

# You Will Never See Death

by John Piper

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**Scripture:** John 8:32, John 8:51, John 11:25, Hebrews 2:14, 1 Corinthians 15:52, John 5:24, John 8:36, Exodus 3:14

**Topics:** "Freedom from Fear", "Eternal Life in Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Let's pray. By your Spirit and through your Word now, conquer the fear of death that pervades the lives of people. You will know the truth.

The truth will set you free. The Son shall set you free. You shall be free indeed from the fear of death.

So God, come and take it away. Unleash upon this world now the most courageous people it has ever seen. I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. So if you have come, there are three things the Lord wants you to see. That's why you're here.

Number one, He wants you to see that you don't have to die. Number two, He wants you to see that Jesus is the God of Israel, the God of the universe. And three, He wants you to see the implications for your life of liberation from fear of death because you don't have to die, because you've been set free by the one who said before Abraham, was, I am.

There is another reality in this text besides those three, and that is the opposition that Jesus gets when He starts talking like this. And it's not a pretty thing. I don't think John records the opposition of Jesus because it's comfortable.

It's tragic. These are His people. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

He's called a demon-possessed person by His own kinsmen. It's not comfortable, but there it is. And the reason it's there is because it's precisely through the opposition that the greatness of Jesus is drawn out.

Look at verse 53 at the end of verse 53. Who do you make yourself out to be? That's their question, and they're very skeptical. And the answer to that question, that kind of cynical opposition to what He has just said about Abraham seeing his day, the answer to that question explodes with power on this text, and almost gets Him killed on the spot, but He hides from them because it's not His hour, and He's not going to be killed by stoning.

He's going to be killed by crucifixion. That's the plan. But it was a violent moment, and it was drawn out by the answer that came to the question that came through the opposition.

Who do you think you are? So, let's take these two great realities, deity of Jesus, deathlessness of His followers, deity deathlessness. Let's take those two big pictures and deal with them one at a time, and then unfold the implication for your life right now in your job, at your home, in your school, the implication for you right now that you do not have to die. The text begins with opposition because the conflict—we've been in this chapter for, what, four sermons, I think, already, and it's been opposition all the way along.

It's not new. From the first part of the chapter, they're still resisting Him. They've gotten to a point where they can't even hear Him.

Look at verse 47. Whoever is of God hears my words. Here's the words of God.

The reason why you don't hear them is you're not of God. So, they're deaf to His meaning, and you almost wonder, why does He keep talking to them? Verse 48, the indictment of Jesus comes out. The Jews answered Him, are we not right in saying you're a Samaritan and have a demon? Now, the Jews despised Samaritans.

The Samaritans were half-breeds. They were Jews who had intermarried with pagans six centuries earlier. They had adjusted the Bible.

They created their own place of worship, and there was huge antagonism between them. And to call Jesus a Samaritan was a racial slur, among other things. They didn't know who His Father was anyway, and so who knows, could have been one of them.

So, this is vicious. And to put a little icing on the cake, you've got a demon. That's what's wrong with you.

He answers, verse 49, I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet, I do not seek my own glory. There is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.

So, he's saying, in effect, I don't need to defend myself here. I have one who's totally passionate about my glory, my Father. If you array yourself against me, you array yourself against God.

So, I don't need to say anything at this point about my glory. I have a Father who is utterly devoted to upholding my glory, and if you dishonor me, you go on the attack against the one who is devoted to upholding my glory. You don't want to go there, and I'll tell you why.

He is the judge. You see what he's saying? If you move against me, if you talk against me, if you demonize me, God's gonna judge you. I won't have to.

He is the judge. That's what he's saying. All through this book, that's not the main point, is it? You can think of verses in this gospel.

That's not the main point of the book. It's true, and it has to be said. What's the main point of this book? John 3 17, God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but in order that the world might be saved.

So, yes, he strikes a note of judgment, warning. Warnings are precious. If you're ready to fall over a cliff, warnings are precious.

I don't care how loud they are, strident they are, they're precious. If you're about to fall and kill yourself, warnings are precious, but that's not the thing in this gospel. So, he finishes his response to them in verse 51.

This is amazing. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. So, they've gotten to the point where they're blaspheming him, slurs, and you kind of demon.

And Jesus said one time, don't cast your pearls before swine. I mean, if there was ever a moment when he should shut up and go away, this would be it, wouldn't it? And he doesn't. This is incredible mercy that he will keep talking to these people and what he says to them.

I mean, he said this, he said things like this before, and they've just blown it off and put the worst face on it. And he just keeps talking to them. If anyone will keep my word, anyone, anyone among you blaspheming friends of mine, if any one of you will keep my word, you won't ever see death.

That's an amazing promise, isn't it? It's amazing for several reasons. One of them is that he didn't just say you won't ever die. He said you won't ever see death.

And in verse 52, second half of the verse, the adversaries pick it up and restate it with a word taste instead of see. They say, he says you keep his word, you won't ever taste death. We'll never taste of it.

And he doesn't correct them. So he's saying to them, if you will keep my word, you won't see it, you won't taste it. It's breathtaking.

What does he mean, if you will keep my word? He means, if you will believe what I say about myself and my father and our great work of salvation, you won't see death, you won't taste death. This gospel ends with the crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. And the gospel interprets for us why this whole life is lived toward death and resurrection.

It says, I will lay down my life for the sheep. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. If I be lifted up on a pole, just look at me and your sins will be taken away and you'll have eternal life.

The whole point of all this story is going towards that moment of lifting up Jesus on the cross and sins being covered, righteousness being provided, wrath being appeased, death being conquered, hell being shut, heaven being opened. And keep these words, that, that story. I'm just talking about it and talking about it and constantly talking about it and me and my father and what we're here for, what we're doing.

Keep it, love it, treasure it, embrace it, hold it, live in it, be transformed by it, you'll never die. You will never see death. Really? Really? Death is everywhere.

Did you read the blog yesterday from Harmon Killebrew? Seventy-four years old, checking himself into hospice because esophageal cancer has won, he said. He's going to die. He's telling everybody that's where he's going.

At Target Field, across town, just outside gate 34, there's a golden glove. It's located 520 feet precisely from home plate. You know why? That's the longest home run that's ever been hit in the history of the Twins, Barclay, Harmon Killebrew hit that.

And he's going to die. It doesn't make any difference. Be anything you want to be and you're going to die.

It's everywhere. Here's what he said. I copied it off the blog.

It is with profound sadness that I share with you that my continued battle with esophageal cancer is coming to an end. With the continued love and support of my wife, Nita, I have exhausted all options with respect to controlling this awful disease. My illness has progressed beyond my doctor's expectation of cure.

So he's going to die. You're going to die. I'm going to die.

You're going to die. Death is the great leveler. It doesn't matter how glorious your career was.

Everybody looks the same at that moment pretty much if they're 74. You're going to die. Or are you? Are you? Verse 51, truly, truly, not falsely, falsely, truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

He will never taste death. One of the most powerful moments in my seminary life was the funeral of James Morgan, my 36-year-old professor of systematic theology. Lewis Meads was preaching his funeral message, wife and four little children of the deceased.

And at one moment, Lewis Meads, in his magisterial voice, lifted it up and cried out, James Morgan is not dead! And I remember to this day the tingling in my spine as the truth just crashed over that moment. I've never forgotten it. It's just one of those unforgettable moments.

So, if James Morgan is not dead at his funeral, and James Morgan was not dead a few months earlier when I was listening to him teach theology, what happened in between? What was that? Well, let's let Jesus explain it. I'm going to take you to two passages of Scripture where Jesus owns the paradox that I've just articulated. You're not going to die, follower of Jesus.

You're not. This is John 11, 25 to 26. Jesus is talking to Martha, the sister of the man who's in the grave.

I am the resurrection and the life. John 11, 25. I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Verse 26. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Yes, we die, as it says. Though he die, yet shall he live. Verse 25.

No, we don't die, because it says, verse 26, everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Lazarus's body lays dead in the grave, but Lazarus was not dead. His body was dead.

He was not dead. He had not died. Now, here's the other verse.

This one is even more important. It's John 5, 24. It gets at it even more profoundly, I think.

John 5, verse 24. Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment.

He has passed from death to life. Believers in Jesus who keep his word have passed already out of death into life. They now have what's called eternal life.

Eternal life cannot, by definition, stop for a second. It cannot stop. You never lose it.

It is eternal. There's not a five-minute pause in the hospital or anywhere. Believers do not see death.

They do not taste death. Our bodies die. They die.

They lie there. How many hundreds have lain here? They look like they're sleeping, and that's why in the New Testament death is called sleep sometimes. It's not because we consciously go to sleep.

It's that we don't have any consciousness. We wake up at the resurrection. That's a very bad interpretation.

It's because they look like they're sleeping. It's just an analogy. The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable.

We shall be changed. First Corinthians 15, 52. When our bodies die, we do not die.

We have passed from death to life, eternal life, unbroken life, unending life. What that means is this. When we are born again, chapter three of John, the wind blows where it wills.

We don't know where it comes from or where it's going. Such are all who are born of the Spirit. That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Until you are born again by the Holy Spirit, you have no living spirit. You are flesh, mortal flesh.

When you are born again, Spirit is awakened. Life is given, eternal life. The Holy Spirit lives within you and imparts the life of God to you.

This life is indestructible. That's what happens. And now we experience God.

We speak with God. We hear from God by His Spirit through His Word, very personally, experientially. We love God as the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

This is the work of God, the Spirit. We're alive to Him. We're alive to Him.

We have fellowship with Him. We walk with Him. We know Him.

We taste and see that He is good. We're alive. When somebody asks you if you were born, you shouldn't show them a certificate.

You should breathe in their presence. Speak, touch them. Don't look for your birth certificate as proof that you're alive.

And when somebody asks you if you've been born again, don't look for your birth certificate. Breathe. Speak, pray, love, touch.

Enjoy God in front of them. You're alive. You know Him.

You enjoy Him. He's real to you. This is what never, ever ends.

It just gets perfected in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Sometimes it just hits me, and to older people who know exactly what I mean, how close that moment is. Just a few years and I will sin no more, and I will enjoy Him face to face forever.

I'm 65. Suppose I live to 80. What's that, 15 years? I can remember 15 years ago like it was yesterday.

That's not very long, and I'm probably not going to live to 80. This fellowship that we enjoy with God cannot be ended. It cannot be broken.

It is eternal. Wherein our bodies die, we do not experience one millisecond of break in fellowship with God through Christ. It is in that instant perfected.

Hebrews 12, 23. The life we have with Christ in God today, because of the new birth, will never end. We will not see the end of it.

We will not taste the end of it, because there is no end of it. We'll come back to that in a moment with regard to a massive implication in our lives if that's true of you, but we must take a moment, just a brief moment, on the majesty of the person who said this, because this statement got him in deeper trouble, and his answer to the trouble gets him in mortal trouble. Verse 52, his adversaries mock him.

Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, as did the prophets. Yet you say, if anyone keeps my word, he'll never taste death.

Are you greater than Abraham who died and the prophets who died? Who do you make yourself out to be? Now the answer to that question comes in two stages, each of them breathtaking, and the last one not dead breathtaking. So here's his answer. Stage one, verse 54, Jesus answered, if I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.

It is my father who glorifies me, of whom you say he's our God, but you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I'd be a liar like you, but I do know him, and I keep his word.

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. He what? You're not 50 years old.

He saw your day. He saw the day of my rule. He saw the day of my glory.

He saw the day of my living. He saw the day of my reigning. He saw it, and commentators, you read the commentaries on this, like okay, when did that happen in Abraham's life? Nobody knows.

Commentators go here, they go there. I got three different interpretations. I read three commentaries.

I got three different ideas, and nobody knows what Jesus is referring to here, and you know what? The listeners didn't give a rip what he's referring to because they saw an implication in it that infuriated them, and they went with that, and that's what Jesus wanted them to go with. So that's what I'm going with. I don't know when this happened, could have been like Isaac, could have been when he received the promise at the beginning, could have been some other theophany that he had.

I don't know. He saw Jesus in his great day, and they saw the implication. So verse 57, so the Jews said to him, you're not 50 years old, and you've seen Abraham.

Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. This is the clearest, most forthright statement in the gospel that Jesus is Yahweh, the God of Israel.

He did not say, had he wanted only to say, I pre-existed Abraham, he would have said this, before Abraham was, I was, and he didn't say it because he wanted to say more. He said the very odd grammatical statement, before Abraham was, I am, and that's why they picked up stones. If he had claimed to be an angel, say a Jehovah's Witness Michael, I don't think they would have picked up stones.

But if you say, before Abraham was, I am, we know where that comes from in the Bible. That comes from Exodus 3.14. Where God says to Moses, I am who I am. Say to this people of Israel, I am has sent me to you.

Jesus, our Lord, is to be worshiped as God. Now the implications of this for all of life, for all the world, for all eternity, for all religions, is staggering. We will never exhaust, in all of eternity, we will never exhaust the mystery, the wonder, the beauty, the stunning, glorious reality that Jesus is man and God.

Two natures, a divine and a human, in one person. But the implication in this text is all I want to deal with right now. The implication in this text is when he says, if you keep my word, you will never see death.

You will never see death. Period. Look who's talking.

That's the point here. And the point is probably deeper than that. It's not just that God Almighty has just said it.

You keep my word, you'll never see death. The point is also the reason you will never see death is not just because an infinitely authoritative person just promised it. That would be enough.

But he has shown how it can be that these sinners, like me and you, these sinners won't see death. Namely, he became man so that he could die on the cross and rise again and cover the sins, take the punishment, be the substitute. That's also implicit in this word, in this context.

So let's end this message with one huge practical implication. And to get it, I'm going to go to Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14, not because it's not implicit here, but because it is so amazingly explicit in Hebrews 2.14. The effect of Jesus' death in our place as the God-man in Hebrews 2.14 is what I want you to feel and see in the last few minutes of this message. Since therefore the children, that's us, people, since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, that is we're human, he himself, the Son of God, likewise partook of the same things, the same nature, that is he became human.

See the dynamic. The question is now, since we're human, he became human. This is what we're seeing in John all over the place, and here's the reason.

So that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver, this is us now, deliver all those who through the fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. The writer of the Hebrews believes that all human beings are enslaved their whole life by the fear of death, even when they don't know it. In 1973, Ernest Becker wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning book called *The Denial of Death*.

It was all the rage in the 70s. The thesis of the book was the same as the thesis of Hebrews. Humanity is enslaved globally by fear of dying, and what humans do is deny, deny, deny, deny, and we find all kinds of ways, religious ways, alcoholic ways, work ways, family ways, beautiful ways, surgery ways.

Take 10 years off. Listen to this, I'll read you the thesis. The main thesis of this book, Becker says, the main thesis of this book is that the fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else.

It is a mainspring of human activity, activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man. Becker has no answer. He's just documenting this pervasive reality, this massive human effort to deny, deny this reality of death.

Jesus has an answer. His answer is to, number one, say, I am. Number two, the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

Number three, I lay down my life for my people and cover all their sin and provide all their righteousness. And number four, I conquer death, and I conquer Satan who has the power of death. Number five, I rise from the dead.

And number six, I take away the fear of dying. That's Jesus' answer. Hebrews and Becker, Ernest Becker and the writer of the Hebrews, both say that the fear of death produces pervasive, lifelong slavery.

Don't miss that. See at the end of verse 15 in Hebrews 2? I came to deliver those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. You may not think that.

He does. I believe. I'm going to agree with him, not you.

John Piper, until grace does a miracle, is subconsciously driven to deny my death. There are things in your life right now that are owing to the fear of death that you don't know are owing to the fear of death, and that if you could have this stunning liberation from the fear of death, there would come into your life a kind of freedom and a kind of risk-taking adventuresomeness for God that would change almost everything in your life. It is haunting our choices, making us cautious and wary and restrained and confined and narrow and tight and robbing us from risk and adventure and dreams for the sake of Christ and the kingdom and the cause of love in the world.

Why do you live such cautious lives? Why do you devote so much energy to security? It's just absurd if the one who said, before Abraham was I am, said, you keep my word, you will never die. You have entered life. Life.

You have passed out of death. You have moved around judgment. You are hidden with Christ in God.

It cannot be ended. It cannot be interrupted. What are you afraid of? Without even knowing it, fear of death is a slave master binding us with invisible ropes, confining us to small, safe, innocuous, self-centered lives.

Becker had no solution for this bondage. Jesus does. And the solution of Jesus, I'll just say it and close.

If you keep my words, you will never see death. You will know the truth, this truth, and the truth will set you from what? Fear of death and a lot of other things, because that one is underneath almost all of them. Unconsciously, Hebrews says, and if the Son, and now we know who he is, if the Son shall set you free, Bethlehem, you will be free indeed.

Oh, may God come. May God do a work in our hearts so that if you're 80 or 8, you will be afraid anymore. And if you're not afraid of dying, what could you be afraid of? Almighty God, I want the last chapter of my life, whether it's a minute or 15 years, to be fearless in the cause of love, in the cause of Christ, fearless to be humble, fearless to be broken, fearless to be a servant, fearless to go, fearless to speak.

And I know I speak for many who ache under the invisible ropes of small, selfish, secure, confining, innocuous, boring lives. Set us free in the name of Jesus, I pray.

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