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Sermon Notes

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Fear of Death Conquered Forever

Hebrews 2:14-15

I. Endlessly Looking to Kill Death

A. Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer started work on *The Canterbury Tales* in 1387

Stories told by Pilgrims en route to Canterbury to worship at shrine of St. Thomas

Chaucer portrayed a set of thirty pilgrims, telling two tales each

The Pardoner's Tale was entitled "Death's Murderers"

Three worthless rough highwaymen, common thieves, had just received news that one of their friends had died from the Black Death, and that his whole family had died as well.

They decided to hunt down death and kill him in revenge... they desired to murder death

"I don't see what gives Death the right to go carrying off anyone! If you ask me, it's about time some brave soul stood up to Death and put an end to his carryings-on! Let's take an oath, friends, not to rest until we've tracked down this 'Death' fellow and stuck a knife between his ribs. Think what the mayor and parish would pay if we brought in Death's dead body. Besides—how many purses do you think he's emptied on the dark highway, eh? Death must have made himself quite a walletful by now!"

So off they tramped, full of indignation and greed, to hunt down Death and kill him. Then no one would have to fear Death anymore.

As they traveled, they met an old man, gnarled and wizened with the years. They thought they'd caught up with Death until they saw how old he was. The old man said, "I wish I could die and be free of this tedious burden... my sick old body. But I just saw Death over by that oak tree!" The three robbers left the man and ran to the tree.

At the tree they didn't find Death, but they kicked over a pot filled with gold... the wealth of seven lifetimes. All three of them began to celebrate and forgot their mission. They sent the youngest thief into town to buy wine to celebrate.

While he was gone, the other two thieves plotted to kill him when he got back and split the pot two ways instead of three. And while in town, the youngest thief, filled with greed, plotted to kill the other two and keep the pot for himself. So he poisoned two of the bottles of wine with rat poison, while he carefully marked his own bottle.

It was well past dark by the time he returned. He was drinking from his own bottle of wine, and holding the other two poisoned bottles. His former partners jumped him in the dark and stabbed him to death. They then picked up the two unopened bottles of wine to celebrate the success of their evil plot.

In the morning, Death came to reclaim his pot of gold. He wrapped it in the miserable rags of his decaying cloak, close to his gappy ribs. The three corpses under the oak tree made no move to stop him, and he left them to a wealth of flies and crows before continuing his endless journey. The heavy pot of gold weighed light in his arms. For though his bones were dry and his muscles were like the withered tendrils of a grapeless vine, his strength was immense. He could carry off the biggest or strongest of men—even though, like any man or beast, he could never carry off himself.

No... only one Man can destroy Death... only one Man can face the terrors of the grave and emerge victorious... only one Man can Murder Death. And that one Man, Jesus Christ, had to die in order to do it.

B. Worldwide Cultures: Many Differences, One Great Unifier

1. Differences abound

food

customs

language

dress

architecture

history

worldview

2. Unifying Factor: the Inevitability of Death

a. every culture, every nation, every tribe... subject to death

no refuge on this planet... no one has found a way to escape death's clutches

- Distant mist-covered valleys of Irian Jaya: there's no valley there where they have the secret to escaping death

- Far reaches of the barren outback of Australia: no hidden cave where some small clan of aborigines has escaped death
- Teeming bustling metropolitan centers of Asia: population density on many thousands per square mile; modern hi-rises of steel and glass... easy to get lost in the throngs... yet there's no small alleyway where some aged Oriental expert in herbs and arcane remedies has found the secret to escaping death
- Farmlands of the Ukraine... people die without remedy
- In the frozen reaches of northern Finland, the Lapplanders all succumb to death
- In the steamy jungles of the Amazon, no tribe has found a way to escape death
- No, not in the mountainous monasteries of Tibet, where Buddhist monks named Lamas claim to have found the secret to endless physical life
- Not even in the City of Medicine, where billions of dollars are spent every year on pharmaceutical research and the development of non-invasive surgical techniques that are the envy of the world... not even here have we found the remedy to death

b. so also in history... the secret to escaping death was not once known and now lost

Juan Ponce de Leon (1460-1521), who had been with Columbus on his second voyage in 1493 and who had later conquered and become governor of Puerto Rico, is supposed to have learned of the fable from the Indians. As described to the Spanish, Bimini not only contained a spring of perpetual youth but teemed with gold and all sorts of riches. The fact that the party of Arawaks who had gone in that direction had never returned was taken as evidence that they must have found the happy land!

“Peter Martyr” wrote to Pope Leo X in 1513: "Among the islands of the north side of Hispaniola, there is about 325 leagues distant, as they say who have searched the same, in which is a continual spring of running water, of such marvelous virtue that the water thereof being drunk, perhaps with some diet, maketh old men young again."

c. Americans: seeking the answer in surgery, exercise, lifestyle changes, genetic research

d. none can escape death...

3. Death Inevitable... so also the Fear of Death

C. Our Text: Gives the Only True Escape from the Slavery of the Fear of Death

II. Fear of Death is Natural for Slaves of Sin

Hebrews 2:15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

A. From the Beginning, It Was Not So

Spurgeon: “It is a very natural thing that man should fear to die, for man was not originally created to die. When Adam and Eve were first placed in the Garden of Eden, they were in such a condition that they might have remained there for a myriad years if they had kept their integrity. There was no reason why unfallen man should die; but now that we have sinned, the seeds of corruption are in this flesh of ours, and it is appointed unto men once to die. Yet, as if the body knew that it was not according to the first decree of heaven that it should go to the earth and to the worm, it has a natural reluctance to return to its last bed.” [“Fear of Death” on Hebrews 2:15, December 17, 1874]

1. Eternity in our hearts... a sense that life should go on forever

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has also set eternity in the hearts of men

2. A yearning to return to Eden’s purity, to Eden’s sinlessness, to Eden’s life

B. Death a Shockingly Unwelcome Intruder

1. Death comes unannounced and is always a shock

Illus. Shuttle Columbia’s explosion...

2. As sense that this is not the way it should be... that death is unnatural

C. Why Death a Source of Terror

1. The power: death’s grip cannot be broken... no incantations, no potions, no science
2. The pillage: death is a robber, that steals from us what is most precious
3. The pain: the process of death itself terrifying
4. The permanence: what death does cannot be undone
5. The penalty: death ushers us into judgment, when we must give an account for all our actions and words

D. Fear of Death of Some Benefit to the World

1. Causes men to strive valiantly in extreme circumstances
2. Causes science to strive constantly for remedies to disease

3. Causes sinners to seek a Savior

E. Fear of Death Natural to Slaves of Sin... and it dominates ALL THEIR LIVES

Hebrews 2:15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

1. Wages of sin well-known

Romans 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

2. Polluted conscience constantly accuses

Romans 2:15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

3. Knowing they are out of fellowship with God, they fear judgment day

Hebrews 10:27 a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

4. Some deny fear of death and try to squelch it with bravado, philosophy, or false religion

Epicurus: "Men, believing in myths, will always fear something terrible, everlasting punishment as certain or probable ... Men base all these fears not on mature opinions, but on irrational fancies, so that they are more disturbed by fear of the unknown than by facing facts. Peace of mind lies in being delivered from all these fears."

Albert Einstein: "The fear of death is the most unjustified of all fears, for there's no risk of accident for someone who's dead."

Mark Twain: "The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time."

New Age guru Deepak Chopra: 1999 wrote a book called *Overcoming the Fear of Death*

Barrie Konicov, of Potentials Unlimited, which helps you use the power of your mind through **self-hypnosis** to deal with your fear of death.

Comedians use humor to poke fun at death

Poets write poetry to gain power over death

Kamikaze pilots in WWII believed they were guaranteeing eternal happiness by dying in battle

So also Muslim warriors fighting in a jihad

But none of these methods genuinely frees us from fear of death

Because none of them deals with the real issues of death: sin, judgment, and eternity

III. The Devil Held the Power of Sin and Death

vs. 14 ...him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil

A. Power to Murder the Body Directly

1. A murderer from the beginning

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Greek word "murderer" is literally "man-slayer" ... very much focused on the destruction of the human race through death

2. Had to be restrained by God from Job's body

Job 1:12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:4-7 "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. 5 But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." 6 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life." 7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

3. Behind every murder there has ever been

4. In one sense partly responsible for every death there has ever been... for sin entered the world through the devil's temptation, and death through sin

Ultimately the devil is the murderer of every infant that dies in a third world country, of every inner-city gang member who dies in a drug-related incident, of every 68-year-old man who dies of a heart attack, of every victim of a drunk driver, of every aborted baby, of every teenager who drowns in a boating accident, of every 90-year-old woman who dies in her sleep, of everyone who dies period.

B. Power to Murder the Soul Indirectly

1. Not directly... but through sin and temptation
2. Hell originally made for the devil and his angels
3. By joining the devil's rebellion, we joined his condemnation
4. Devil's entire world system is geared at destroying the soul

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.

Satan is on the prowl like a lion, seeking souls to destroy through temptation and sin. He plants the desires, entices them, fans them into a flame... the flame burns to destruction

James 1:14-15 each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Whoever places the evil desire in the heart of man is the ultimate father of death... and that is the devil

5. Devil's greatest goal is preventing people from trusting Christ by deceiving and blinding them

2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

C. Power Far Too Great for Us

Luther: For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing, were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing; Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He, and He must win the battle!

And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure... one little word shall fell him!!

IV. Christ Destroyed the Devil to Deliver the Slaves

Ultimately Christmas Leads to Easter... right in this text

vs. 14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

A. First Step: Commitment by Christ to Love the Children of God

1. Christ set His love on people... on flesh and blood individuals
2. His passion is to rescue them from death and bring them into eternal life

Dorothy Sayers: Talking about Sloth: "In the world it calls itself 'Tolerance'; but in hell it is called 'Despair'... It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there's nothing it would die for."

WHAT APATHY... and today we call it TOLERANCE

Christ is so different: He believes in the Father's glory in His children, cares for His children, interferes with the Devil's power of death, enjoys the eternal consummation of His children in glory, loves His children enough to take on flesh and blood, hates sin and death, finds purpose in the Father's plan, lives for His children, and for all of this treasure He is joyfully willing to die.

CHRIST IS THE INFINITE OPPOSITE OF APATHY... He will NOT Tolerate Death as the status quo!!

3. Implied in the logic

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity

Since Christ loved us, He had to share everything with us!!

Since Christ loved us, He had to enter our fleshly existence

There is passion in the logic

NOTE: the term of endearment, "children"...

Spurgeon: Hear that sweet expression again, for it is one of the choicest description of the saints, ‘the children’. ‘You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.’ What a wonderful influence the children have in the house! How many of the arrangements are made specially with a view to them! How much of the wear and tear of the parents is for their sakes! And we may truly say concerning our Father in heaven that His plan, His arrangements, His actions, His gifts are very emphatically for the children.”

This gentle term shows the great affection Christ has for His elect, His children, His sheep for whom He dies, for whom He does all things

Christ looks down from heaven on the children of promise, sets His love on them, and must go the whole journey... He must share all things with them

He must leave glory to bring the sons to glory

He must share all things with them but sin, in order to free them from sin

And when the end has come, Christ will stand before the Father with every one of His children safely in heaven, and He will say...

vs. 13 "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

The first step in that journey was an infinite love for the children

B. Second Step: Choice by Christ to Partake in Their Humanity

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity

1. “Flesh and blood” ...

- a. this is weak, mortal humanity
- b. this is suffering, hunger, weariness, pain
- c. ultimately sharing in “flesh and blood” means sharing in death

2. “Partake” ...

- a. humanity has a “fellowship” in mortality... we experience frailty and fleshly infirmity daily... we share it with people from all over this planet

June 10, 1963, speech at American University... John F. Kennedy, addressing the escalating “Cold War” with Soviet Russia, found commonality in our fleshly existence:

“For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.”

- b. this is the “fellowship” we share with each other... everything from the indignities of bodily sickness—a runny nose or a bad cough—to the final outrage of death
- c. Christ SOMEWHAT shared these infirmities... spared sickness, yet He suffered hunger, pain, and death

KJV Hebrews 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same

C. Third Step: Conquest by Christ of the Devil on Behalf of the Children of God

How? By Dying!!

Owen: The Death of Death in the Death of Christ

Samson’s Riddle: Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.

1. Death penalty must be paid
2. The devil’s accusations are in some sense just
3. For the devil’s mouth to be shut, and for God’s justice to be satisfied, Christ must die

D. Fourth Step: Deliverance of the Children Forever from Fear of Death

How? By Rising from the Grave!!!

1. Christ’s Resurrection means our debts have been FULLY PAID

Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

To some degree this means for our “vindication”... that the accuser’s mouth may be silenced on Judgment Day

The atonement of Christ... His blood shed on the cross is sufficient forever for our righteousness

The Devil’s mouth will be silenced on that final day

vs. 14 By His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil

“Destroy” = render powerless, strip bare and leave defanged

Christ’s death silences the devil’s ability to point the accusing finger at the Children of God

Romans 8:33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?

Zechariah 3:1-4 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. 2 The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. 4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

2. Christ's Resurrection also means death itself has been conquered... transformed forever

1 Corinthians 15:53-57 then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Devil's vicious kingdom has been smashed, The Devil no longer has the power of death:

Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Christ the conqueror has won the victory

AND He has handed us the spoils

We are delivered... we are rescued... we are FREE forever!!

V. Fear of Death Unnatural for Children of God

- Because Christ has set His eternal love on us, His dear children
- Because Christ was willing to be a partaker with us of our flesh and blood nature
- Because Christ gladly, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and died a physical death
- Because Christ thereby destroyed the devil who held the power of death
- Because Christ has delivered us from the devil's dark kingdom, rescuing us from sin and condemnation

- BECAUSE OF ALL OF THIS...

Fear of Death is Unnatural for Children of God

Now... some saints still suffer some pangs when facing the actual process of death...

Pilgrim's Progress: Christian crossing the river of death is terrified and Hopeful is not

The Pilgrims then, especially Christian, began to despond in their minds, and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them by which they might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the waters were all of a depth. They said: No; yet they could not help them in that case; for, said they, you shall find it deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the place. They then addressed themselves to the water and, entering, Christian began to sink, and crying out to his good friend Hopeful, he said, I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all his waves go over me! Then said the other, Be of good cheer, my brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good. Then said Christian, Ah! my friend, the sorrows of death hath compassed me about; I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey; and with that a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian, so that he could not see before him. Also here he in great measure lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his pilgrimage. But all the words that he spake still tended to discover that he had horror of mind, and heart fears that he should die in that river, and never obtain entrance in at the gate. Here also, as they that stood by perceived, he was much in the troublesome thoughts of the sins that he had committed, both since and before he began to be a pilgrim. It was also observed that he was troubled with apparitions of hobgoblins and evil spirits, for ever and anon he would intimate so much by words. Hopeful, therefore, here had much ado to keep his brother's head above water; yea, sometimes he would be quite gone down, and then, ere a while, he would rise up again half dead.

YET... it is not necessary for us to be in bondage to the fear of death!!!

Therefore, many saints have testified by their faith-filled joy that death is not a crushing burden...

Spurgeon: "Every day Christ is overcoming death, for He gives His Spirit to His saints, and having that Spirit within them they confront death with songs... they face death with a calm countenance, and they fall asleep in peace. 'I will not fear thee death—why should I? You look like a dragon, but your sting is gone.'" "For these saints, to die has been so different a thing from what they expected it to be, so lightsome, so joyous; they have been so unloaded of all care, have felt so relieved instead of burdened, that they have wondered whether this could be the monster they had been afraid of all their days. They find it a pin's prick, when they feared it would be a sword thrust; it is the shutting of the eye on earth, and the opening of it in heaven..."

Thomas Goodwin: "Ah! Is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!"

William Preston: "Blessed be God! Though I shall change my place, I shall not change my company!"

Charles Wesley: "I shall be satisfied with thy likeness... satisfied, satisfied!!!"

Adoniram Judson: "I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."

John Pawson: "I know I am dying, but my death-bed is a bed of roses. Heaven has already begun."

William Everett: "Glory... Glory...Glory..." for the last 25 minutes of his life, until he was gone.

VI. Application

A. How then shall we conquer fear of death?

- 1) Come to Christ in faith... trusting in Him for salvation
- 2) Consider that the devil's power over you has been broken forever
- 3) Value the blood of Christ as sufficient forever to cover all your sins... and those of a thousand worlds besides ours
- 4) Look on death as a finish line to a race well-run
- 5) Run your race well!! Keep your conscience clear, and serve Him with all your might

Acts 24:16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

- 6) Grow constantly in Christ-like character

2 Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- 7) Celebrate frequently the death and resurrection of Christ... sing praises to Him and thank Him often

B. What shall we do with such a fearlessness?

Live boldly for Christ!! Go to China to witness, even if there is a SARS epidemic

Be willing to take risks in evangelism and ministry