Are you afraid of death?
Time: 30 minutes

Death is a necessary outcome of everyone. Yes many of us are still young, and death seems to be quite far away from us. But I am sure many of you have experienced the death of your family or relatives. Have you asked yourself this question? Are you ready enough to face death? How can you prepare your parents or relatives to face death?

Some people fear because death is considered to be the biggest “unknown”. They do not know what life is like after death. If they believe after death things will be worse than when they are alive, they would prefer to live.

Some people fear death will take away their families, or they fear nobody would look after them if they die.

Some people are afraid of the process of death. People fear cancer, not only it results in death, but the process is painful. Operation, radio and chemotherapy are all very difficult. But death itself is a process. Everyday our cells are dying, while new cells are generated. Finally when your cells are all dead, starting with your brain cells, finally all other cells died.

What about those who commit suicide? The main reason people commit suicide is because they think death is better than being alive. If they believe after they die they will have more problems in their life I don’t think they will commit suicide.

There are many reasons why people are afraid of death, but many people do fear death. The author of Hebrews realise some of his readers are afraid of death. They have to decide whether to continue trusting God, or go back to Judaism. Since Emperor Nero started to persecute Christians after 64 AD, death becomes so near to many Christians. Not only death, but also the way Nero kills Christians. Some of them were torn by lions, and some of them are crucified, or burnt alive. No wonder there are some in the church to ask people to go back to their old ways, why believe in something that is inferior and draw death itself?

1. God is like one of us (v.9,14,17)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—[2:15] and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. [2:16] For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. [2:17] For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the
Sunday Sermon - Are you afraid of death? Hebrews 2:14-18

The singer Joan Osborne has a song, What If God Was One Of Us. I am quite sure she means quite differently from the incarnation of Jesus. But there is certain truth in it. God did become one of us. The Jews believe Jesus is mere human, therefore worshipping Jesus is idolatry. The author of Hebrews tries to explain to them why Jesus has to become flesh in chapter two.

First of all, to the author and to all Christians, it is true that Jesus was human. Verse 14 

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\text{2:18} \quad \text{Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”} 
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(Hebrews 2:14-18, NIV)

Emphasizing the humanity of Jesus helps us to see how Jesus fully identifies with us, and how he can represent humanity fully. It is very difficult to understand how God can become men. We cannot understand fully what this means for Jesus. If you watch Chinese TV series, a good Chinese Emperor will sometimes hide his identity to see his country from a pagan’s perspective. But often they will pretend to be a rich man, with lots of servants. No Emperor will pretend to be a beggar. But Jesus is different, he was the son of a carpenter, and came from a small despised place named Galilee. He becomes someone even lower than the average. He can be tired, thirsty and hungry. He can bleed and be wounded. He can cry and feel burdened. He can be tempted and ultimately face death. But why is it important for Jesus to fully identify with us?

2. Death produces life (v.14-16)

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(Hebrews 2:14-18, NIV)
There are three reasons why Jesus had to become one of us. Firstly, verse 17, he needs to bear our sins. Secondly, verse 14, he needs to destroy the devil who holds the power of death. Thirdly, he needs to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

We see here that the devil does have his power. He can tempt people, he can bring calamity to Job under the permission of God. He killed Job’s family members. He holds the power of death, means he can use ability to make people afraid through death. The devil can bring sickness too, for people to fear him. Muy father once said, he hates going to the hospital. He says sometimes medical examinations are even more painful than the disease itself. I sort of understand what he means. Many people not only fear death, but they are most afraid of the process that brings death.

Verse 15 states, Jesus became human to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Many of us may say, I am not afraid of death. But let me ask you another question, are you afraid of losing health. But if you think about it, the result of losing health is death. Those who are afraid losing their health are often afraid of death. Otherwise, you will see a lot of people commit suicide when they lose their health. What shall we do? Verse 15 says that Jesus will set you free from fear of death, by becoming one of us. His death produces our life.

「10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”」 (Matthew 10:28, NIV) I think it is not we do not fear death, but we do not fear enough. We only fear physical death, not spiritual death. Otherwise, why don’t we pray for people’s spiritual health but prays more for their physical health?

I know of someone whose life was produced by the death of Jesus. She was not afraid of death till the end. Have you all heard of grandma QingJu? She was such a good example. She had bowel cancer, but she was not afraid. When you visit her in the hospital, she will ask you “have you been baptized”. If it is a Christian who visits her, she would encourage people to continue serving God. Towards the last month of her life, she asks the doctor not to prescribe her any pain killer, because she wants to see God with a clear mind. She fast for a month, and you can see her stomach keeps on growing and growing, until she died at the end. One of the nurses is also a member of this church. She was really surprised how anyone can stop using painkillers, especially towards in the last stage of cancer. But Grandma QingJu feels no pain, she only wants to see Jesus, for she knows she has life that is produced by his death.

3. Conquer the fear of death (v.18)

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might..."
How can we be like her, conquering the fear of death? In verse 17 it says, he became like us in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. When someone asks you, God does not understand what I have been through. You may now say to them, yes he did. He is merciful. He bears more than any of us. No one can claim that God doesn’t understand how we feel, because he is made like us in every way. He even serves us to death.

If someone asks this, “God has never been tempted.” How can he understand how hard it is to live in this world and obeying God? You may tell that person, Jesus is made like us in everyway, but he was faithful. He was tempted, but he was obedient to the Father till his death. He knows how hard it is to make the right decisions, especially the decision to be crucified. Because he is like us in every way, now he may represent us fully, and restore the glory and honour through his death. In verse 7, God has crowned man with glory and honour, but we have lost it. But Jesus as our representative was crowned with glory and honour because he suffers death. Now we may live a life of glory and honour because of him. Jesus understands your fear of death because he was tempted to death. He understands your sufferings because he himself suffers. But he wants you to live a glorious and honourable life now because he was crowned glory and honour. He is made every way a human, not because he is inferior but because of his love. The humanity of Jesus demonstrates to us God’s love. Only through his death, we may gain life, and a glorious and honourable life.

**Conclusion**

I will finish today’s sermon with a story.

"Tomorrow morning," the surgeon began, "I’ll open up your heart..." "You’ll find Jesus there," the boy interrupted.

The surgeon looked up, annoyed. "I’ll cut your heart open," he continued, "to see how much damage has been done..."

"But when you open up my heart, you’ll find Jesus in there."
The surgeon looked to the parents, who sat quietly. "When I see how much damage has been done, I’ll sew your heart and chest back up and I’ll plan what to do next."

"But you’ll find Jesus in my heart. The Bible says He lives there. The hymns all say He lives there. You’ll find Him in my heart."

The surgeon had had enough. "I’ll tell you what I’ll find in your heart. I’ll find damaged muscle, low blood supply, and weakened vessels. And I’ll find out if I can make you well."

"You’ll find Jesus there, too. He lives there."

The surgeon left.

Later, he sat in his office, recording his notes from the surgery, "...damaged aorta, damaged pulmonary vein, widespread muscle degeneration. No hope for transplant, no hope for cure. Therapy: painkillers and bed rest. Prognosis," here he paused, "death within one year."

He stopped the recorder, but there was more to be said. "Why?" he asked aloud. "Why did You do this? You’ve put him here; You’ve put him in this pain; and You’ve cursed him to an early death. Why?"

The Lord answered and said, "The boy, My lamb, was not meant for your flock for long, for he is a part of My flock, and will forever be. Here, in My flock, he will feel no pain, and will be comforted as you cannot imagine. His parents will one day join him here, and they will know peace, and My flock will continue to grow."

The surgeon’s tears were hot, but his anger was hotter. "You created that boy, and You created that heart. He’ll be dead in months. Why?" The Lord answered, "The boy, My lamb, shall return to My flock, for he has done his duty: I did not put My lamb with your flock to lose him, but to retrieve another lost lamb."

The surgeon wept.

The surgeon sat beside the boy’s bed; the boy’s parents sat across from him. The boy awoke and whispered, "Did you cut open my heart?" "Yes," said the surgeon. "What did you find?" asked the boy.

"I found Jesus there," said the surgeon.
Often the messages people convey on their deathbed, are stronger than the sum of the words they speak in their entire life. I sincerely hope when people ask us, are you afraid of death, we may say to them, “No, because you will find Jesus in my heart.“

Let’s Pray.