

Christ's Birth/death's Doom

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus' birth and death were necessary to deliver us from the fear of death and to give us the power to live without the tyranny of death.

Duration: 46:13

Scripture: Hebrews 2:14

Topics: "Birth Of Jesus", "Liberation through Christ", "Fear Of Death"

Description

J. Glyn Owen delivers a powerful sermon on the significance of Christ's birth and its connection to His death, emphasizing that Jesus came to liberate humanity from the fear of death. He explains that through the incarnation, Jesus shared in our humanity to destroy the power of the devil and free those enslaved by the fear of death. Owen highlights the importance of understanding that death is not to be feared, as Christ's sacrifice has taken away its sting and provided believers with eternal life. He encourages the congregation to embrace this truth and live without the tyranny of fear, reminding them that Christmas signifies the beginning of God's plan for salvation. The message calls for repentance and trust in Christ, urging believers to live in the freedom that His birth and death provide.

Transcript

You have a croaking preacher today and I hope nevertheless that the voice will come through and that the good Lord will help us. He has promised and so we trust him. I don't think I would have come to the service this morning did I not feel very sure that the Lord had given me a message that I dare not keep to myself.

And however one feels physically I certainly feel thrilled by the word of the Lord which has come to me and based upon the words that you will find in Hebrews chapter 2 verses 14 and 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, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Christ's birth and death's doom.

I shall spare myself any introductory words this morning and I will come immediately to the two main things that occupy us in this very wonderful passage. This is no superficial passage this is no passage that simply tells us even the historical details that relate to the incarnation of our Lord. In this passage the inspired writer is taking us to the heart of the meaning of the incarnation.

And I want us to be looking this morning first of all at the liberating intention of it all and then secondly at the liberating action involved. First of all the liberating intention. Look at verse 15 we work backwards in the text this morning rather than forward as we more generally and more normally do.

Notice these words and to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Why did Jesus come? Why was he born? Why the incarnation? Here is the answer of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews at least in part. He came in order to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.

Do you fear death? I have good news for you. It is unnecessary. You do not need to fear death.

God sent his son to deliver you and to deliver me from slavery to the fear of death. We look first of all in this connection that man's dread slavery. Born in total freedom under God's beneficent rule and care.

The Bible tells us that man sinned his liberty away, sinned his priceless privilege away and landed himself in slavery. And that slavery is fundamental. It is possible for man to be liberated from unjust political structures and from dehumanizing social conditions.

To be socially free and in other respects free. But this fundamental tyranny may still remain holding him in its chains. Fear of death.

The tyranny of the fear of death. Man is subject to the law of sin and death. And in the wake of this multitudes indeed most normal men and women know something of the tyranny of fear.

Now there seems to be a sinister league abroad in our day and age to play down the reality of death. The fact of death and the inevitability of death. Time was when death was spoken of very generally.

You go back to the Victorian era for example and even before that. And you will find that people spoke seriously about death. In our day and age the theme has switched to the beginnings of life.

Sex is everything today. Don't let me go off at a tangent but that is true. In the old days men and women were more seriously inclined and they thought of the exigency of death.

And they talked about it and they wrote about it. The Greek philosophers for example would have thought you a strange thinker if you did not at some stage or other address yourself to the issue of death. They all did.

Because they were not superficial thinkers. And having so done they had not only addressed themselves to the subject. But they tried to work out some hypothesis on the basis of which they could understand what the whole thing meant.

Now in the event of course they may not have had any real answers to give humanity. But at least they asked the right question. In our day however we tend to hide the fact of death from everyone.

From our loved ones. If they're unwell we we say hardly anything about the possibility of death. Or the inevitability of death.

We shield our children from the mention of it. And as people gradually get older death is the forbidden subject. But the ogre the monster still remains.

You may be silent about it. Come it will. You may refuse to read about it.

Come it will. Death remains. Death is nonetheless very much a fact of life.

However much we turn our eyes away from the from the reality of it. And shut our minds to the fact of it. And every silent cemetery and every puffing crematorium bears its silent and unsolicited testimony to the fact it is appointed unto men once to die.

And after that the judgment. True one hears from time to time of people who say that really they have no fear of death at all. Never have had any in some cases.

They would be very rare exceptions if they actually existed. Of course there are ways and means of at least temporarily overcoming the fear of death. There are various ways various means of doing that.

But the fact is we still have the phenomenon the universal phenomenon of the fear of death. You say isn't that an exaggeration? I don't think so. I'll tell you why.

I'll put it in one sentence. This is not my theme but we're on the way to it. All over the world men and women of all nations and of all ages can generally be persuaded to say things and do things at the threat of death.

That they would never do and never say were it not for the threat of death. Upon the threat of death men and women everywhere will do things, say things, go places. That nothing else and nothing less would produce that effect.

And why is that? It is because irrespective of what we profess there is innate in the human soul some dread of the monster. So we turn from man's dread slavery to God's promised liberty. And free those, says my text, who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Just imagine it. From all eternity God had a plan. And the plan envisaged the deliverance of men and women from the fear of death.

And in the fullness of time he sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, conceived of the Holy Ghost in the virgin mother's womb. God sent him forth to engage in the work of deliverance. And though the term deliverance conceives of many things beyond this.

It conceives of this. It envisages this. How merciful our God is.

Even at that moment in the Garden of Eden when death first invaded our human race. He said to the tempter in the hearing of our first parents. He said I will put enmity between you and the woman.

And between your offspring and hers. And he will crush your head. Now the text doesn't end there but I want to stress that.

When death comes invading the hearts of the souls of Adam and Eve. God says this is not the end. This is not the end.

There's a seed of a woman coming and he will tread on your head. He'll deal with you. When Jesus went into the synagogue of Nazareth at the beginning of his public ministry.

You remember Luke 4 tells us that he took the parchment and he read the reading for the day which came from the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had done so they were they were bewildered by him. They were bewildered and they were challenged because these are the words he read.

Among others I'm just choosing out this segment. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.

Now it's a larger passage it includes much much else. But Jesus says the spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me. He has sent me to proclaim deliverance to the captives.

I've come into this world he says to open the prison doors. And among the prisoners he had come to release from their fetters were prisoners to the fear of death. That was the purpose envisaged by God in the words of the prophet.

A purpose fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. And if the Son shall make you free you will be free indeed. And that liberty included and still includes freedom from slavery to the fear of death.

Salvation includes this aspect of emancipation. Do you know it? Are you enjoying it? Moreover and we have to bring this in. The New Testament shows us that the early church almost on block as far as we can read moved into the experience of this.

This was a characteristic of the early Christians. They were delivered from the fear of death. There were many other characteristics of course but this was one of them.

Wherever they went they were they differed from other people because they did not live under the tyranny of death. They joyfully anticipated the eternal fulfillment of their Lord's promises that death was the stepping stone to glory. Therefore they didn't worry all that much if they were put in prison.

If they had to oppose the authorities under threat of death it didn't worry them all that much because you see death to them was the way home. This is an element of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ my friends that we need to proclaim today to people that will not come to hear it proclaimed from the pulpit. You need to proclaim it.

I listen to the great Apostle Paul in the epistle to the Romans. I'm just going to cull a few words. I'm missing a lot out.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecutions or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No he says in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now listen to this.

He's writing to the Philippians and he says I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body. Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death. For to me he says to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Now that kind of man is indomitable. You can't beat it. He says he says the whole purpose of my life is that Christ may be magnified in me in this body of mine whether by life whether by death it makes no difference because to me he says to live is Christ and die is gain.

Brothers and sisters have we got into this? Are you living there? Can I quote another one from a different context altogether excuse me. Paul was writing to Timothy to Timothy chapter 1 and he was afraid that the young Timothy was a little bit a little bit ashamed of him because he was in prison and his body was lacerated. He had wounds and wheels and sores all over his body but now he was in prison and and a young Timothy the young Christian.

What is there to keep him in fellowship with a man who's in prison? Why should a young fellow with all the promise of life before him recognize as his friend a fellow who's in a Roman jail? Oh says Paul join with me he says in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who has saved us and called us to a holy life. The grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time he says but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus who has destroyed death and he was living on that level you see. Christ Jesus who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Life and immortality were facts of where they were real before but they were not brought to light. They've been brought to light through the gospel he says and we see the light and we see death in the light of the gospel and immortality in the light of the gospel and it is eternal life of glory. Now he goes on and of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher that is why I am suffering as I am yet I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him against that day.

Paul why are you the unashamed? Well he says the gospel has taken the sting out of death and out of suffering. My very sufferings, my very wounds of a glory and my very chamber of horrors is the stepping stone into the presence of God. But you say what is all that to do with Christmas? This is why Christmas was necessary because God wanted you and wanted me to live like that.

Brothers and sisters let me say to you eyeball to eyeball insofar as that is possible from a pulpit like this. God wants you to live like that and that's why he sent his son that's why Christmas. Martin Luther was right when he said he who fears death or is not willing to die is not sufficiently Christian.

As yet such people lack faith in the resurrection and love this life more than the life which is to come and so was Calvin right when he wrote something similarly. Although we must meet death says Calvin let us nevertheless be calm and serene in living and in dying when we have Christ going before us. If anyone cannot set his mind at rest by disregarding death that man should know that he has not yet gone far enough in the faith of Christ says Calvin.

In other words the Reformers expected what the New Testament promises that we should live without the tyranny of this fear. Liberty was anticipated and this is why Jesus was born. Child of a virgin, born in a stable.

Why oh why? Here's one reason and it's as relevant this morning probably within these walls of Knox as it ever was in the history of civilization. You can be saved from the tyranny of this fear because Jesus was born and lived and died. That brings us to the liberating action 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.

Now look at it like this. The ultimate end in view is what we have noted. The liberation of the children men and women given to our Lord Jesus by the father as the fruit of his passion to liberate believers from the

fear of death.

That's the ultimate end in view. Now look at the proximate goal what has to take place in order to make that possible? 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. Now I want you to notice two things here.

I'll be very brief with a second. I want to say a little more about the first. There are two things here that we're moving backward towards the incarnation rather than forward from it.

The first act envisaged here is the an act of destruction. The second act is an act of incarnation. We look first at the act of destruction that he might destroy him who holds the power of death that is the devil.

I'll be coming in a moment to the meaning of that word destruction but let me let me say a word like this at this stage. In order for you and for me to be saved from the tyranny of the fear of death the devil has got to be destroyed. And Jesus came to deal with our foe whom we could not deal with in our own human nature under the curse of the law.

He came to do it for us and in company with him. With him as your shepherd and your Savior and your Lord you and I can walk into the not only the shadow of death but into the reality of death knowing that if the Lord is your shepherd you will not want anything. Now that's the gospel.

Now let's examine it just a little. First of all I want you to notice these words referring to him that had the power of death. Now those words can be misleading if we overstress them because the ultimate power of death of course resides in God not in the devil's hand.

Now we've got to be clear about that there is a secondary sense in which death is the weapon used by Satan and that's what we have here. But let me stress the other. The ultimate power over death resides in the hands of the Almighty God for whom and by whom all things were made according to verse 10 in this very chapter.

Death is under his control and subject to his command as scripture clearly shows. He warned Adam and Eve before they sinned that death would come if they did. He executed the order following their act of shame.

And the scriptures elsewhere reaffirm God's absolute power in this regard. I can only refer to them now. Let me just quote to you from Deuteronomy 32 39.

See now says God that I myself am he there is no God beside me. I put to death and I bring to life. I have wounded and I will heal and no one can deliver from my hand.

That's an Old Testament expression of this sovereignty of God in the matter of death. And in the New Testament our Lord Jesus put it beyond doubt. When in Matthew chapter 10 and verse 28 and in the corresponding passage in Luke chapter 12.

He said this I'm quoting Matthew. Don't be afraid he said to the disciples of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather he says be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

God says Jesus is the one with absolute power, absolute authority over life and over death. Now whatever power the devil has he is under the Almighty Lord God and Creator. You must see that he says.

Having the power of death in the secondary sense then Satan has used it to humiliate God's creatures made after his image. And here are some of you dear people this morning blood-bought with the Spirit of God in your hearts and the Word of God in your hands and yet the devil comes your way and he frightens you and he gives you sleepless nights and he gives you bad dreams and he makes you afraid of death. And he tyrannizes men and women.

There's no need for it. Matthew Henry puts it like this. Satan has the power of death in his hands in that he was the first sinner and the first tempter of others to sin.

And sin has the procuring cause was the procuring cause of death. Now there is of course an instinctive fear of death. Even animals have that.

Brute beasts have that. Some of you have dogs. I don't want to introduce a very sad note into anybody's life this morning but I have known what it is for a dog just facing the end of its life to come near one and look up poignantly as if appealingly for help for something or other.

The poor little creature didn't know what was going on but its big eyeballs looked. It was aware of something. It had a fear of death.

There is an instinctive fear but there is also a spiritual fear of death experienced by mankind and this is something quite different. The element of mystery and of finality play some part in this but the dagger point would seem to be a sense of guilt and of shame and of unpreparedness to meet our God and our judge. And so it is a rational and a moral fear all at once.

It makes sense but it arises out of the knowledge of who God is and what I am. And you see we instinctively know that we cannot load the jury of that day with jurors who are predisposed to gloss over our flagrant violations of God's laws. There will be no jury.

It will be trial by judge. And the judge is the omnipotent Lord of all the ages who is just and holy against whose judgment there is no appeal. The trial will be before the omniscient and the just God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the more we know of his character the more the more we tend to be afraid of meeting him. That's something that goes to the fear of death. Now the devil uses that.

He the accuser of the brethren comes oh and how he rakes up our sins and throws them in front of us. And how he how he confuses us about things. Even Christian people.

And he brings out old sins from the past that have been buried under the blood of Jesus. And he hurls them before us and he says don't you remember this and don't you remember that. It's all unnecessary says the gospel.

It's all unnecessary. Him that hath the power of death he has the power of tyranny. He is confusing us.

If we do not look to the Savior. The only Savior that God has provided. But look at these words.

That by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death. That is the devil. God's plan of salvation envisaged what this writer describes as the destruction of Satan.

Now actually I hinted at this a little earlier on. The term rendered destroy in verse 14 needs to be explained. The total destruction of Satan does not seem to have been the divine intention.

Even Satan's eventual doom is never couched in such terms in scripture. Now some of you may want to challenge that. I'd be happy to talk to you.

But I want to repeat it the total destruction of Satan does not seem to have been the divine intention. Even Satan's eventual doom is never couched in such terms in scripture. Now some of you may want to challenge that.

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The total destruction of Satan does not seem to have been the divine intention. Even his eventual doom is never couched in such terms in scripture. But rather in terms that denote his ongoing existence in what the book of Revelation describes as quote the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet have been thrown.

They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. God never envisaged the total annihilation of Satan. And when the word destruction is used here it obviously does not mean that.

He is to be cast into a lake of fire where he will burn forever and ever. That's the word of God. And that's not consistent with annihilation.

Clearly that is not destruction in the absolute sense. What then does the word signify? Not total destruction but a rendering inoperative or ineffective of Satan's previous capacity to wield the power of death. It is rendering his power inoperative.

It is disabling him or crippling him from using the weapon that he used to use. The purpose envisaged by this word in this context is that of rendering Satan powerless to use death as a weapon whereby to bully men and women into abject fear. But how could this be done? By the death of God's only son.

The divine plan envisaged the means whereby Satan's power over death might be broken. And that necessitated the death of God's only son in human flesh. By his dying God planned to take the sting out of death to quote Hosea and Paul.

To take the sting out of it you see. And you know once the sting is taken out of death you can play with it like a serpent that is incapable of doing you any damage. It can become the plaything of children if it has no sting.

And the whole purpose of God is to take the sting out of death and put death in the hands of Satan. And the knowing child of God need not be terrified one moment. By death therefore God planned to conquer

death.

By the death of Christ he would seal the doom of death. And thus the very thing that apparently marked Satan's perverse success. Namely death.

The result of his seducing mankind into disobedience and thereby earning the divine sentence of death becomes the means of his downfall. And the New Testament is full of this. The Apostle Paul in writing to the Colossians for example in chapter 2 speaks of the death of Christ and the blessings that emanate from it.

In these words. When you are dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature God made you alive in Christ. He forgave us all our sins.

Having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us. Now listen. He took it away nailing it to his cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities he made a public spectacle of them. Triumphant over them by the cross. He took the sting out of death.

There is no need for you to be frightened. Jesus came that you might have life and life abundantly. Like David who grappled the great Goliath and slew him with his own sword.

The Son of God engaged himself in the stronger than Goliath and with the devil's own sword of death slew death on his cross. And on the morning of the resurrection began a new era. Like Samson Jesus died and in so doing he tore the whole edifice of death until it crumbled around him.

Only unlike Samson he arose again and came back into life and said to you I am the first and I am the last. I died but I am alive again and I have the keys of hell and of death. I give to you eternal life and you will never perish.

Brothers and sisters have you got it? A friend of mine has written a commentary on Hebrews. He uses an illustration which I heard him use on a platform I shared with him once. He is a great scholar nowadays but he was until he was 24 years of age a postman in England.

And in his early days he was delivering the post. And on this day he came to a house where apparently he had never been before. He was no sooner into the garden than he was faced with a vicious dog.

I opened the garden gate he says only to find myself confronted by the largest and most vicious dog I'd ever seen. It barked furiously and then leapt towards me. I stood there helpless and terrified.

And then at last he says to my relief I saw what I hadn't seen previously that this massive dog was chained. And the chain was tied to a huge stake set in concrete. He said I began to breathe.

But I saw this yelping dog before me. And there it was he says and it could come so far and I realized of course that there was enough room for me to go around the side and deliver the letter. And that's what I did.

From there on he says I hardly remembered about the dog. I came I knew it would be there but I just went my way. I didn't let him come too near.

I knew that he had limits set on his ability to hurt. And says Raymond Brown from that day forward it became a kind of a parable to me. I've never been afraid to die from that day.

He said that though he didn't write it in his book. I've never been afraid to die. Been very sick many times in hospital and out of hospital.

Been involved in accidents but the fear of death has gone. He says because I see that the great dog is not tied to concrete but the death of Calvary has taken the sting out of it. And my Lord holds him back by his word and covenant.

But you say what's all that got to do with Christmas? You're talking about Good Friday man you get all mixed up. No no I haven't my friend. All I want to say about Christmas is this that Christmas was the first step in history towards Golgotha.

On the morning of Christmas God arrived on planet earth. The Lord was conceived of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin's womb. He came to take to his deity of our humanity and he came to do it.

You know why? Because unless he did that he couldn't die. And he wanted to die. Imagine wanting to die.

Imagine foreseeing Calvary and wanting to go to Calvary. Is he a pathological case? No but he loved. He loved you men and women.

He loved you on the gallery. He loved you downstairs. He even loved this sinner in the pulpit.

And he came because he loved. For God so loved the world. That's the message.

And he went into that dingy outhouse. However smelly it was. Whatever about it.

I'm not sure of its character all together. I don't think anybody is. But whatever kind of place it was he did not despise it.

He loved. And he wanted to rid you of the fear of death. He wanted you to live.

Live with hope. Live in the power of eternal life. Are you there? Well let me give you this picture as I close.

I return to something we've hinted at already. The strategy, the divine strategy you see was not to bombard the devil from a distance. God could have done that.

The almighty God could have said a word and the devil's whole armory would have been in disarray. For God is omnipotent. The devil is a creature, an angelic creature.

He's a creature of God and a word of God could have dismantled all his arsenal. But that wasn't the strategy. The strategy was you see God was going to become small enough, so insignificant as to come inside the castle of human nature and inside the experience of suffering and dying.

And when he gets into the experience of suffering and dying he's going to explode the cave of death and say there's nothing here to fear. I'm Lord here. And that's exactly what he did.

Amen. He took our nature. He took our flesh and blood and he came into the midst of it all.

The writer of this same epistle says he was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. He tasted death for every man. He went into death itself.

And he tore death to smithereens. And the devil has got no quiver in his armor that need frighten the child of God forevermore. But then brothers and sisters there's only one thing for you and for me.

To repent of our sins. To come to the Christ of God who came for us. And in coming to him trust him.

Trust him. Have faith in him. Rest in him.

Walk with him. Live with him and for him. He will not only live better he will die better.

And when at last the end comes it will be as with the apostle to be with Christ. Which is far better. Now there's someone here this morning who needs this message.

And there's someone here who's never received the Savior in this sense. You've never done it. You're outside of it all.

Listen. Don't let this Christmas season go by and you know why God sent his son and you're not profiting from it. Don't leave.

Don't leave an imaginary bite in the mouth of Satan. Don't leave an imaginary sting in his mouth. And it need only be imaginary.

Rather accept the fact of what he's done and trust him. And begin to walk with him. And work for him.

Step over the boundary of a new year if he saves us and keeps us and leads us. To begin an altogether new life. Will you do it now? Right where you are.

Now some of you who are believers have not lived on this level. And you know it's wrong of us. It's sin.

We're living beneath our dignity and privilege. If we are frightened by suffering and death when Christ has done everything to assure us and sends his word to be proclaimed in our hearing that we should have peace with God and peace in our own souls. Let us pray.

Oh Lord our God and Father we thank you that you have such an amazing word in scripture to declare in the hearing of men and women such as ourselves who know ourselves to be sinners and unworthy of your presence and unprepared apart from what Jesus Christ alone can do. Oh God should there be among us this morning someone who knows not the Lord Jesus in this saving intimate personal way. Help that one to call upon you.

And should there be among us some of your dear blood-bought children who are buffeted and fearful and timid at the very thought of suffering and of death. Blessed God grant them to see the glories of the Redeemer. Feast our eyes afresh upon the knowledge that the incarnation has taken place and what begun historically in the womb of the Virgin was concluded in the womb of death.

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