

# Fear of the Last

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 05/17/20  
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We've been talking about fears for the last several weeks. Today, we're concluding our series by talking about events toward the end of our lives.

A few years ago the American Association of Retired People (AARP) put together a video in which they asked people in the 20s and early 30s what 'old' looks like. When asked what age they consider old, they named the 40s and 50s. In a way, I'm not surprised. I can remember in high school people saying we shouldn't trust anyone over 30 years old.

A Nielsen survey asked people about their sense of wellbeing in relation to their age. And at what age do you think people are happiest? The highest sense of wellbeing was reported by people in their 70s and 80s.

Some of the concern of growing old is related to losing a sense of purpose in our lives. Think about this. In the Bible, there's no word for retirement.

I am convinced that we experience wellbeing and fulfillment at any age when we live out God's purposes in our lives for others. Offer ourselves to God and to others.

Human beings have a lot of different experiences, different hopes, different fears - but death is a common experience that every single one of us will face.

Everybody dies. No matter how healthy you are, no matter how rich you are, no matter what country you live in, no matter what, your journey on this earth, will one day end in death - despite that common bond we have - we tend to shy away from talking about death.

Sometimes, when I'm meeting with a family to plan a funeral for a loved one, the family can't answer any questions for me about what their loved one wanted in a service. And they can't easily answer questions about what they want in a funeral service - because they've avoided thinking about it, avoided talking about it.

We don't want to talk about death when it comes to our loved ones because despite whatever hopes we have for eternal life, we know the loss and grief we'll experience right now when we lose someone we love is the worst kind of pain we'll experience in this life.

But I think it is more than that. I think we especially fear the unknown, and what happens in death is the great unknown. No matter what we learn about the process of death, no matter what we read about visions of eternity, we can never really know what death is like until we experience it. Death is an unknown, and that is what is most frightening about it.

When I make a conscious effort to look at the evening sky in rural areas where you can look into 'deep space,' I shudder. The hair on the back of my neck raises up. It, for me, is a fearsome thing. To think that I was a tiny speck on a tiny planet in one solar system in one galaxy out of that whole infinity - it was just too much to consider.

Sometimes I think our pondering about death is kind of the same. There's so much unknowable about death, that it's hard to look death in the eye too often.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes: "When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"

For a Christian, death is not a defeat, but a transition into a new phase of our victorious walk with Christ. Easter is God's answer to our deepest fear. God came and walked among us in Jesus. He died and was buried, but on the third day rose from the grave! When Christ stepped out of the tomb

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humanity's greatest enemy was defeated, the deepest source of our fear. When we actually trust this, it will be okay when we die. We grieve saying goodbye. But we have the hope that our goodbye is only "for now".

We remember the words of Jesus to his disciples the night before he died: "Don't let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

Indeed, "Death has been swallowed up in victory!" Trusting this gives us the ability to live life unafraid, with courage and hope. I am not saying that the dying process will not be scary.

Among the millions of documents following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War was this statement by a Dutch patriot:

"In a little while at 5:00 it's going to happen, and that won't be so terrible; on the contrary it's beautiful to be in God's strength. God has told us that He will not forsake us, if only we pray to Him for support.

"I feel so strongly, my nearness to God that I'm fully prepared now to die. I have confessed my sins to Him and have become very quiet. Therefore, do not mourn, but trust in God and pray for strength. God's will be done.

"Greet everybody for the four of us. We are courageous—you be the same. They can take only our bodies; our souls are in God's hands. May God bless you all. I die without hatred. God rules everything!

Someone once told me, "I don't fear death, I fear how I will die." Yet no matter how challenging our last days might be God is with us. Jesus faced evil and death at their very worst and defeated them. We always need to focus not on our dying but on what happens afterwards. How we die might be challenging and messy.

Knowing God is with us makes it easier to trust in the walk of life and ultimately we do not fear death. Easter is our story of hope and promise. Early Christians staked their lives on the truth of Jesus' victory over death. We do as well.