

# If I Should Die Before I Wake

By Jim Elliff

Did you pray these words as a child?

Now I lay me down to sleep.  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.



There is a candor in this little prayer that makes you shudder. It seems strange to hear little children pray these words when they have only begun to live.

This prayer recognizes two ultimate realities: We will die, and there is something good beyond death that the Lord may take us to. But it implies another truth—the Lord will not take everyone there.

If a man or woman is sane and thinking, the fact of death aggravates the mind. Its certainty stirs up at least a chronic uneasiness, and in times of vulnerability or danger may do even more. It is a frightening fact when one chooses to face it honestly. The Bible calls death an enemy. Most people fear it, and they are right to do so.

There are those who can say that death is not a worry. True Christians, that is, those who have come to Christ on His terms and are genuinely converted, have a certain right to say this, as we will see. But others are only bluffing themselves. They either believe themselves to be invincible or they think that merely *saying* they are not afraid alters the facts. Both thoughts are deceptions.

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We have a ticking heart—an internal battery with no electrical cord leading to an outlet. And the One who has the power to keep it going has no compelling reason to sustain our hearts one minute longer. Rather, most of us are steadily increasing the number of our sins against the very One who can keep us alive and take us to heaven. That’s scary.

But it doesn’t have to be that way! Christ came to liberate us from such fear.

Christ appeared, said the writer of Hebrews, to “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrews 2:15)

Christ takes the binding fear out of death by turning it into an advance rather than an eternal loss. He makes death the ticket to life.

Here’s how that works. Along with everybody on the face of the earth, you are constantly sinful. These thousands of sinful thoughts, words, and actions cause the perfectly holy God to judge you as deserving of hell. But Christ’s death in the place of sinful people, as a true substitute, provides the way of escape. God pardons those who come to Him because Jesus took the punishment in their place. In simple terms we may say that the just penalty for sins either falls on you or Christ.

The person who comes to Christ rejects the life he was living in order to become Christ’s own child. He comes by faith. That is, he must rest all his confidences for eternity on Christ alone as the only One who fully satisfied God’s justice on the sinner’s behalf. This is

called *believing in Christ*. And the one who believes has no need to fear death anymore. The judgment for sin has been covered by the Substitute.

Jesus said, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” John. 3:18

The Christian knows physical death will come. He can look it straight in the face. To be certain, he will not enjoy the pain of the dying process, but death itself is not the problem. As a Christian he knows that he will be in heaven after he dies. Like the Bible author Paul, he asserts, “to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21)

A Jewish oncologist in Little Rock, Arkansas saw this phenomenon. In fact, he converted to Christianity because of seeing the difference in how Christians and non-Christians die.

Perhaps it would be helpful for you to meditate on the following words that Christ gave us about life and death. He said these words to Martha, the sister of Lazarus who had just died. And as you carefully think over this profound set of words, remember that Christ is the only legitimate antidote to the fear of death because He is the only one who can say, “I am the life.” Here are His words. Believe them—believe in *Him*.

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die....  
(John 11:25-26)