

A Critical Reading Journal Analysis on Resurrection and the Fear of Death

David "Dave" C. Shields

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The fear of death or loss of a loved one is one of the most painful things for Christians to have to explain. It is easy to think of the goodness of God when everything is right in the world, but what about when all is not well in the world? A common argument against God being good that all believers have heard at least a few times in their life is, how can a good God allow bad things to happen? This is especially true when someone's loved one is diagnosed with a terminal illness. Despite the fear and pain that comes from these things, the Bible offers much hope to the believer who is thinking through these things.

The Resurrection vs. Fear

Facing fear is something that we all must do in different ways and at different times. In fact, even Jesus himself felt fear the night before his crucifixion and asked God to take it from him (cf. Luke 22:41-44). Although, an interesting piece of this is that Jesus knew he was going to die and in fact, came to deliver believers from the fear of death¹. Even though Jesus knew what would happen to him, he still felt fear and pain so it makes sense that all humans would feel the same way at one point or another. The important thing in all of this is to remember that Jesus overcame death and therefore believers should not fear it.

Even though believers should not be afraid of death, that does not mean it is easy to do so. No one that any person living today knows has ever died and then returned to tell their friends what it was like. Mankind tends to fear what it does not understand and so it makes sense that death is to be feared. But it really may not be the idea of death that concerns people so much as it is the fear of non-existence, something even more terrifying to humans². However, in the

¹ Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Press, 2003), 174.

² *Ibid.*, 175.

Gospel of Luke, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist offers a spiritual truth that should make this fear of death easier to think on, ‘He has given us the privilege since we have been rescued from our enemies’ clutches, to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness in His presence all our days.’ (Luke 1:73b-75, HCSB). That truth is that believers have already been delivered from the clutches of death so even this greatest fear should be nothing but a passing moment before thinking upon righteousness.

It is easy to forget the Bible explains the deep despair upon Jesus’ disciples when he died on the cross. There was a shining hope in this world of darkness and then just as quickly it was snuffed out. Many times, a believer can sing of their hope in Jesus and his faithfulness during the high times, but then seem to forget all those things during the low times. How, then, can one reflect on the loneliness in those times? The simplest way is to remember that Jesus appeared again after his death to his disciples and other believers in a very real way³. Then, when Jesus ascended to Heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent to fill that emptiness for all. Believers are never alone; they just sometimes forget to speak to the one sent to help them.

Speaking to the Pain and Fear

Despite the believer knowing who holds their tomorrow, it is not always easy to remember that in times of pain and struggle. Throughout their lives, believers may not have the strength or the heart to remember what blessings they hold, and it may become the job of another believer to remind their brother or sister about these things. In some cases, a believer may reach out to someone they trust and revere to give them the hope they are seeking but in the depths of loss and despair, this may not be one’s first inclination. This means that Christians must be

³ Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, 182.

prepared to lift their brothers when the fear and pain comes. But what, exactly does this lifting look like?

The first and easiest way to approach brothers who have lost a loved one is to remind them that eternal life is a reality and Christians know that death is not the end⁴. It may feel like life is ending because of all the emotions that come with loss, but it is not truly the end because greater things are still in store. A song that really speaks life into this despair is the hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness, especially the chorus, ‘Great is Thy Faithfulness! Great is Thy Faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed Thy hand hath provided: great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.’⁵ When the believer is struck with this pain and suffering, it is important to be reminded that God has been faithful in the past and will continue to be faithful in the future.

One additional thing that often seems to help believers when they are faced with pain or fear of death, is to help them focus on the things that God still needs them to do. If someone is permitted to wake up in the morning and still finds air in their lungs and a heart beating in their chest, that means God’s not done with them yet. It is helpful to focus on the fact that the life one still has in the present is meaningful and important⁶. The hard times may last for a moment, but each day brings new joy for those who love God. Jesus even addresses this in the Beatitudes, ‘You who are now hungry are blessed, because you will be filled. You who now weep are blessed, because you will laugh.’ (Luke 6:21, HCSB). The pain of loss will always sting but greater things are still in store.

⁴ Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, 178-179.

⁵ Hymnary.org, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” Hymnary.org, n.d., https://hymnary.org/text/great_is_thy_faithfulness_o_god_my_fathe.

⁶ Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, 180.

Conclusion

As I even addressed in one of my other journals, the fear of death and the curiosity of the afterlife are some of the most challenging things to grapple with as a believer. I personally experienced this deep loss when I was 32 because this is the year that I lost my father. No matter how much one thinks they are prepared for loss, nothing prepares them for the feeling when it happens. I certainly went through the five stages of the Kübler-Ross model during this time (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance)⁷. Unfortunately, this model does not follow a linear path and it is often easy for someone to reach one later stage only to be suddenly moved back to a different stage. Even though the pain was very real back in those days, I have since learned to look back on my father for the right reasons. I do not think of the man who I held the hand of in the Intensive Care Unit and told that I had to let him go, I think of the man who taught me so much about life and myself. Now, the greatest lesson in all these things is not to ask God, “Why Me?” but instead of ask God, “What Can I Learn from This?” When we do this and wait for God to reveal His answer, we will be able to hear Him more clearly than ever before.

⁷ Regina Josell, “The 5 Stages of Grief After a Loss,” Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials, March 20, 2022, <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/5-stages-of-grief>.

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