

Set Free From the Fear of Death

by Carter Conlon

This sermon focuses on the freedom from the fear of death that comes through Jesus Christ, emphasizing the transformative power of accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. The speaker shares personal experiences and urges listeners to open their hearts to God's forgiveness and salvation, highlighting the eternal significance of the decision to follow Christ and the assurance of life beyond death.

Scripture: Hebrews 2:14, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 Corinthians 15:54, Ephesians 4:8, Romans 8:11

Topics: "Freedom from Fear", "Assurance of Eternal Life"

Description

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Transcript

Easter time, as with every other Sunday in the Church of Jesus Christ, we get to talk about life, when society all around us is so afraid of death. I mean, death is on everybody's mind now, with over 20,000 deaths from coronavirus across the United States as of this morning. And here where we are broadcasting from New Jersey, over 2,000, almost 2,100 deaths here in New Jersey from the coronavirus.

So it just seems like there's no escaping this pervasive fear that is literally just eating at the heart and conscious and mind of so many people today. I don't know if we've ever been more aware as a society here in America of the finality of human life and the reality that none of us are guaranteed tomorrow. And we're aware of it now.

But I want to talk to you not about death today. I want to talk to you about being set free from the fear of death. There is a freedom.

There is a freedom that can come from God into the human heart where death actually holds no sway over us any longer. We're not afraid of death. We are secure in the hand of God.

We have the presence of Christ in our hearts, our minds, and our lives. And we're not afraid of what tomorrow might bring. Now, I'm going to ask you if you have your Bible to turn to the book of Hebrews chapter 2 in the New Testament, or if you have another device.

And if you don't, then just listen carefully to me. I'm going to be reading to you the scripture and speaking to you for the next 20, 25 minutes on this particular topic of being set free from the fear of death. So, Father, I thank you, God.

I thank you for the anointing of your Holy Spirit. I thank you, my God, that the entrance of your words gives light. That's what you tell us in your word.

Thank you, Lord, that many of us online this morning have already experienced this light and this life. I thank you, God, for giving me the ability today to convey this truth for the sake of those who need to hear it. Oh, Jesus Christ, let the power of death be destroyed today, God.

The power that death has over people's lives who don't yet understand what happened when you died on the cross and you rose again from the dead on the third day. Help me, Lord, to make it clear. Come upon me, Holy Spirit.

Come upon the feebleness of my mind and my own presentation, Lord, and override me and give me words directly into the hearts of those who have come in to listen this morning. This is a glorious day. This is a wonderful day.

This is a great day of good news. God, let it be so to every heart and to every mind, and I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hebrews chapter 2, beginning at verse 9 and right through to verse 15, the writer says, but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting of him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason he's not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare your name to my brethren in the midst of the assembly.

I will sing praise to you. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, here am I and the children whom God has given me.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself, speaking of Jesus Christ, likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. That's an incredible statement, that Christ came and tasted death for every man, every woman, every child, so that humankind being under this curse of death and being given over to the fear of death might be set free from a lifetime of bondage to the fear of what happens when we pass beyond this life. And you know as well as I do, if you're an honest person this morning, you've been thinking about this.

Everybody thinks about it. What happens when I die? Where do I go? Is there life after this season that I live here on this earth? And is there a deeper meaning to life than the meaning that I have procured in my own heart, or maybe I've laid hold of? The word bondage, it says, who all their lifetime were subject to bondage because of the fear of death, that means that people are tied in their minds or in their spirits, and they're tied in reality to a certain and inescapable fate. Hebrews chapter 9 verse 27 says, it's appointed for man to die once, but after this the judgment.

After we die, after our physical body dies, we who are the real eternal beings, the real eternal people that are living inside these earthly bodies, we stand before the judgment seat of God. Everyone ever born is going to stand there. As a matter of fact, the scripture says, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Now for many it will be a confession of joy. They will have made the decision to open their heart to the forgiveness that God offered through his son on this earth. And for many others, it will be a season of terror.

It will be an expression of a plea for mercy. It will be saying, Lord, I recognize you now. I recognize that you died for me.

I recognize that you came to give me life, but it will be too late, you see, because the decision to be a child of God has to be made on this side of eternity, not after we have passed through this life and gone into eternity. Now it's interesting that many people rank death and public speaking as the two deepest fears of their lives. Now those seem to be at the opposite ends of the spectrum, death and public speaking.

Now why would those be the two deepest fears of people's lives? Well, they're not as far apart as you might think. Public speaking, for example, is to stand in front of people. And many feel that if they stood in front of people and they began to speak as I am doing today, that they would be judged, that all of their inadequacies would be on full display, and that ultimately they will be laughed at or shamed before all.

And it's a deep-seated fear in the heart of all humankind not to be judged, not to want to be judged, not to want to have our failures on display and not to want to be brought into a place of shame. And so in order to avoid public speaking, they craft a false image of themselves. They put on a false front and they hope that no one will ever discover their disguise.

And it's all really just to avoid being judged. And I know exactly what that feels like because I had a deep-seated fear in my life before coming to Christ. I know what it's like to be in a classroom in college, for example, and be deathly afraid that I'm going to be asked to say something or to speak lest all of my inadequacies would be put on display.

I should be judged by the people in the room and brought to shame. And see, there's an inherent fear in everyone's heart of being judged by their peers. But how much more should there be this concern in our hearts that one day we're going to stand in the presence of a holy God? One day we're going to have to each give an account of what we've done in this body, of how we've lived.

And we'll have to answer a lot of questions, but the first and foremost question that we will have to answer is when God looks us in the eye and says, what did you do with my son? I sent my son into the world to die on a cross to taste death for you on your behalf, the death that you deserve for the way you've lived, for how you've departed from the ways of the living God. You've gone your own way. You've done your own thing.

The Bible calls it sin. And the scripture says the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God will look you in the eye and say, so what did you do with my son? Let's put everything else away.

I sent a savior to you. I made a way for you to come into eternal life. I sent my son to a cross.

I allowed him to be falsely accused. I allowed him to be beaten and whipped and scourged. I allowed him to be suffering indescribable pain and to understand what separation in a sense from God feels like on your behalf so that you might be forgiven.

Then he put him in the grave for three days and at the end of three days, he was raised by the power of God from the grave because death had no power over him. And it was through him that I promised to give you life. It was through him.

I promised to forgive everything that you've ever done against me. The Lord would say to you, it was through him. I made a way.

You were like a drowning man or drowning woman. And I threw you a life ring into the ocean of your struggle and your failure. And the question is, what did you do with that salvation that I made available to you? You see, that's why many people will confess in that day.

You are Lord of all, but it would be too late for many. As I said earlier, the decision has to be made now. It can't be made then.

You see, we are created in the image of God. We're the only thing in the universe created in the image of God. We have the essence in a sense of something of God that's in our minds, it's in our spirit, it's in our DNA as human beings that God created for fellowship with for all of eternity in his image.

We were given the power to reason, to think, and there's certain things that we know, even though we may try to push them out of our collective consciousness. We have this inherent fear that when we die, something awaits us. We know it.

It's like a distant voice from the past. It's there. It's a knowledge that's been passed down from generation to generation.

It is inescapable. As a matter of fact, I think the Bible clearly calls it a conscience that God has placed inside of all of us, thoughts that come from God, whispers of the Holy Spirit, wooing us, calling us, drawing us to himself, offering us this eternal life that can only come through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We all know, we know we're headed into eternity to face our creator.

I don't have to convince you, you have not given your life to Christ to this point in your life. I don't have to convince you. You already know it.

There's something inside your heart that tells you that what you're hearing today is the truth. It's not over when you die. Eternity is just beginning when you die.

You will dwell for eternity somewhere, but one day when you leave this body, you're going to be headed into that eternity and the first thing you will face is your creator. And no disguise will survive there. You can't disguise a sinful heart.

You can't put on your best clothes and just show up to church at Easter. You can't try to, with human effort, change the very essence of who and what you are as a sinner born into this world. You can't change it with any amount of human effort.

It only can be changed by a supernatural act of God's mercy, himself doing what you can't do for yourself. And it's at this moment of standing before God that many will taste the bitterness of death and understand

now what it means to be eternally separated from God. Listen, listen to me.

I plead with you. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, if you have not opened your heart and surrendered your life to God, I plead with you. I plead with you with everything that's within me.

You can afford to get a lot of things wrong in this life, but you cannot afford to get this one wrong. This is forever. There is no changing your destiny once you leave this earthly body and stand in the presence of a holy God.

And let me tell you something. Eternity is a very long time to live in a place of separation from God. As horrific as that is, I don't think your mind or mine can even comprehend what it's like to be in a place forever where God is not.

The Bible describes it as a darkness that is so thick you can touch it with your hands. You can cry with your voice, but sound doesn't carry there. There's a torment there that is beyond our comprehension because we will be, not me, but those who do not come to Christ as Savior, will be in a place where God is not for all of eternity.

And I don't know if you are willing to risk that or not. There has to be this inherent knowledge in your heart that says, oh my God, I don't ever want to go to a place like that. You see, that's what makes Easter and the cross such a wonderful truth, such great news.

In the beginning, when Christ was born, it caused the angels to burst through the heavens and into time and begin to praise God and just begin to shout glory to God and on the earth, peace and goodwill towards men. In other words, God had come desiring to make peace with you and with me, desiring to forgive the way we've lived and how we've been so distant from him in our words and our thoughts and our actions. And he wanted to show us mercy and grace.

It seemed up to this point that the devil had humankind tied up in his back pocket, literally reserved to be tormented forever. And let me warn you, let me warn you, if you're not a believer in Christ, you are tied up in the devil's back pocket. I want that to sink into your heart really deeply this morning.

This is not a game. This is not, Easter is not about chocolate rabbits and a bunch of eggs and having a good time in the house of God and dressing up. There's a great, great truth behind what we celebrate.

It's about the freedom to escape the fear of death that's in the heart of every man, woman, and child. And he did have all of humankind sewn up until Jesus Christ, the Son of God came, and he tasted death for every one of us. When he went to the cross, when he shed his blood, he was God's ultimate sacrifice for the wrong that we have done.

He was an innocent man, and he took our sentence of death upon himself, and he did it willingly. He said, no one takes my life. I give it up willingly.

He said, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. He went to the cross willingly, and he did it because he loved you. He did it because he desired to forgive you.

He did it because he was making a way for you and I to be delivered from the power and the fear of death and brought into this incredible understanding. As Paul the Apostle once said, the day I'm absent from this body, I will be automatically in the presence of God for eternity. Thank God for that.

Jesus Christ shed his blood for you on that cross, and among the last words he said before he died, he said, it is finished. It's finished. It's finished.

The right of the devil to you is finished. The right of evil to cause fear in your heart is finished. The right of anything that could condemn you is finished.

I have justified you. The scripture says he became sin for us who know no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him. That's an amazing thought that through Jesus Christ, when we open our heart to him, we can be made into people who in the sight of God look like we've never ever sinned.

It's an amazing thought when you begin to look at what Jesus Christ has done. Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 7 and 8, none of the rulers of this age knew what was happening on the cross, and had they known it, they would not have crucified the Son of God. They would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

They thought they were ridding themselves of God's plan for redemption and mercy on the earth, not realizing they were falling right into God's plan for redemption and mercy on the earth, because a sacrifice had to be made for your wrong and for mine. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 8, when he ascended on high, when Jesus Christ rose out of the grave by the power of God, he took captivity captive, and he gave gifts unto men. Hallelujah.

He took your captivity captive. He took my captivity captive, and he told us we could be forgiven, given the power of his Holy Spirit, and made into new creations by the power of God. That's why the scripture says, if any man is in Christ, he's a new creation.

The old things in his life pass away, and behold, all things become new. Paul said in the book of Romans chapter 8 verse 11, if the Spirit of God that raised Christ from the dead is in you, he will also quicken your mortal bodies. In other words, he will change you from the inside out.

You will become a new creation in Christ Jesus. All things pass away. The promise of God is a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit.

The promise of God is an eternity in heaven. When I stand at the judgment seat of God one day, when I stand before Christ or God the Father, I don't have to plea bargain to get into heaven. If God looks at me and says, Carter, why should I let you into heaven for eternity, if that's the way it should be done, then I would just look back at him and say, because Jesus Christ your son died for me, and I trusted him for my salvation.

When I turned to Jesus Christ on May 12, 1978, on the side of the road, on the way to work, God forgave my sin. The Holy Spirit came into my life. The old nature died, and a new man was born.

And as the Scripture said, my captivity was taken captive, and the giftings of God were given to me. The Spirit of God quickened my mortal body, and I became the person that God had always intended me to be. I have this inner witness of the Holy Spirit that I am a child of God.

And when you open your heart to Jesus Christ, you too will have this inner witness come into your life that you are a child of God. This is not an illusion. This will happen to you.

I pulled over on this side of the road, and another, I was a police officer at the time, and another police officer in Canada, a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman, had been telling me about Jesus Christ, about his death, about how I could be forgiven, entrusting that he had paid the price for my sin. He told me that the Bible promised that if Christ was in me, if I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, I would become a new person, and the old things in my life would pass away. I didn't like what I had become.

I had tried to change myself. I wanted to be a better person than I was, but I seemed to be incapable of escaping the boundaries that were around my mind and my life and my heart and my behavior. As a matter of fact, the harder I tried to change, it seems that the worse I got.

And I lived with the fear of dying. I know what that's like. I remember as a police officer going in a few times into life and death situations, and I remember the fear in my heart at the thought of what happens to me if I die.

May 12, 1978, I pulled over on the side of the road, and I said these simple words, Lord Jesus, if what this man has told me is the truth, I open my heart to you, and I invite you to come into my life and to be my Lord and my Savior. That was all I prayed. I didn't feel anything.

I didn't feel any different. You know, some people describe this euphoric experience. I didn't feel a thing, nothing.

Put my car in drive. I went to work. I worked the rest of my shift.

At night, went home, went to bed. But I've told this story a thousand times, and if God gives me life, I'll tell it a thousand times more before I die. The next morning when I woke up and I got out of my bed, as soon as my feet touched the floor, I knew something had happened to me.

I was a different man. I felt different inside. I started having thoughts I'd never had before, feelings that I'd never had before.

Something had happened inside of me. I couldn't express it. I couldn't put it into words.

I didn't fully understand it, but the Bible calls it being born again by the Spirit of God. I had accepted the fact that Jesus Christ had died for me. I had opened my heart to his offer of forgiveness, and according to the promise of God's Word, his Holy Spirit now had come and taken up residence inside of this earthen body that I live in.

And the Bible, remember, says if the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead be in you, he will quicken your mortal body. He will raise it from death. He will bring it out of the power of death.

He will set you free from the fear of death. And that's where I live today. I'm not afraid to die.

Death has no fear over me whatsoever. None. Zero.

Because to be absent from this body, I'm going to be in the presence of the Lord forever. Now, until that day comes, I'm going to fight for you with everything that God has put in my heart. Do you understand me? I'm going to fight for you.

I'm going to fight for your soul. This is the only reason I live. It's to see every one of my children, my grandchildren, my friends, the people I'm talking to.

I'm talking to somebody in Prince Edward Island right now who's listening to me. I'm talking to you, a friend of mine. You know who you are, and you know I'm talking to you.

I will fight for you with every ounce of breath that God places in this earthen body. I will fight for your soul. I will fight for you to open your heart to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Don't put it off any longer because none of us are guaranteed tomorrow on this earth. You are not guaranteed it, and neither am I. But we are guaranteed eternal life in heaven with God. We are guaranteed that the fear of death will be taken out of our hearts if we turn and say, Jesus Christ, please forgive me for the wrong that I have done, and I believe that you have died in my place on a cross, and I open my heart to you, and I confess you as my Lord and my Savior.

Just as happened to me, it will happen to you. If you truly mean it, God will forgive you. You'll be brought back into right relationship with God, and God's Holy Spirit will come and take up his dwelling inside of your physical body, and you won't have to try to change yourself from the outside in anymore.

You will be changed by the power of God from the inside out. The old things in you will pass away, and all things will become new. I stand here today in this pulpit, and I bear witness to this through my own life, and the witness of so many of God's people I've known over the years who have been totally transformed by the power of God.

I was in Sullivan Maximum Security Prison one time sharing these truths with about 60 men who were in for life. They'll never get out, and the leader of the worship of that service that day was David Berkowitz. Some of you may remember his name, the infamous son of Sam, a soldier who came back from Vietnam, drug addicted, and got involved in the occult and ended up killing people in New York City and terrorizing the city, but in prison he found Christ as his savior, found the forgiveness of God.

What a lovely man. What a wonderful brother in Christ. He wept through the whole worship, and out of his own mouth he says, the devil made me into a murderer, but God has now made me even in prison into the man that I'm called to be, and I just remember the joy of just knowing that he was given to helping prisoners who would be brought into the prison so despondent, so down sometimes they couldn't even brush their teeth or comb their hair, and he would help these prisoners.

He would tell them how much God loved them, and how much God had sent his son to pay the price for their sin and give them new life. You see this can be yours today. The Bible tells us in the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that death through Christ was swallowed up in victory.

The grave has no victory, and death has no sting anymore. Christ has delivered us from the power of death. That's what the resurrection is about.

That's what the cross is about. That's what the good news is about, and today I'm going to ask if you have the courage to open your heart to receive Christ as your Savior. All you have to do is admit that you're a sinner.

Admit that you live apart from God. Admit that you've spent your whole life crafting a disguise. It's Easter time.

You look, you're just like a chocolate bunny. You look real good on the outside, but you're hollow on the inside. You've got nothing inside.

You know it. You've got no life. You've got no strength.

You've got no power. You've got nothing. It's Easter time.

We're talking today about the resurrection of Christ. We're talking about new life, and you don't have new life, and you hate the old one, and you don't like what you've become, and the bitterness is eating you up from the inside out. It's time to put it all away and say, Lord Jesus Christ, I'm a sinner.

I'm a sinner, and I ask you, God, to forgive me for the sins that I have committed, and thank you for dying on the cross for me. So you admit you're a sinner, then believe that Jesus took your place. An innocent man was sentenced to death for the wrong things that you have done.

He went to a cross and died and paid the price that you owe God so that you can be brought back into right relationship with God, and then confess him with your mouth as Lord and Savior. Speak out loud and say, Jesus Christ, today I receive you into my heart as my Lord and my God and my Savior, and don't be afraid or ashamed to tell others around you that you've done this. You watch what God will do.

You watch how it will so change you radically from the inside out. Your life will never ever be the same again. I'm going to now lead you in a prayer.

Many, many people prayed this prayer with me last week, almost 200 or so prayed this prayer. I'm going to ask you to pray it with me today. It's a simple prayer.

I'm going to lead you in it, and I want you to make it your own. Now you might want, you can say it out loud. You can say it in your heart.

It doesn't matter. God hears it either way, but you just say it. Please, I beg you, in Jesus' name, pray this prayer with me.

I'm going to say it, then I'm going to give you, I'm going to pause so that you can repeat it after me. Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you today for dying for me. I admit that I am a sinner, and I can't change myself no matter how hard I try.

I am afraid to die, and I'm afraid to stand before you not knowing where my eternity is going to be, but I believe today that you died in my place. You took the penalty of my sin upon yourself so that I could be forgiven, and so today I open my heart to you, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and I invite you to come into my life and to be my Lord and my Savior. I believe that you are the Son of God.

I believe that you died to give me life eternally, and you died to give me a full life while I live on this earth, and so today, Jesus Christ, I confess you as my Lord and my Savior. Thank you for not being ashamed of me, and from this day forward, I will not be ashamed of you. I am forgiven, and you are my God.

In Jesus' name, amen. If you prayed that prayer with me today from your heart, I'm going to ask you to text the words decided, just the simple word decided, to 88202. That's the word decided to 88202, and somebody from our church staff will contact you if that's what you desire just to encourage you to pray with you or maybe tell you where you need to go from where you are right now.

We're going to have some courses online for new believers that will be available to you, and we want you to be able to partake of those things. I'm just so happy for somebody. I feel it in my heart.

It's about to explode. I'm just so happy for somebody right now. I just want to shout.

I want to cry. I don't know what to do. If I knew who it was right now that had just prayed that prayer, I don't know.

I just feel it in my spirit. Last week, the Lord told me at the end of the message that an eight-year-old boy had just received Christ, and we found that little boy, eight years old in Austin, Texas, who had opened his heart, and that testimony will be on our Facebook page this week. There's just somebody out there.

I don't know who you are, but I'm telling you my heart is exploding with gratitude. I don't know what else to say. I just thank God.

Thank God. Thank God. Thank God.

Maybe we get to the throne of God one day, and we're going to be on the right side of that throne, and we can hug, and we can laugh, and we can dance together. I may never ever meet you, I don't know, on this side of eternity, but I'll meet you there. Thank God you've made that choice.

So text DECIDED to 88202 if you've decided to receive Christ. If you'd like, young people, listen, it's too late for you to try to figure out your own life plan. If you're a young person and you're a believer in Christ, it's time to get biblically trained.

You've got to be able to stand up, and this generation needs you. Do you understand? This generation needs you. There's so many people out there that are afraid.

They need to understand who Christ is. In order for you to be able to be used of God, you have to be biblically trained. You've got to understand what you believe and who you are in Christ, and we're willing to do that for you at our Bible school.

You can text SUMMIT to 484848. Just text the word SUMMIT if you're interested in attending our Bible school. I'm going to be there next year because I'm no longer going to be the senior pastor at Times Square Church.

I'm going to be living at the school, and I'll be taking one or two or three classes at the school talking to those who feel the call of God on their lives, and I look forward to meeting you there. And so if you are interested in living for God and letting your life be used for God, text the word SUMMIT to 484848 and get an application in your hands as soon as you can. It's time now.

It's time to walk with God. It's time to serve God. For some that are listening to me today, this is indeed a happy Easter for you.

This is not just Jesus Resurrection Sunday. This is your Resurrection Sunday. This is the Sunday.

Mark this Sunday down. This is the Sunday that you were raised from the dead, that you were taken out from the power and the penalty of sin, and you were given eternal life in God through Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. God bless you, my brother.

God bless you, my sister. God bless you. What a great day this has been for you.

Mark it on your calendar and never forget the day that you opened your heart and Jesus became your Lord. It was the day that you were raised from the dead and you were set free from the power and the fear of death. Praise be to God.

God bless you. We'll see you again Tuesday night. We're going to close with a song.

Greg's going to sing a song for us, and we'll see you again on Tuesday night for a worldwide prayer meeting in 207 countries right now. So join us. I'm not sure how we're going to close.

We're either going to close with a blast from the past or a blast from the present. Either or, it's going to be a great close. Thank you, Greg.

Thank you so much. God bless you. See you on Tuesday.

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