

## Death is not the End

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I am so grateful that I could come back here after so many decades. I have completely forgotten when I came for the first time. I used to visit every week to teach the German language. The founder of this school gave me special permission to use the school's library any time I liked. He even encouraged me to talk about Jesus to his students. It was a very pleasant time. Although I have no idea when the seeds sown will be reaped, I am quite confident that no seed was wasted. Today, I am going to talk about this subject, "death is not the end."

Thirteen years ago, a terrible incident occurred on September 11th in the United States. Huge numbers of people were killed instantly. These are the words written on the wall of a fire station of New York.

No farewell words were spoken  
No time to say goodbye  
You were gone before we knew it,  
and only God knows why.

These words were made public. After all, no one can explain why and how it had to happen. The most dangerous answer to this question comes from religion. Whenever you go through an ordeal, religion always tells you that it occurred because of your arrogance, or perhaps that it was a divine punishment for the evil deeds of your grandfather. These are all lies.

There is no God who punishes humans—This is what the Bible wants to tell us. There is no such God because it is not necessary. The reason is that Jesus Christ was already punished for human arrogance; God does not have to punish humans anymore. This is such a wonderful fact, isn't it? This very fact allows us to live positively. About two thousand and several hundred years ago, the prophet called Isaiah wrote;

"Look! God—yes God—is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid. For the Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2 )  
[International Standard Version]

I believe that having such unshakeable conviction is a supreme blessing. What is the salvation offered through the Bible?

In the first place, it is the 'solution to the problem of your sins.' All humans are arrogant and commit sins. And after all, there is nothing we can do to atone for our own sins. The salvation of Jesus brings us the conviction that "our sins are forgiven and forgotten."

In addition, true salvation liberates us from isolation. All humans are lonely. We want to be cared for and we want to be loved. True salvation is a liberation from isolation. "I feel a little lonely sometimes but I know I am not alone. He will never leave me or forsake me"— this conviction inevitably arises from acceptance of the salvation of Jesus.

Furthermore, true salvation is a liberation from fear of 'death'. Most people don't want to think about their death. But we all have to die one day. As the proverb says, "be prepared and have no regrets." Our present life is so empty if we can't face our death with peace and hope. Liberation from the fear of 'death' is exactly the salvation offered through Jesus. These words are taken from the Bible;

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus the Messiah! (1 Corinthians 15:55,57)

Those who can express their feelings this way are truly blessed.

Once, the son of the president of a German publishing company was asked by a TV reporter; "What would shock you most? Getting cancer? Losing all your wealth suddenly? Or, being forced to live on a wheelchair for the rest of your life?"

The son's answer was kind of strange. He said, "If God exists, it would be unimaginably fearful for me."

If the Lord God exists, 'death' is not the end. Because if he does, we will absolutely be judged after death. After all, we are destined to go to either heaven or hell. Certainly, it will be unimaginably fearful if you have to be in hell forever, where you see no light at all with no peace, no joy and no hope. The Bible talks about a heaven in which;

There won't be death anymore. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain. (Revelation 21:4)

The glory to come will be truly magnificent. So, it is briefly mentioned in the Bible:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

At this moment, you may be agonized, suffering and full of despair. However, your life won't end there.

This man I knew very well had gone through many troubles in his life. His wife died of cancer and a few decades later, he got the same disease. He prepared a small booklet for his own memorial service, which began with this sentence;

*"I, Minoru Arai am so grateful to you for gathering for my funeral ceremony today."*

More than 700 people gathered for his funeral ceremony as well as the prayer meeting held the night before. It was several decades ago that I first met him. We met at a hospital in Nagoya when his wife was sick in bed there. He was a 49-year-old, and his wife was 39. On that very day, they understood that there was nobody but Jesus and came to believe in Jesus. Since then, they began to share their worries and pray together. Thus, the lesson to be learnt here is that there is no need to give up, because it is not old age or disease that humans die of. The Creator knows the time to call us and we do not have to worry until then.

When I visited them in the hospital at a later time, I heard his wife say to her husband, "Congratulations for getting sick, darling" and he answered, "thanks to you."

What she meant was that, had he not gotten ill, then he would never have sought salvation, and thus he would not have encountered the savior. He would have had to live the rest of his life without true joy, true peace and true hope. It was why his wife celebrated him for getting this serious disease. He received something eternal as a consequence. He once wrote to me;

*"If I did not know the Bible, I would have been agonized with pain and sorrow and cursed my destiny. My wife, Junko has been released from the fear of death through her belief in Jesus and she changed the meaning of my life too. Now, I am filled with joy of seeing Junko again soon in heaven and gratitude for the love and grace of the Lord."*

About 34 years ago, my daughter Linde got cancer. She was raised to heaven when she was just 20 years old. This girl sincerely desired to bear fruit for Jesus. Her health or happiness did not mean anything to her and she did not care about these things at all. I feel happy when Jesus alone is glorified—This was the attitude my daughter always had. And this testimony of hers eventually bore abundant fruit. It made so many people seek Jesus, visit Jesus and encounter Jesus.

One person visited me in Germany and asked a question; How could Linde die filled with so much joy? How could she live separated from worldly things? Why wasn't she attracted by the visible but instead paid attention to the invisible?

My daughter explained it in the following sentence. It was found in her Bible after she died:

*"Honorable people can look straight into death."*

Some people consider that they would never understand life after death until they actually die and so prefer not to be bothered by such problems while they are alive in this world. What kind of attitude are we supposed to take to such thoughts? In fact, different people have different ideas about 'death'. Generally speaking, many people do not feel comfortable discussing 'death' and they refuse to talk about it.

When famous Louis XIV of France, who was called the Sun King, saw a funeral cortege passing by, he immediately gave the order to close all the curtains according to the legend. As we know, he could have anything he desired. He was the famous king, who had honors, status, wealth and everything he wanted. However, 'death' was the only thing he feared. The famous German poet and politician, Wolfgang von Goethe, also had an abhorrence of 'death', so much so that he refused to attend funerals even of his closest friends or family.

People make plans for their lives and try to live according to them. However, if they work on their 'death' the same way, their lives will be totally messed up. Knowing that they cannot make any such plans for their death, they avoid thinking about it. They cannot give up their strong desire to enjoy their lives as long as they are in this world. The devil constantly whispers to them to stop contemplating their 'death'. He dazzles their eyes, tempts them into a life of worldly pleasure and draws them into snares of evil.

However, when we look at reality, we see that our lives are surrounded by death regardless of whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. For example, in this country alone, nearly 24 people are killed in traffic accidents every hour. During the two world wars, 80 million people were killed. In this country, more than 4000 members of society take their own lives every year. The grief and pain of the bereaved family members are beyond imagination. 'Death' is an undeniable fact and I would have to say that those who refuse to think seriously about death are unwise.

The Island called Borneo is known for their peculiar ritual practice. They have a tradition of placing a human skull between bride and bridegroom during their wedding ceremony. They say that this custom began so as to enable the couple not to forget about their death at the happiest moment of their lives.

If people are sensible enough, they would be compelled to admit that 'death' does not mean the end of all things. It is absolutely unreasonable to believe that the Lord God created men only so that the purpose of their lives would be completed by death. When people begin to work, they have some image of what they want to achieve. If a carpenter builds a house with no architectural plan, without any idea of what he is working on, his work will be utterly meaningless. It goes without saying that no tailor begins to cut out fabric without having a clear picture of the cloth to be made. No one can accomplish anything without a meaning, purpose and plan.

Thus, when the Lord God of almighty created men, he surely did so with one clear objective. The Lord God never wants humans to 'die' or be destroyed. The Lord God desires humans to live. So, when we think of our 'death', we need to pay attention to what follows after death, instead of concentrating solely on how our 'death' itself will be like. I would like to have a brief discussion with you on six points.

Firstly, we can only live for some decades, which is too short to fulfill everything. Now, in this world we live in, a human being's lifespan is 120 years at best. Still only a few people live up to 100 years old. When we seriously think about this, we can't help but admit that what is written in the Bible is absolutely true, which is that;

[You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. \(James 4:14\)](#)

Even we can realize how trivial our lives are. The history of mankind is just a little longer than 6000 years, which is almost nothing before the eyes of the Lord God. Where were we 100 years ago? And where will we be 100 years later? Our life is so short that it seems natural for people to spontaneously come up with the idea that there might be another life after death. To this question, the Bible clearly assures the existence of another world. Our life is too short to have any real meaning and true life only begins after death.

Secondly, the Bible states that the Lord God Himself has instilled in our hearts an aspiration for eternity. Man was created in the image of the Lord God. And the Lord God gave us the ability to comprehend the meaning of 'eternity' and realize what 'perfection' is. So, humans will not be satisfied with temporal, fleeting pleasures or anything imperfect. We all want to love someone wholeheartedly and want to be loved wholeheartedly in turn. It is why we are repeatedly disappointed by mortal love in this world.

Artists bring enormous passion into creating a perfect piece of art. But they often hurl their own creations on the wall when they see some imperfections in their own work. While young people

see unlimited hope in their future and never doubt that it will last forever, old people do not see their future as filled with brightness. For young people, each year is so fulfilling, meaningful and long, but as they grow older, they come to feel that the years are passing so quickly and realize the frailty of time from experience.

Women spend a lot of money and make desperate efforts to keep themselves looking younger and more attractive. However, they eventually have to realize that there is nothing they can do and become disappointed and sad.

Humans are perpetually caught in a tide of desires that follow one after another and they will never be satisfied. It is nothing but a tragedy. Some people run after the latest trends which come and go so fast and will never bring them true happiness. Businessmen work hard day and night to make as much profit as they can. Dictators are not satisfied with ruling their own countries but desire to force the whole world under their control. So-called workaholics place the highest priority on their job and throw their hearts into their work, ignoring all other aspects of their lives. But eventually the day will come when all these people lose the sense of what they are living for and begin to feel suffocated. When people succeed in their business, get a lot of money and are physically healthy, they may look very happy from the human perspective, but their hearts are always filled with unsatisfied desires. Moreover, they have not attained blessings as seen through the eyes of the Lord God.

The intention of the Lord God is simply for us humans to have eternal life. Therefore, no one but our Lord God can truly fulfill our hearts.

In chapter 4 of the Gospel according to John appears a woman. She committed adultery and had five husbands. Undoubtedly, she had been pursuing worldly happiness for many years. But her desperate wish has never been fulfilled. This was when the Lord Jesus walked close to her and said; "whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never become thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become a well of water for him, springing up to eternal life." (John 4:14) Then this woman replied to Him;

[Sir, give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water. \(John 4:15\)](#)

A famous man called Augustine once confessed that, "I have no lasting peace until I rest in the Lord God."

Here is the third point. If there is no life after death, this world is utterly meaningless. Our life has no

meaning unless it is connected to an eternal world. If death is the end of everything, what is the value of the efforts made during our lifetime? The great King Solomon said that all things in this world are meaningless; in fact, they are “utterly pointless.” He had everything including honor, status and wealth. Actually, he was the richest man in the world of his days. Still, he had to say in his confession that “everything was meaningless.” Nothing in this world will preserve its value forever. All things we have while we are alive will fall away from us at the moment of our death.

Materialists would say; Let us enjoy wining and dining today as nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. However, I would say that this kind of mindset is an expression of their resentment and desperation. When you are young, you have plenty of time and money and you can spend them as much as you like in drinking and eating. But eventually when you get old and have to get by on your savings, the time will come for you to realize that only illness and death are waiting for you. If you fail to deal with the problem of life after death, you will have to kill yourself or become insane; either way you will end up in miserable desolation. Suicide is not the right solution to this problem. It just means a refusal to face reality.

Fourthly, the justice of this world does not satisfy us from the bottom of our hearts. Because worldly justice can't satisfy our desperate thirst for perfect righteousness. There are so many injustices in this world that escape without being properly judged. On the other hand, those who live a righteous life do not always receive the rewards they deserve. In actuality, a lot of people have been persecuted or even murdered because of their pursuit of the truth. If death means to put a period on all things, life would be absolutely meaningless. However, it is not true. Certainly, separation by death is equally sad and painful even for Christians.

So, you may want to contemplate having the conviction that you can see your loved ones again after death, which is the fifth point. Death is merely a temporary separation from your loved ones and you will absolutely see them again—Having this conviction is the ultimate consolation and joy for believers.

Sixthly, it is the time for us to see Jesus face to face and to be transformed into his image—this is exactly the plan of our God, the Creator. We should not forget that men are not merely created as eternal beings to pursue perfection for themselves, but are created to fulfill the purpose of the Lord himself. That is to say, because of the sin Adam, the first man, committed, all men are separated from the Lord God. Thus, we have to recover lively fellowship with God, otherwise we cannot continue our lives. It is

unimaginably wonderful for saved people to have the conviction that they will live in an eternal fellowship with Jesus. In fact, man-made religions can't give concrete explanations about a life after death but can only attempt some abstract description based on their own imagination.

Contrarily, the Bible, which consists of the words of God, clearly explains the existence of life after death, not only for believers but for non-believers too. According to the Bible, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who lived more than 4000 years ago are still alive. On the other hand, those who refuse to repent will be thrown into Hades where they will have to suffer forever. Jesus mentioned that when those who refused to be penitent will suffer in Hades after death, they will never be unconscious, but they will remain clearly conscious and will have to endure all pains (Luke 16:19-31). Once they die, all those who refused to believe will be hauled before the Lord God in Hades and will have to go through the Last Judgment.

Those who were saved and even those who are not saved yet will continue to live after death; there is no end. Those who accepted the salvation of the Lord God will certainly maintain eternal life. That is to say, after death, saved people will be given eternal life and stay together with the Lord God, while those who refuse to repent will have to perish in pain and agony according to the Bible.

These can be summarized as follows: First of all, when people are born into this world, they are given the 'soul' along with the privilege to exist forever with that soul. Secondly, when these people repent of their sins and are newly reborn by a faith that believes in Jesus, they receive 'eternal life'. Thirdly, they will receive, at the time of the resurrection, a 'nonperishable body'. Certainly, non-believers too would exist forever, but they cannot have true life, unless they are reborn.

True life only exists when we are in fellowship with Jesus. It is explained in the Gospel according to John, chapter 17, verse 3;

**And this is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent—Jesus the Messiah. (John 17:3)**

It is also written in the First Epistle of John, chapter 5, verse 20; “...Jesus the Messiah, who is the true God and eternal life.” (1John 5:20) Non-believers who refuse to believe in the Lord God do not have true life in this world. In other words, they are not fulfilled for they do not have peace with the Lord God.

The famous poet, Wolfgang von Goethe whom I mentioned earlier confessed that, throughout his life,

there has never been a single day when he was purely happy for 24 hours. Why do humans have to stay unfulfilled like this? It is because of the lack of true peace and quiet in their hearts. The Bible states that humans do not have true peace of mind because they know somewhere in their hearts that they will be judged after death. As I mentioned earlier today, my daughter who was taken up to heaven when she was 20 years old wrote before she died, "Honorable people can look straight into death." Those who can look straight into 'death' are those who were saved by Jesus. That was why Paul testified that "Jesus is my peace." Jesus accomplished redemption with the Lord God. The Lord Jesus canceled confrontation between the Lord God and humans. Our sins of turning away from the Lord God and all our debts were totally wiped away by the precious sacrifice of Jesus.

True peace can only be attained through belief in Jesus. All believers of Jesus are granted the faith and certainty that they have redemption and peace with the Lord God now.

The Lord God is not angry anymore, but has accomplished perfect redemption and reconciliation through the sacrifice of Jesus. Now, nothing can sever our ties with God. Those who make peace with the Lord God do not have to fear death anymore, for they can rest in perfect solace and harmony. Without peace with the Lord God, that is to say, if we lack fellowship with the Lord God, there will be no true joy or blessing. Hence our life will be meaningless and valueless.

The famous composer, John Sebastian Bach, left a number of masterpieces, in which he clearly expressed his sincere desire for 'death'. That is to say, Bach saw, in the eyes of faith, the magnificence of the world that comes after death rather than the world he was living in. When he did, he was compelled to praise the Lord. Once, the believers of God were no different from non-believers, in that they were sinners and were equally destined to go to Hades. However, the Crucifixion of Jesus, the only-begotten Son, has canceled their debt of punishment and liberated all believers from their sins so that they can attain eternal life. Thus, believers no longer have to fear 'death'. It is written in the very famous verse 1 of Romans, chapter 8:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor anything above, nor anything below, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is ours in union with the Messiah Jesus, our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

In this sense, 'death' plays the role of a bridge to let believers reach Jesus through faith. Thus, believers have no reason to fear death at all.

Let me read another verse from the Epistle to Philippians, Chapter 1, Verse 20;

I rejoice because I eagerly expect and hope that I will have nothing to be ashamed of, because through my boldness the Messiah will be exalted through me, now as always, whether I live or die. For to me, to go on living is the Messiah, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:20-21)

For those who have been saved by the grace of the Lord, to die is to become one with Jesus, which is wonderful for them. Paul contemplated which was better for him, to die or to live, and he chose death. However, because of his strong feelings of obligation to serve other people, he decided to continue to live. Had there been no other people to serve and he only had to care about himself, presumably Paul would have chosen to die. He would have been very pleased to die. This was actually what my daughter did. There is a tombstone in Karuizawa with a verse from the Bible chiseled, which reads; "It is far better to leave this life and be with the Christ." Saved people are free from the fear of 'death', in which all non-believers are caught.

Adolf Hitler of Germany murdered 6 million Jews during the second world war. During this period, the ten Boom family in Holland provided shelter to many Jews in order to protect them. One day, their house was raided by the Gestapo, the secret police of the Nazis and they were all sent to concentration camps, where all the family members except one woman called Corrie ten Boom were slaughtered. However, at the moment when the family left their home, her father said filled with great joy, "the most wonderful thing is about to begin."

What he was saying was that it was not a departure for a dreadful journey to death, but they were leaving for a trip to be with Jesus—a trip which was filled with supreme joy and thankfulness. When people see the glory to come in the future and decide to belong to the Lord Jesus, they are given the hope to live. As a result, they can rejoice in the Lord even in times of terrible ordeal, for they have no reason to worry about their future. We are not able to predict what will happen in the future but we know Jesus. This means that all questions about our future have been answered. Jesus himself is our future. All worries and anxieties are healed by Jesus. Jesus will never fail to lead all his believers to his destination and this conviction makes us so gratified, proud and grateful now.

The King David who ruled this world three thousand years ago said;

The Lord is the one who is shepherding me; I lack nothing. Even when I walk through a valley of deep darkness, I will not be afraid because you are with me. (Psalms 23:1,4)

I trust that the supreme blessing is to have a conviction like this.

End