

# The Reality of Death

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Praised be God. Praised be God. Praised by God; a praise commensurate to His bounties and equivalent to His plentiful blessings. O our Lord, for you is praise befitting Your sublime essence and Your majestic Dominion. Transcendent are You; O God I am unable to enumerate Your exaltations, for You are as You exalt Yourself. I testify that there is no deity except God alone, who has no partner, and I testify that Muhammad is His slave, His messenger, and His pure and intimate friend; the best Prophet God sent. God sent him to the whole world as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. O God send your mercy, peace, and blessings upon our master Muhammad<sup>2</sup> and upon the family of our master Muhammad; continuous peace and blessings that last until the Day of Judgment.

I exhort you, O Muslims, and my wrongful self, to fear<sup>3</sup> God, the Exalted.

Slaves of God! I want to talk to you today about a reality that often many people moan about and detest its discussion. It is the reality of death. How odd that people despise this reality being considered, grumble and want to escape it; yet, they know their Messenger said,

“Increase in remembrance of the destroyer of pleasures and the severer of gatherings. Verily when it is mentioned amidst plenty (i.e. of sins) it lessens them and when it is mentioned amidst a few (i.e. pious deeds) it increases them.”

How strange that people despise the discussion of death and moan about its remembrance and it being the topic of conversation; yet, the Divine discourse to mankind asserts that man has an appointment with this reality that he can neither escape nor flee. Did He not say, **“Every soul shall taste death, and only on the Day of Resurrection shall you be paid your full recompense”**<sup>4</sup>? Did He not declare this reality saying, **“Wherever you are, death will find you, even if you are in towers built up strong**

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<sup>1</sup> The Friday sermon delivered by Shaykh Dr Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī at the Umayyad mosque on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Muharram 1431 (Hijri calendar) which corresponds to the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010 (CE).

<sup>2</sup> An invocation that is recited each time the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

<sup>3</sup> The arabic term “*taqwa*”, translated as fear of God, is a concept that may be defined as following the commands of God and avoiding His prohibitions with reverence and awe for the majesty of God. Taqwa gives rise to the protection of God.

<sup>4</sup> A translation of the meaning of a verse from the Qurʾān: chapter number 3: verse number 185: ie Q (3:185).

**and high”<sup>5</sup>**? Was it not He who further emphasised this reality saying, **“Say, ‘Surely death from which you flee will truly meet you’”<sup>6</sup>**? Is it not He who further clarified and emphasised this reality when he said to His messenger, **“You will surely die and they will die”<sup>7</sup>**?

Slaves of God! Indeed, remembrance of death, along with the certainty of its reality and what lies in wait, clips the claws of tyranny. Verily remembrance of death, along with the certainty of its reality, shatters the canine teeth of oppression and aggression and it up-roots all forms of rotten depravity from society.

Slaves of God! God, the Mighty and Majestic, has made death the restraint and “brakes” that man uses when negotiating the slippery slope of lusts, desires, and heedlessness. Each one of us is confronted and afflicted by the perilous ground of heedlessness, lusts, and impulsive desires. It is necessary to use intellectual restraints to overcome them. So what are these brakes that protect a human from slipping? O slaves of God, it is death.

Have you not considered a vehicle driven by its owner? The first thing the driver does is start the engine. However, even before he sets off, he considers how to stop the vehicle, checking his brakes and how to use them. Hence, the importance of the brakes precedes turning the ignition, pressing the accelerator pedal and getting going. To this effect, God gives precedence to death over life when He addresses us, saying, **“Blessed is He in Whose hand is Sovereignty, and, He is Able to do all things. Who has created death and life that He may try you which of you is best in deed.”<sup>8</sup>**

People often ask, “Why does God mention the creation of death prior to mentioning the creation of life”? The answer is so that it becomes clear to man that death is the restrainer or brakes of life, that he should discern death's importance, and develop a relationship with it before he sets off on the journey of life.

Let us then reflect upon that which many people flee from, despite there being no escape. Let us reflect upon the reality of death that God, the Transcendent and Exalted, has decreed for all mankind. Is death a calamity, O slaves of God? Some people err by imagining that death is a calamity. Death is not a calamity for the deceased; it is only a calamity for his relatives and beloved. Their calamity is personified by the sense of desolation from the absence of their beloved and the longing for his proximity. As for the deceased, the way he himself lives his life determines the nature of his death. So, the man who welcomes death and receives it kindly is capable of establishing in death the sense of a wedding feast<sup>9</sup>, if he so desires. Conversely, man is capable of contriving to transform

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<sup>6</sup> Q (62:8)

<sup>7</sup> Q (39:30)

<sup>8</sup> Q (67:1)

<sup>9</sup> A joyful celebration.

his death into the most pitiful disaster, if he so desires. So, it is each living person who lays down a specific reality to their death. Hence we must not generalise and assume that death is a disaster.

When does death become a calamity for the living? Consider the one who travels the journey of life knowing his Creator, Maker, and Master and his outlook is coloured by the reality of servitude to God. He pays attention to God's commands and instructions, and implements them as required. On this journey, he holds tight to the scales of justice, rising above wrongdoing, enmity, and treachery. Wherever he goes he plants seeds of change, love, friendship, and strengthening family ties; not just the ties of flesh and blood but the strengthening of all humanity's familial bonds. This human being neither deceives his brothers in humanity nor cheats them in any of his activities. He ensures that he is not a cause of corruption in the earth, after God, the Majestic and Almighty, has set it in order. He thereby carries out His command, **“Work not corruption in the earth after it has been set in order”**<sup>10</sup>. He listens attentively to the edict of God, the Transcendent and Most High, **“Exult not: God loves not the exultant”**<sup>11</sup>. He responds, “O Lord, I listen and obey”. God continues in His divine speech, **“But seek the abode of the Hereafter in that which God has given you, and forget not your portion of the world”**<sup>12</sup>. The traveller affirms his initial reply, saying, “O Lord, I listen and obey”. And on hearing the command of Allah, **“and seek not to work corruption on the earth”**<sup>13</sup>. The traveller replies “Yes, I have promised not to cause corruption, nor to oppress and tyrannise. I have pledged to hold fast to the scales of justice that You have revealed to Your slaves on the earth and I will only be held sway by these scales.”

Slaves of God! Death comes to this traveller as a wedding feast. This is the truth, whether you believe it or not.

Now consider the man who goes against his nature and shuns his servitude to God, Most Transcendent and High. He responds to the heedlessness of his lower self, causes oppression, deceives, and plunders the rights of others, whether in open or covertly. He travels along a wretched path arriving at death to confront a calamity, oh what a calamity! When the angel of death appears to such a man this disastrous calamity becomes perfectly clear to him.

Reflect on this in the speech of the Messenger of God, God bless him and his family and give them peace,

“Whosoever loves to meet God, God loves meeting him. And whoever loathes meeting God, God loathes meeting him.”

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<sup>10</sup> Q (7:56)

<sup>11</sup> Q (28:76)

<sup>12</sup> Q (28:77)

<sup>13</sup> Q (28:77)

‘Ā’isha said, “Is it death, O messenger of God? For all of us loathe death.”

He replied, “Not that. However, when death approaches the believer, (i.e. the virtuous believer, as I have just described to you), he is given glad tidings of meeting his Lord.”

Thus, there is nothing that he looks forward to that is more beloved to him than death. Whereas when the disbeliever, the tyrannical oppressor who sows corruption on the earth, approaches death he is told of God's hatred and wrath. Nothing is more detested and frightful to him than death.

Slaves of God, we must know this truth. Moreover, heed the speech of Salamah ibn Dinār, the lordly scholar, directed towards the caliph, Sulayman ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, who had come to visit him. The caliph sat at his feet like a disciple sits in front of his master. The caliph asked Salamah, “O Abu Hazim, why do we loathe death?” Salamah replied, “Because you lived your mortal life<sup>14</sup> and ruined your Hereafter. Hence, you loathe moving from a flourishing abode to a derelict abode.” The caliph was silent and then said, “If only I knew my state when tomorrow I arrive at my Lord.” Salamah replied, “The one who does good arrives like an absent person returning to his family. As for the disobedient wrongdoer, he arrives to his Lord like a runaway slave returns to his master.” On this, the caliph Sulayman shed tears.

Slaves of God, this is death! You can make of death what you want; a wedding feast and joyous celebration or a dreadful calamity. A dreadful calamity which will make you forget the fleeting pleasures of this world and your nights filled with distraction and amusement. Isn't it incredible that the one who approaches death with dread has it in his hands to make it a day of celebration?

Slaves of God! He has endowed us with intellect, so why don't we employ it to good use?

In this world you resemble one of two men in the following allegory:

The first man owns a dilapidated unliveable house. He rents out a house for ten years in the same neighbourhood. His rented house is spacious and luxurious. He feels content and has everything that he could possibly want including all the latest modern conveniences. This all makes him forget his decrepit run-down house to the extent that he doesn't attend to its repair or renovation. The house and his lifestyle intoxicate him and he persists in a life of ease and comfort. Time passes by quickly and before long his landlord knocks on his door, tells him that his rental lease has ended, and that he is to be evicted immediately. In no time the man sobers up, comes to his senses, and goes to his dilapidated house who addresses him, saying, “I am sorry, I am not ready for you.” Homeless, his life has turned upside down.

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<sup>14</sup> Arabic: “*dunya*” the ephemeral, mortal, lower world in which we currently live.

The second man finds himself in the same initial situation. He is wise to the situation and uses his intellect. He too felt at home in his rented house and, yes, he too enjoyed living there in luxury. However, he attended to his dilapidated true abode. Every day he would spend an hour or two restoring it and renovating it. He paid particular attention to repair all of its structural defects and hidden faults. He expended as much effort as he could until ten years later the time came to leave his rented accommodation. When his landlord visits him and asks him to leave, the man looks at his own house and it appears to him like an unveiled bride. She says to him invitingly, "Welcome, I am ready for you. The hard work and efforts that you gave to me in your life have prepared me for you. This is all due to your weighing of the mortal world against the world to come and being sagacious in your choice."

Slaves of God! Death is not how Westerners portray it to be and their foul notions have affected us: death is not non-existence. It is the third of life's four stages. Memorise these stages because I come to you with certain knowledge and do not speak with a tongue habituated to the land of fairy tales, a land where many people reside. The first stage is the life of the unborn child. It is the life of the fetus in the world of the womb. The second life is this mortal world, whose beaten track we are currently travelling. We have an appointment with the third stage, it is the life of the intermediate realm<sup>15</sup>. The fourth stage is the life of the Hereafter that awaits us. Know that each stage is vaster and more intense than the stage that precedes it. The intermediate realm, whose entrance is the door of death that lies ahead of us, is broader and more potent than the one in which we currently reside.

Man should anticipate felicity if he is entitled to felicity and he should prepare himself for punishment if he warrants it.

I deliver this sermon and seek the forgiveness of God, the Majestic.  
Seek his forgiveness and He will forgive you.

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<sup>15</sup> Arabic: "*barzakhi*" the intermediate realm that separates the mortal world from the Hereafter.