

A black and white photograph of a sailboat on the ocean with mountains in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

Death,

where is
your sting?

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Forward

Hebrews 9:27

And just as it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment.

God created you. Not only that, he loves you so much that he wants you to know him now and spend eternity with him.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus came so that each of us could know and understand God in a personal way. Jesus alone can bring meaning and purpose to life.

Jesus not only died for our sin, he rose from the dead. When he did, he proved beyond doubt that he can rightfully promise eternal life -- that he is the Son of God and the only means by which we can know God. That is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one can come to the Father except through me."

Instead of trying harder to reach God, he tells us how we can begin a relationship with him right now. Jesus says,

"Come to me." "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."¹⁰ It was Jesus' love for us that caused him to endure the cross. And he now invites us to come to him, that we might begin a personal relationship with God.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear. Even though the earth be removed, and

the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled”. Psalms 46:1-3

Chapter 1



How to face death

1 Samuel 31:4

Saul groaned to his armor bearer, "Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines run me through and humiliate me." But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

The Philistines had a well-earned reputation for torturing their captives. Saul no doubt knew about Samson's fate (Judges 16:18-31) and did not want to risk physical mutilation or other abuse. When his armor-bearer refused to kill him, he took his own life.

Saul was tall, handsome, strong, rich, and powerful, but all of this was not enough to make him someone we should emulate.

He was tall physically, but he was small in God's eyes. He was handsome, but his sin made him ugly. He was strong, but his lack of faith made him weak. He was rich, but he was spiritually bankrupt. He could give orders to many, but he couldn't command their respect or allegiance.

Saul looked good on the outside, but he was decaying on the inside. A right relationship with God and a strong character are much more valuable than a good-looking exterior.

Saul's armor-bearer faced a moral dilemma—should he carry out a sinful order from a man he was supposed to obey? He knew he should obey his master, the king, but he also knew murder was wrong. He decided not to kill Saul.

There is a difference between following an order with which you don't agree and following one you know is wrong. It is never right or ethical to carry out a wrong act, no matter who gives the order or what the consequences for disobedience may be.

What shapes your choice when you face a moral dilemma? Have the courage to follow God's law above human commands.

Saul faced death the same way he faced life. He took matters into his own hands without thinking of God or asking for his guidance. If our lives aren't the way we would like them to be now, we can't assume that change will come more easily later.

When nearing death, we will respond to God the same way we have been responding all along. Coming face to face with death only shows us what we are *really* like. How do you want to face death? Start facing life that way right now.

Psalm 23:4

Even when I walk
Through the dark valley of death,
I will not be afraid,
For you are close beside me.

Your rod and your staff
Protect and comfort me.

Death casts a frightening shadow over us because we are entirely helpless in its presence. We can struggle with other enemies—pain, suffering, disease, injury—but strength and courage cannot overcome death.

It has the final word. Only one person can walk with us through death's dark valley and bring us safely to the other side—the God of life, our shepherd. Because life is uncertain, we should follow this shepherd who offers us eternal comfort.

2 Samuel 18:33

The king was overcome with emotion. He went up to his room over the gateway and burst into tears. And as he went, he cried, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I could have died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son."

Why was David so upset over the death of his rebel son?

- (1) David realized that he, in part, was responsible for Absalom's death. Nathan, the prophet, had said that because David had killed Uriah, his own sons would rebel against him.
- (2) David was angry at Joab and his officers for killing Absalom against his wishes.
- (3) David truly loved his son, even though Absalom did nothing to deserve his love. It would have been kinder and more loving to deal with Absalom and his runaway ego when he was younger.

Why you need not fear death

Proverbs 12:28

The way of the godly leads to life; their path does not lead to death.

For many, death is a darkened door at the end of life, a passageway to an unknown and feared destiny. But for God's people, death is a bright pathway to a new and better life. So why do we fear death?

Is it because of the pain we expect, the separation from loved ones, its surprise? God can help us deal with those fears. He has shown us that death is not final, but is just another step in the eternal life we received when we followed him.

Luke 9:24-25

If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process?

If this present life is most important to you, you will do everything you can to protect it. You will not want to do anything that might endanger your safety, health, or comfort. By contrast, if following Jesus is most important, you may find yourself in unsafe, unhealthy, and uncomfortable places.

You will risk death, but you will not fear it because you know that Jesus will raise you to eternal life.

Nothing material can compensate for the loss of eternal life. Jesus' disciples are not to use their lives on earth for their own pleasure—they should spend their lives serving God and people.

Hebrews 2:14-15

Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form.

For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death.

Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

Jesus had to become human (“flesh and blood”) so that he could die and rise again, in order to destroy the devil's power over death (Romans 6:5-11). Only then could Christ deliver those who had lived in constant fear of death, and free them to live for him. When we belong to God, we need not fear death, because we know that death is only the doorway into eternal life (1 Cor. 15).

Christ's death and resurrection set us free from the fear of death because death has been defeated. Every person must die, but death is not the end; instead, it is the doorway to a new life.

All who dread death should have the opportunity to know the hope that Christ's victory brings. How can you share this truth with those close to you?

Don't allow death to leave you empty-handed

Psalm 49:10-14

Those who are wise must finally die, just like the foolish and senseless, leaving all their wealth behind.

The grave is their eternal home where they will stay forever.

They may name their estates after themselves, but they leave their wealth to others.

They will not last long despite their riches—they will die like animals.

This is the fate of fools, though they will be remembered as being so wise.

Like sheep, they are led to the grave, where death will be their Shepherd. In the morning the godly will rule over them.

Their bodies will rot in the grave, far from their grand estates.

The rich and poor have one similarity—when they die, they leave all they own here on earth.

At the moment of death (and all of us will face that moment), both rich and poor are naked and empty-handed before God.

The only riches we have at that time are those we have already invested in our eternal heritage.

At the time of death, each of us will wish we had invested less on earth, where we must leave it, and more in heaven, where we will retain it forever.

To have treasure in heaven, we must place our faith in God, pledge ourselves to obey him, and utilize our resources for the good of his kingdom.

This is a good time to check up on your investments and see where you have invested the most. Then do whatever it takes to place your investments where they really count.

God is aware of death.

Psalm 116:15

The Lord's loved ones are precious to him; it grieves him when
They die.

Unbelievers fear death.

Proverbs 10:24

The fears of the wicked will all come true; so will the hopes of the
godly.

The wicked person dreads death. Those who do not believe in God
usually fear death, and with good reason.

By contrast, believers desire eternal life and God's salvation—their hopes will be rewarded. This verse offers a choice: you can have either your fears or your desires come true.

Chapter 2



Planning for death.

Eccles. 7:2

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Eccles. 7:4

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Many people avoid thinking about death, refuse to face it, and are reluctant to attend funerals.

Solomon is not encouraging us to think morbidly, but he knows that it is helpful to think clearly about death. It reminds us that there is still time for change, time to examine the direction of our

lives, and time to confess our sins and find forgiveness from God. Because everyone will eventually die, it makes sense to plan ahead to experience God's mercy rather than his justice.

The custom of mourning death

Mark 5:38

And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagoge, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.

Loud weeping and wailing was customary at a person's death. Lack of it was the ultimate disgrace and disrespect.

There were some people, usually women, who made mourning a profession and were paid by the dead person's family to weep over the body. On the day of death, the body was carried through the streets, followed by mourners, family members, and friends.

Jesus predicts his death.

Matthew 16:21

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

The phrase "From that time on" marks a turning point. In Matthew 4:17 it signaled Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of heaven.

Here it points to his new emphasis on his death and resurrection. The disciples still didn't grasp Jesus' true purpose because of their preconceived notions about what the Messiah should be.

This is the first of three times that Jesus predicted his death

Matthew 17:22-23

And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

Once again Jesus predicted his death; but more important, he told of his resurrection. Unfortunately, the disciples heard only the first part of Jesus' words and became discouraged.

They couldn't understand why Jesus wanted to go back to Jerusalem where he would walk right into trouble.

The disciples didn't fully comprehend the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection until Pentecost (Acts 2). We shouldn't get upset at ourselves for being slow to understand everything about Jesus. After all, the disciples were with him, saw his miracles, heard his words, and still had difficulty understanding. Despite their questions and doubts, however, they believed. We should do no less.

The disciples didn't understand why Jesus kept talking about his death because they expected him to set up a

political kingdom. His death, they thought, would dash their hopes.

They didn't know that Jesus' death and resurrection would make his kingdom possible.

Matthew 20:17-19

And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Jesus predicted his death and resurrection for the third time (see Matthew 16:21 and Matthew 17:22-23 for the first two times).

But the disciples still didn't understand what he meant. They continued to argue greedily over their positions in Christ's kingdom.

The disciples afraid to ask Jesus about his death

Mark 9:32

But they didn't understand what he was saying, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

Why were the disciples afraid to ask Jesus about his prediction of his death? Perhaps it was because the last time they reacted to Jesus' sobering words they were scolded (Mark 8:32-33). In their minds, Jesus seemed morbidly preoccupied with death.

Chapter 3



Dying versus staying dead.

Luke 13:5

No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will also perish."

Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

Once again Jesus predicted his death; but more important, he told of his resurrection. Unfortunately, the disciples heard only the first part of Jesus' words and became discouraged.

Pilate may have killed the Galileans because he thought they were rebelling against Rome; those killed by the tower of Siloam may have been working for the Romans on an aqueduct there.

The Pharisees, who were opposed to using force to deal with Rome, would have said that the Galileans deserved to die for rebelling.

The Zealots, a group of anti-Roman terrorists, would have said the aqueduct workers deserved to die for cooperating. Jesus said that neither the Galileans nor the workers should be blamed for their calamity. And instead of blaming others, everyone should look to his or her own day of judgment.

Whether a person is killed in a tragic accident or miraculously survives is not a measure of righteousness. Everyone has to die; that's part of being human.

But not everyone needs to stay dead. Jesus promises that those who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Significance of Jesus' death misunderstood

Mark 10:33-34

"When we get to Jerusalem," he told them, "the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans.

They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

Why Jesus had to die.

Matthew 20:28

For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many."

A ransom was the price paid to release a slave from bondage. Jesus often told his disciples that he must die, but here he told them why—to redeem all people from the bondage of sin and death.

The disciples thought that as long as Jesus was alive, he could save them. But Jesus revealed that only his death would save them and the world.

Mark 15:31

The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself!"

Jesus could have saved himself, but he endured this suffering because of his love for us. He could have chosen not to take the pain and humiliation; he could have killed those who mocked him—but he suffered through it all because he loved even his enemies.

We had a significant part in the drama that afternoon because our sins were on the cross too. Jesus died on that cross for us, and the penalty for our sins was paid by his death.

The only adequate response we can make is to confess our sin and freely accept the fact that Jesus paid for it so we wouldn't have to.

Don't insult God with indifference toward the greatest act of genuine love in history.

John 16:7

But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you.

Unless Jesus did what he came to do, there would be no gospel.

If he did not die, he could not remove our sins; he could not rise again and defeat death.

If he did not go back to the Father, the Holy Spirit would not come. Christ's presence on earth was limited to one place at a time. His leaving meant he could be present to the whole world through the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4



Jesus proved his power over death

John 12:23-25

Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory.

The truth is, a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. Unless it dies it will be alone—a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.

Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This is a beautiful picture of the necessary sacrifice of Jesus. Unless a kernel of wheat is buried in the ground, it will not become

a blade of wheat producing many more seeds. Jesus had to die to pay the penalty for our sin, but also to show his power over death.

His resurrection proves he has eternal life. Because Jesus is God, Jesus can give this same eternal life to all who believe in him.

We must be so committed to living for Christ that we “hate” our lives by comparison.

This does not mean that we long to die or that we are careless or destructive with the life God has given, but that we are willing to die if doing so will glorify Christ.

We must disown the tyrannical rule of our own self-centeredness. By laying aside our striving for advantage, security, and pleasure, we can serve God lovingly and freely. Releasing control of our lives and transferring control to Christ bring eternal life and genuine joy.

Jesus’ death penalty had to be approved by the Romans

Matthew 27:1-2

Very early in the morning, the leading priests and other leaders met again to discuss how to persuade the Roman government to sentence Jesus to death. Then they bound him and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Who was really guilty of Jesus’ death?

Mark 15:14-15

"Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?"
But the crowd only roared the louder, "Crucify him!"

So Pilate, anxious to please the crowd, released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, and then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him.

Who was guilty of Jesus' death? In reality, everyone was at fault. The disciples deserted him in terror.

Peter denied that he ever knew Jesus. Judas betrayed him. The crowds who had followed him stood by and did nothing. Pilate tried to blame the crowds.

The religious leaders actively promoted Jesus' death. The Roman soldiers tortured him. If you had been there, watching these trials, what would your response have been?

The region of Judea where Pilate ruled as governor was little more than a hot and dusty outpost of the Roman empire

Because Judea was so far from Rome, Pilate was given just a small army. His primary job was to keep peace. We know from historical records that Pilate had already been warned about other uprisings in his region.

Although he may have seen no guilt in Jesus and no reason to condemn him to death, Pilate wavered when the Jews in the crowd threatened to report him to Caesar (John 19:12).

Such a report, accompanied by a riot, could cost him his position and hopes for advancement.

Although Jesus was innocent according to Roman law, Pilate caved in to political pressure. He abandoned what he knew was right.

Trying to second-guess the Jewish leaders, Pilate gave a decision that would please everyone while keeping himself safe.

When we lay aside God's clear statements of right and wrong and make decisions based on the preferences of our audience, we fall into compromise and lawlessness.

God promises to honor those who do right, not those who make everyone happy.

How we played a part in Jesus' death.

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were putting him to death—Jewish leaders, Roman politicians and soldiers, bystanders—and God answered that prayer by opening up the way of salvation even to Jesus' murderers.

The Roman centurion and soldiers who witnessed the crucifixion said, "Surely he was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). Soon many priests were converted to the Christian faith (Acts 6:7).

Because we are all sinners, we all played a part in putting Jesus to death. The gospel—the Good News—is that God is gracious. He will forgive us and give us new life through his Son.

Roman soldiers customarily divided up the clothing of executed criminals among themselves. When they cast lots for Jesus' clothes, they fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 22:18

Jesus' death was not an end but a beginning.

Luke 23:38

A signboard was nailed to the cross above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews."

This sign was meant to be ironic. A king, stripped and executed in public view, had obviously lost his kingdom forever. But Jesus, who turns the world's wisdom upside down, was just coming into his kingdom.

His death and resurrection would strike the deathblow to Satan's rule and would establish Christ's eternal authority over the earth.

Few people reading the sign that bleak afternoon understood its real meaning, but the sign was absolutely true. All was not lost. Jesus is King of the Jews—and the Gentiles, and the whole universe.

Jesus' death brought his kingdom into focus.

John 19:19

And Pilate posted a sign over him that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

This sign was meant to be ironic. A king, stripped nearly naked and executed in public view, had obviously lost his kingdom forever. But Jesus, who turns the world's wisdom upside down, was just coming into his kingdom.

His death and resurrection would strike the deathblow to Satan's rule and would establish Jesus' eternal authority over the earth. Few people reading the sign that bleak afternoon understood its real meaning, but the sign was absolutely true. All was not lost. Jesus was King of the Jews—and the Gentiles, and the whole universe.

Miraculous events surrounding Jesus' death

Matthew 27:52-53

Tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead after Jesus' resurrection.

They left the cemetery, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

Jesus' death confirmed.

Mark 15:44

Pilate couldn't believe that Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman military officer in charge and asked him.

Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly, so he asked an official to verify the report. Today, in an effort to deny the resurrection, there are those who say that Jesus didn't really die.

The centurion, Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, the religious leaders, and the women who witnessed his burial, however, confirmed his death. Jesus suffered actual physical death on the cross.

John 19:31-35

The Jewish leaders didn't want the victims hanging there the next day, which was the Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath at that, because it was the Passover), so they asked Pilate to hasten their deaths by ordering that their legs be broken. Then their bodies could be taken down.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus.

But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was dead already, so they didn't break his legs.

One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out. This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account; it is presented so that you also can believe.

It was against God's law to leave the body of a dead person exposed overnight (Deut. 21:23), and it was also against the law to work after sundown on Friday, when the Sabbath began. This is why the religious leaders urgently wanted to get Jesus' body off the cross and buried by sundown.

These Romans were experienced soldiers. They knew from many previous crucifixions whether a man was dead or alive. There was no question that Jesus was dead when they checked him, so they decided not to break his legs as they had done to the other victims.

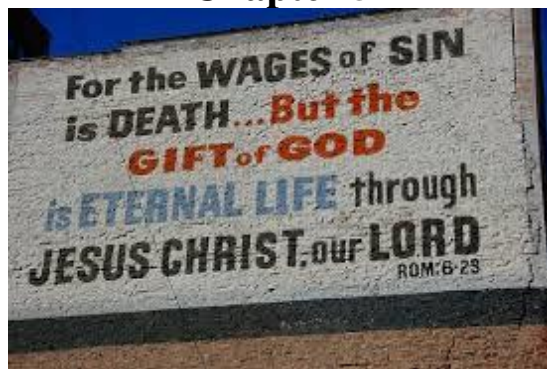
Piercing his side and seeing the sudden flow of blood and water (indicating that the sac surrounding the heart and the heart itself had been pierced) was further proof of his death.

Some people say Jesus didn't really die, that he only passed out—and that's how he came back to life. But we have the witness of an impartial party, the Roman soldiers, that Jesus died on the cross (see Mark 15:44-45).

The Roman soldiers would break victims' legs to hasten the death process. When a person hung on a cross, death came by suffocation, but the victim could push against the cross with his legs to hold up his body and keep breathing. With broken legs, he would suffocate almost immediately.

The graphic details of Jesus' death are especially important in John's record because he was an eyewitness.

Chapter 5



Death is the result of sin.

Romans 5:13-14

Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. And though there was no law to break, since it had not yet been given, they all died anyway—even though they did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. What a contrast between Adam and Christ, who was yet to come!

Paul has shown that keeping the law does not bring salvation. Here he adds that breaking the law is not what brings death.

Death is the result of Adam's sin and of the sins we all commit, even if they don't resemble Adam's. Paul reminds his readers that for thousands of years the law had not yet been explicitly given, and yet people died.

The law was added, he explains in Romans 5:20, to help people see their sinfulness, to show them the seriousness of their offenses, and to drive them to God for mercy and pardon.

This was true in Moses' day, and it is still true today. Sin is a deep discrepancy between who we are and who we were created to be.

The law points out our sin and places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders. But the law offers no remedy. When we are convicted of sin, we must turn to Jesus Christ for healing.

Adam is a *pattern*; he is the counterpart of Christ. Just as Adam was a representative of created humanity, so is Christ the representative of a new spiritual humanity.

How life and death are your servants.

1 Cor. 3:22

Paul and Apollos and Peter; the whole world and life and death; the present and the future. Everything belongs to you,

Paul says that both life and death are ours. While nonbelievers are victims of life, swept along by its current and wondering if there is meaning to it, believers can use life well because they understand its true purpose. Nonbelievers can only fear death.

For believers, however, death holds no terrors because Christ has conquered all fears (see 1 John 4:18). Death is only the beginning of eternal life with God.

Be ready to die be ready to live.

Philip. 1:20-21

For I live in eager expectation and hope that I will never do anything that causes me shame, but that I will always be bold for Christ.

As I have been in the past, and that my life will always honor Christ, whether I live or I die. For to me, living is for Christ, and dying is even better.

To those who don't believe in God, life on earth is all there is, and so it is natural for them to strive for this world's values—money, popularity, power, pleasure, and prestige.

For Paul, however, to live meant to develop eternal values and to tell others about Christ, who alone could help them see life from an eternal perspective.

Paul's whole purpose in life was to speak out boldly for Christ and to become more like him. Thus Paul could confidently say that dying would be even better than living, because in death he would be removed from worldly troubles, and he would see Christ face to face (1 John 3:2-3).

If you're not ready to die, then you're not ready to live. Make certain of your eternal destiny; then you will be free to serve—devoting your life to what really counts, without fear of death.

What happens to dead believers when Jesus returns.

1 Thes. 4:13

And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope.

The Thessalonians were wondering why many of their fellow believers had fallen asleep (died) and what would happen to them when Christ returned. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that death is not the end of the story. When Christ returns, all believers—dead and alive—will be reunited, never to suffer or die again.

1 Thes. 4:16-18

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves.

Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever.

So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

Knowing exactly *when* the dead will be raised, in relation to the other events at the second coming, is not as important as knowing

why Paul wrote these words—to challenge believers to comfort and encourage one another when loved ones die.

This passage can be a great comfort when any believer dies. The same love that should unite believers in this life (1 Thes. 4:9) will unite believers when Christ returns and reigns for eternity.

Because Jesus Christ came back to life, so will all believers. All Christians, including those living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore, we need not despair when loved ones die or world events take a tragic turn.

God will turn our tragedies to triumphs, our poverty to riches, our pain to glory, and our defeat to victory. All believers throughout history will stand reunited in God's very presence, safe and secure.

As Paul comforted the Thessalonians with the promise of the resurrection, so we should comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.

Chapter 6

JESUS SAID
I AM the WAY,
the TRUTH,
and the LIFE.
John 14:6

Being spiritually dead.

Rev. 3:1

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars:

"I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead.

The wealthy city of Sardis was actually in two locations. The older section of the city was on a mountain, and, when its population outgrew the spot, a newer section was built in the valley below.

The “seven spirits of God” is another name for the Holy Spirit. The seven stars are the messengers, or leaders, of the churches (see Rev. 2:1).

The problem in the Sardis church was not heresy, but spiritual death. In spite of its reputation for being active, Sardis was infested with sin. Its deeds were evil and its clothes soiled.

The Spirit has no words of commendation for this church that looked so good on the outside but was so corrupt on the inside.

What is the second death?

Rev. 21:8

But cowards who turn away from me, and unbelievers, and the corrupt, and murderers, and the immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, and idol worshipers, and all liars—their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death."

The “cowardly” are not those who are fainthearted in their faith or who sometimes doubt or question, but those who turn back from following God.

They are not brave enough to stand up for Christ; they are not humble enough to accept his authority over their lives. They are put in the same list as the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the liars, the idolaters, the sexually immoral, and those practicing magic arts.

People who overcome “stand firm to the end” (Mark 13:13). They will receive the blessings that God promised:

- (1) Eating from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7),
- (2) Escaping from the lake of fire (the “second death,” Rev. 2:11),
- (3) Receiving a special name (Rev. 2:17)
- (4) Having authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26)

- (5) Being included in the book of life (Rev. 3:5),
- (6) Being a pillar in God’s spiritual temple (Rev. 3:12), and
- (7) Sitting with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21).

God will reward those who can endure the testing of evil and remain faithful.

The lake is explained in the notes on +Rev. 19:20 and +Rev. 20:14. The second death is spiritual death, meaning either eternal torment or destruction. In either case, it is permanent separation from God.

Destroyed in lake of fire.

Rev. 20:14

And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire.

Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. God's judgment is finished.

The lake of fire is the ultimate destination of everything wicked—Satan, the beast, the false prophet, the demons, death, Hades, and all those whose names are not recorded in the book of life because they did not place their faith in Jesus Christ.

John's vision does not permit any gray areas in God's judgment. If by faith we have not identified with Christ, confessing him as Lord, there will be no hope, no second chance, and no other appeal.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

Additional comments and charts are taken from:

***Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print**