

# Approaching Your Final Curtain With Confidence

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning, everybody. So the topic of this week's sermon is death.

And I have been racking my brain these last few weeks trying to think of an amusing way to begin this talk. And being from New Zealand, I have a terrible appropriateness sort of meter.

So I was running a few ideas past people and they all said, no, you cannot say that in church. And they would be offended. And they would be rightly offended because there is something in our hearts which recognises the seriousness of death and more importantly recognises the wrongness of death.

Here is where Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet, is spot on. Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rage at the close of day.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light. Deep down we know death is wrong. We are scared of it. And we don't even like to talk about it.

[ 1 : 1 1 ]     You want to bring a dinner party to a crashing halt? Just lean over to your dinner host and say to them, have you given much thought to your death lately? In researching the topic of death, I read a lot of stuff.

And there is this amazing book called *The Undertaking*, written by a guy called Thomas Lynch. Perhaps you have heard of it. Lynch is an undertaker in Milford, Michigan.

And the book is a series of observations about his trade. I haven't read the book, but I watched the documentary on him. And there is this very sober, I mean the whole thing is pretty sobering to be honest, but there is this really interesting moment when he is talking.

And he says this, and let me just read to you what he says. I remember those first few years as a father and an undertaker. I would often wake in the middle of the night, sneak into my children's room to stand by their crib to hear them breathe.

Like my father, I had learnt to fear. And as my children grew, so too was I called upon to bury the bodies of boys and girls. And I would never charge more than the wholesale costs for their small caskets.

[ 2 : 2 9 ]     And throw in our services free of charge, with the hope in my heart that God would in turn spare me the hollowing grief of these parents.

It makes total sense, doesn't it, that somebody who fears death would try and make a deal with God. A very understandable strategy.

And perhaps you have made similar deals with God. God, I will live a good life if you see me through death. God, if there is something on the other side where you look after me, I will promise I will try and live the best life I can.

And I'm pretty confident that there's a lot of people in the world that believe this is what Christianity is. They think Christianity is this, that if you live a good life, because of the good life you have lived, you'll get into heaven.

And I think it's really, really important that you understand that Christianity is actually the almost opposite of that. See, this is where Christianity differs from most of the other world's religions.

[ 3 : 36 ] Other religions will say this, you live a certain way, you live the good life, and you're okay. Well, Christianity says no. Christ has lived a good life.

And because of Him, you're okay. Nothing you do contributes to your ability to get past death and into heaven. It's all about what Jesus has done.

And because of what Jesus has done, if you follow Him, you don't have to be scared of death. Which I think many of us are. Probably most of us.

There's this wonderful promise in the book of Hebrews in the Bible. It says in chapter 2, Jesus came to free those who all of their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

That sounds awesome, eh? I think we want this. We want to be free from that fear. So how did Jesus do this? Well, let's go to the Bible to discover it.

[ 4 : 35 ] And I want to look at the Bible because I want you to know that this is God's ideas about death and not mine. Okay, so we're going to look at one of the stories of Jesus. In particular, the story that we just read about Jesus raising that little girl from the dead.

And obviously it's very relevant to our topic of death. Now, when we're trying to work out what a Bible story means, one of the key things or one of the key tools we have is context.

And what I mean by that is Bible writers, what they do is they tend to clump things together or put things in a certain kind of order, like stories in a certain order, in order to make the meaning of them obvious.

So when we look at this story, it's important to have a look at the stuff that happened just before. And as it turns out, three very, very important things happened just before this.

Jesus calms a storm. You might remember that story. He's in a boat with his mates. Big storm calms it. After that, Jesus sorts out this guy that's possessed with a big legion of demons.

[ 5 : 43 ] You might remember that one as well. And of course, immediately before the healing of this little girl, Jesus sorts out the woman who touched his robe. Those three things are all quite important.

That's my little girl talking right now. Sweetie, let's play the quiet game. You go first. So, what's really interesting is we know these stories are all linked.

And they're all linked by these ways. One, they just come one after the other. So that's fairly obvious. Two, they all involve a worst case scenario.

Three, Jesus sorts it out by just a few words. And four, they all tell us something about the authority of Jesus. So let's look at them quite quickly, okay, before we get to the story of Jairus and his little daughter.

Okay, Jesus calms the storm. It is a severe and deadly storm. The guys in the boat with him were fishermen. And they were terrified. So it must have been a terrible storm.

[ 6 : 48 ] A hopeless case. But Jesus sorts it all out by saying this. Quiet, be still. And the storm was calmed in an instant. This is in chapter four.

The point of that story? Jesus has authority over creation. So that's easy, right? We've got that? Easy. Next story. Beginning of chapter five.

Jesus exercises this demoniac who was living amongst the tombs. Again, a worst case scenario. A hopeless situation. We know it was an extreme situation of kind of possession.

Because it says that no one could subdue him. That they try and chain him up. But he'd break the chains. That he'd break the chains. And he wasn't possessed by one demon. He says that he's possessed by a legion.

Now this guy represented all the forces of evil. But when confronted by Jesus. All Jesus had to say to him was. Get out of him. Evil spirit. And it was sorted.

- [ 7 : 45 ] What's the point? Jesus has authority over evil. Jesus has authority over creation. Jesus has authority over evil. The next little story.
- And it's sort of embedded in the story of Jairus' daughter. Jesus heals a woman who'd been bleeding for 12 years. A worst case scenario in terms of sickness in that day.
- So the nature. Because of the nature of it. She was basically menstruating for 12 years. Which meant in Hebrew law. She was unclean for 12 years.
- Which means she wasn't allowed to go to the temple. To her church. No one wanted to marry her. She said she couldn't have children. No one even wanted to touch her. It says that she spent all her money trying to fix this problem.
- And it got worse. A hopeless situation. A worst case scenario. But she was healed in an instant. When she met Jesus. What is the point here? Jesus has authority over sickness.
- [ 8 : 43 ] Jesus has authority over creation. Jesus has authority over evil. Jesus has authority over sickness. So. That's the context. Now we get to the story of the little girl.
- Jairus' daughter. Like the previous situations. A worst case scenario. A death in the family. But not the death of a great grandfather.
- Or something like that. The death of a little girl. I mean there's nothing more hopeless than that. And yet all Christ has to do to raise her back to life. Is say. Talithicum. Which means little girl.
- Get up. The raising of this little girl. This miracle. Is a crescendo. To all of these previous stories. Authority over creation.
- Authority over evil. Authority over sickness. Jesus even has authority over death. Now I've called them miracles.
- [ 9 : 44 ] But that is not probably a helpful description of them. Because if I keep calling them miracles. You'll just. You know. What we can get out of it. Is just like. Oh wow.
- Jesus can do really cool stuff. Okay. A helpful way. To think of these things. Is as signposts. You know like big signposts.
- You see on the motorway. They're trying to tell you something. These events. Are trying to tell us. Something. And what are they trying to tell us. Well they're trying to tell us. That Jesus. Has authority.
- Over everything. Including death. Death. So this. The story of the little girl. Is the crescendo. Of these. Four events. And Mark wants us to realize.
- That death. Is a great enemy. To us. Our great enemy. Sickness is terrible. Evil. But it wasn't this woman's worst problem.
- [ 10 : 42 ] Nature is fearsome. But it's not our biggest enemy. And it would be awful to be. A crazy. Naked man. Living in a cemetery. You know. That's not a great life.
- But it wasn't that person's. Biggest problem. Our biggest problem. Is dying. Without God. One of the great insights.
- This passage. Gives us. About death. Is just in this. Little line. That we might easily. Pass over. It's in verse 39.
- And Jesus says. To everybody. The child is not dead. But. Asleep. It's one of those kind of.
- Just nice. Pretty little lines. And we could easily think. Perhaps Jesus is just being nice to Jairus. Because. His daughter has died. And he's sort of. False reassurance. Like. Oh. Don't worry. She just looks like she's sleeping.
- [ 11 : 39 ] You can look at her. Or whatever. But it's not. Christ is giving us. A way. Of viewing. Our own death. And that is. We do not die.

Rather. We sleep. Now. Sleep. It's a way of describing death. That is found in several other places. In the New Testament. Um. Approaching the tomb of Lazarus. Lazarus.

In John 11. Remember Lazarus is in the tomb. He'd been dead a number of days. And Jesus says. Our friend. Lazarus. Has fallen. Asleep. When Stephen. The first Christian martyr.

Is stoned. To death. The final moments are recorded in Acts. Chapter 60. Verses 59. While they were stoning him. Stephen prayed. Lord Jesus. Receive my spirit.

Then he fell on his knees. And cried out. Lord. Do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this. He fell. Asleep. That's why.

[ 12 : 35 ] We call. Graveyards. Cemeteries. You know. The word. The word. Graveyard. That's a. It's a terrible word. The etymology of the word. Graveyard.

Is. Is. Is graven. It just means holes. It just means a field full of holes. The word cemetery. That's an ancient Christian word. It means sleeping place.

We should call them cemeteries. Not graveyards. Okay. So why. Do we liken death. To sleep. For Christians. Well. Think about it. Sleep is temporary.

It seems to be over in an instant. And when we are awake. If it is a good sleep. We feel refreshed. Even. Remade. And if we have faith in Christ.

We should view. Our own death like that. The time between our own death. And when Christ raises us from the dead. Will be. An instant. And we will be raised up. And we will be transformed.

[ 13 : 37 ] And I hope this is comforting for you. I mean it should be. It should be very comforting for you. And the most comforting thing about it. Is this. Is when Christ. Faced.

Death. In this instant. With Jairus' daughter. In the story of Lazarus. And in his own life. His own crucifixion. Christ.

Face death. As its master. Which means that death. Does not. Have. The final word. In your life. So when you are thinking about your own death.

If you follow Christ. You can quote. With great confidence. 1 Corinthians 15. Reading in the old King James. O death.

O death. Where is thy sting? O grave. Where is thy victory? That's cool. Let's finish now.

[ 14 : 34 ] With a question. And a suggestion. Firstly. A question. Do you have a life philosophy? Do you have a philosophy on life?

Something that sort of gets you through. A framework for thinking about. How life works. Let me ask you this about it. Does your philosophy of life handle every aspect of your life?

If not. Perhaps you need. A different philosophy. A new one. Does your philosophy on life. Handle death? If you're not a.

If you don't regard yourself as a particularly religious person. Or a Christian. I want to commend. The Christian faith to you. Because there is nothing in life. No eventuality.

That death. That sorry. That Jesus. Can't see you through. Even your own death. And trusting Jesus to take you through that. Means you still feel the wrongness of death.

[ 15 : 33 ] Knowing it's not part of God's original plan. But you don't. You don't have to fear it. Any longer. So there's my question. Now my suggestion.

If you are here. And you're not a Christian. And this talk has raised some questions for you. I want to invite you to a course called Christianity Explored.

It's something I run here at the church. It goes for seven weeks. One night a week. We're going to start it on a Monday night. On the 21st of March. Just for like an hour and a half. We eat a meal together.

We have a lovely chat. We watch a video. We talk about a Bible story. And it's really about creating a space for you. To ask big questions.

You won't be asked to pray. Or read anything. Or do anything embarrassing. It's a. We have a fun time. And this is. This is important stuff. You know. It would be a shame to go through life.

[ 16 : 32 ] And not. Give time. To think about life's big questions. Now if you'd like to come along to that. We have these cards here.

That are in the rows. It's got hay written on them. They're. For people who are sort of new to church. But if you just want me to get in contact with you. Just put your name. And some way of contacting you.

Maybe your email address on it. And just maybe say at the bottom. I just. I'd like to hear more about Christianity Explored. And I'll send you an email. That's quite clear. Eh? Great. Well.

Let me just finish. With. A prayer. Father. Father. We are. Grateful Lord.

At this time. That you have conquered death. That you have overcome our great enemy. Lord.

[ 17 : 30 ] In particular at this time. When we think of the events in Christchurch. And in Japan. Father. Father. And we feel. The wrongness of death. Lord.

I pray God. That in our own lives. We could turn to you. Knowing that you would. Walk with us. Through death.

To the other side Lord. Where we can live forever. Transformed. With you. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.