thing either.

We think about life as a thing, and we, the artists, draw pictures of death as a miserable looking old fellow with a sepulchral smile on his teathy face, and he's dead, and he's got to scythe, and he's out getting a crop of men. And over against him is a smiling feminine looking fellow, and he is called life. And they say, which way will you take? I understand they mean well by all that, but it's certainly reducing spirituality to a woefully physical level. We ought to get loose from those physical images and remember that life is not a thing at all. Life is a person.

He said, I am the life, Jesus Christ is the life, and when He joins the soul of a man, a believing, returning man to God, He closes the gap between man and God, and there is no bridge needed, no gap needed. He has knit them together by one union of life and has bound them up in the bundle of life with God, and all the spirits of just men made perfect.

So, life is a relation to God, as death is a relation to God or the absence of it. Death is the breaking of a relation between soul and body, physical death. Spiritual death is the breaking of a relation between God and the soul.

Life is the maintaining of the relation between the body and soul. As long as your body and soul hang together, we won't bury you. You will be alive, you will live. But when body and soul separate and rend apart, you will be buried out of sight, for your soul will have fled the body.

And life, then, is the reunion of severed parts. When God in the new birth unites himself back to the soul of a man, the spirit of a man, that is life.

This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. Know is almost the same word here as, see. He shall never experience death, but he shall experience Thee, the true God in Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. So, when it comes to permanence, we want something that will live.

We are builders, we humans. We build. We build bridges. We build battleships. We build pyramids. We build hanging gardens. We build skyscrapers. We build, and we want to leave something behind.

MacArthur went out to the West Coast to see unveiled a statue of himself. MacArthur won't be around too long, but there will stand out there in the park a statue of that handsome old man who fought so well and nobly for his country. He won't be here. But something in him says, I want to exist on, and if nothing else, I want to exist in the memory of my countrymen.

And life says, yes, yes, yes, yes. You can exist on. Continuance is the word. It's yours. It's yours. Affirmation. Declaration. Annunciation. Yes, yes, you can live on. God says you can live on in Him, live on in Christ. There shall be permanence. And Paul said that the promises of God are yea and amen.

And I, for my part, though I by nature am not a happy man, and by nature I am not even an optimist. By nature, I am a pessimist, and by education a skeptic. But by faith I am a

Christian. And instead of pessimism and skepticism, I hear the everlasting, yes, ringing through the universe. The affirmation, it's true, permanence, continuousness.

I want to do at least one lasting thing before God is through with me down here, want at least one lasting thing, to come into the world with all our powers, to come into the world with this strange, beautiful instrument we call our hand, with its four fingers and opposed to it the thumb. That thing that gave us the tool and the musical instrument and the artist's brush and the writer's pen, to come into the world with a set of such, to come into the world with imagination and creativeness and vegetate like a beast and propagate like an animal and go out and leave nothing behind. I say that that is to fail, that is to fail forever.

We ought to remember that we are here to leave something. We are here to do at least one thing that will not die with us, one thing that will not die when heaven and earth is on fire, at least one thing, one soul to be won into the kingdom of God, one mind to be purified by our teaching, one sinner to be won by our testimony, one missionary to go out by our money and prayers, one student in school learning the deep ways of God sent by our money and our prayers. There ought to be at least one thing that we do to come into the world and claim we are Christians and then go out and have nothing to show. I tell you; God never meant it.

And I don't want you to think that I'm cracking up, and I don't want you to think that I've gotten so mystical, as the man said who reviewed one of my books, he said, he's so mystical as to be absolutely incomprehensible. I don't believe that, but anyway, I don't want to be too mystical on you.

But I want to say this, that I hear the "yes" ringing through the universe. I hear the affirmation; he shall never see death. He shall never experience negation. He shall never hear the "no" that stops everybody and stops everything, that puts a period behind every general, that kills a Mozart and destroys a Beethoven and cuts down a Bismarck and slays a Gladstone and brings an end to a Bryan and will soon lay low a Churchill and an Eisenhower and a MacArthur.

We're not hearing that. The child of God isn't hearing that. He might in his weak moments, when the physical takes over for a little while, he may feel his pulse and look at himself and pity what he sees. But if he lets his faith mount and says, I believe in the words of Jesus Christ, if any man who hears My sayings believes Me and keeps My words, he shall never experience death, the negation, the end, the period, there's always a flow.

As something of an amateur tank-town writer, I know the difference between a period and a semicolon. A period means you're done, let's go have dinner. But a semicolon says, hey, go on there, you haven't finished. Finish your sentence, bring it to an end.

So, this world that I inhabit by the grace of God hasn't appeared in it, not once. Not a place where God says, this is it, finis. We're always in flow, always in motion, always moving on, and instead of being surrounded everywhere by an everlasting chorus of no's, in Russia they say it's nyet. That sounds still worse. Nyet, nyet, they hear it all the

time in the United Nations. Let's do something decent, nyet, says the Russian. Let's bless somebody, nyet, says the Russian. No, veto, no.

They remind me of hell and death and hell itself, their everlasting nyets, their nos, their negations. But there isn't a one in the kingdom of God, not a one anywhere. It's all yes, yes, yes. Life? Yes. Peace? Yes. Happiness? Yes. Fruit? Yes.

So, Jesus Christ is the everlasting affirmation, no question marks, but affirmations, so that separation has given place to union. Oh, why don't we preach it anymore? Why don't we preach salvation to be the union of the soul with God? Instead of that, it's ten cents' worth of life Jesus Christ gives you when you put a dime in the slot and pull the lever down, and then you can go play golf. It's all done, thank the Lord, we say. Pray for me that I may hold out faith alive, and I've accepted Him. Oh, what a shoddy, low view of Christianity that all is anyhow.

Brethren, accepting Jesus Christ, if it's right and done right and really effective, means that I am reunited with God again, that God isn't angry anymore, that the old enmity has been destroyed by the blood of the everlasting covenant, that I am back in my Father's house. You can't see it, but I wear the ring of His forgiveness. And the new robe of His acceptance, and it's yes, yes, yes, the promises of God are yea and amen.

Now, how could He say this? How could He say this? How can He say this? Why in that same chapter He said, before Abraham was, I am. No Mrs. Eddy could say it, no Father Divine could say it, no Mohammed could say it, no Buddha could say it. They all came up and died like others.

He came to the world and didn't die like others. He never could have died, but He gave His life. Death had no dominion over Him. Death had no mortgage on His holy body or soul. He was born into the world, and He could have been as immortal as they were if they'd eaten of the tree of life in the garden. He developed, but He never died, until the day came that He knew that He must lay His life down for His sheep, and then of His own free will He went out and paid a debt He didn't know and gave up a life hell couldn't claim, and took it back the third day and said, now I share it with My people. I share it with those who hear my sayings and keep them, who follow Me and believe on My name. Before Abraham was, I am, and you can't kill that kind of life. I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven, and you can't kill that kind of life.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men, and you can't kill that kind of life. It can't die, for it's the life of God.

So, He could go out and give Himself up His human life, His human soul, and make His soul an offering for sin. And when He died, it's right in one way to say that God the mighty maker died, but in another we must understand what we mean. For the life of God was not damaged on the cross, it was only the life of the holy man in whom God had united Himself in the Incarnation—the life, the deathless, immortal life of the Triune God was not damaged nor injured on the cross. It was a Lamb that died there, not the Deity, though the Deity certainly was in the Lamb, united forever in a holy bond of mysterious union in the Incarnation.

So, if that seems mysterious and self-contradictory, I do not apologize. It is mysterious, it is self-contradictory, it's an everlasting dilemma, how He could be God and man, and man and God, and could have the ability of a man to die, and yet the virtue of a God and the merit of a God, all that I can never know.

I can only bow and say, O Lord God, Thou knowest. Make room for mystery, open the door for wonderful mystery, and stand breathless and full of wonderment and cry, my Lord and my God. That's the best the theologians can do. They can reason and reason and call biology and science and philosophy to their aid, and when it's all done, there is still a vast, yawning sea of mystery. But I believe it.

In Him was life, and God gave it to Him to have life in Himself, and it says in Hebrews through death that He might destroy him that had the power of death.

So, Jesus Christ offers you life. If you've had enough of death, Jesus Christ offers you life, that if a man keep My sayings, he shall not see death.

But you say, doesn't a Christian see death? He may go through it, but the Lord never lets him look on its dirty face.

And there I am personalizing it just like I told you we did, apostrophizing it, yet it's not really there. A man can't see death when there's no death there. If death is a rending loose of the soul from God, if that's real death, then the Christian in one sense never dies at all.

But if death is the departing of the soul from the body, then the Christian dies. If the Lord doesn't come, the Christian will die. But the Lord will never let him see it. He just puts His kind hand over the Christian's eyes and says, it'll be over in a minute, son, come on. He leads him across and takes the hand off, and the next thing he sees is the spirits of just men made perfect, an innumerable company of angels, the Church of the Firstborn, and all the saints and God Himself.

So, He's not even going to let us look upon that ugly beast, because really there won't be any ugly beast there. It'll only be a temporary separation of body and soul in death, and then when He comes, they'll be reunited in a perfect, immortal union that can never again be divided.

Isn't Christ worth your investigating? Isn't He worth your believing on? Isn't the Christian life worth living? Isn't it worth giving up the foibles of the dying world to believe on Him and take His cross? I think it is. And that is why the Bible calls the man the fool that doesn't make provision for his soul.

The man who knows all this and does nothing about it is ten thousand times a fool. And how wise is that man who hears His sayings and believes them and identifies himself in faith with that Jesus Christ who was before Abraham was, who was in the beginning with God. And he passes out of the realm of the recurring negation, the everlasting no, into the world of the everlasting, eternal affirmation.

He hears God saying, yes, until it echoes from the stars. And he hears it while he lives and while he sleeps and while he breathes and while he eats and while he labors. He hears it coming down from God, yes, yes, yes, I'm on your side. You're on my side, all is well. No man shall pluck you out of My hand, nothing shall separate you. And he can live, and he can die.

In the sense we just explained, the separating of the soul from the body, when we end our lives here, he can do all that, and he can do it without any self-pity, and he can do it without a trembling chin, and he can do it without fear, and he can do it without a wide-staring eye. He can do it cheerfully. Arise my soul, arise, shake off thy guilty fears. The bleeding sacrifice in thy behalf appears. Before the throne thy surety stands, my name is written on his hands. Amen? Amen.

Thank God.