

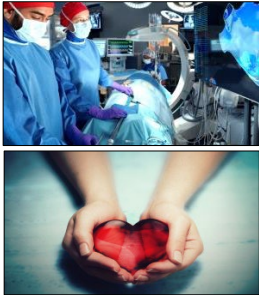
The Great Escape

Love, Death, & Pilots

June 15, 2025



Today we're facing the fear of death, the gift of salvation, and the hope of a safe landing!



Have you ever cheated death? Two weeks ago last Wednesday, I went “heart-dead” for a bit, according to the surgeon. Funny story. I had to have a heart ablation, wherein they guide a laser through a vein into the heart, to stop a double heartbeat (by cauterizing one of ‘em). But when they did, *they both stopped* (so I was later told), *for about three seconds* – while they all held their breath, crash-cart at the ready. But, it rebooted. And when the doctor told me, I said, “Is that what it’s actually called? Heart dead?” He said yes; and I said, “That’ll preach!” Because:

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart – Psalm 73:26 ESV

[Because] Our God is a God who *saves*; *escape from death* [but *not from dying*] is in the Lord God’s *hands* ... who gives power [to *overpower the grave*] and strength [of heart] to His people. [To face it, defy it, and defeat it! Together!] – Psalm 68:21, 36 NAB

Since the *children* have *flesh and blood*, [i.e. an *expiration date*] He too *shared* in their *humanity* so that by *His death* [and *resurrection*] He might *destroy* him who holds the power of death [i.e. the *fear of death*]—that is, the *devil*— and *free* those who *all* their *lives* were held in *slavery* [to *fear*] by *their fear of death*. – Hebrews 2:14-15 NIV

Those who fear the Lord are *secure* [from the *fear of death*, because] ... *Fear of the Lord* is a *life-giving fountain*; it offers *escape* from the *snares of death*. – Proverbs 14:26-27 NLT

[You see] Evil people are *trapped* by [their own *snares of*] *sin*, but the righteous [not only *escape*, they] *escape*, *shouting for joy*. – Proverbs 29:6 NLT

Let the *wicked* fall into their own *snares*, [if *that’s their choice*] but let *me escape* [“from the *snares of death*”, “*shouting for joy*” (Prv 14:27; 29:6)]. – Psalm 141:10 NLT

[For] The *wages of sin* is *death*, but the *gift of God* is *eternal life* in *Christ* – Romans 6:23 NIV



Have you seen any documentaries on **the miracle of Air Transat flight 236**? In 2001, an Airbus left Toronto with 306 people. And it developed a fuel leak. And in the middle of the night, in the middle of the flight, in the middle of the Atlantic, the engines stopped. As did the generator, with no battery back-up. Everything suddenly went dark and silent. And there they were, listening to the soft whistle of wind against the wings, facing the certain death of a catastrophic landing in the mid-Atlantic. **Sadly, this is a great analogy for our life down here.** Because *that’s us!*



We all know that one day, as we're casually flying through our temporary stay, **our trip will come to an abrupt end**. It's strange that they call it "crashing" when someone's heart gives out like those engines. But:



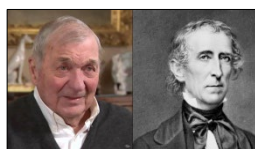
None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. **[On Spirit Air]** None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle. And in the face of death, **[what'll you do? Cuz]** wickedness will certainly not rescue those who practice it. – Ecclesiastes 8:8 NLT

I remember the testimony of a believer who survived the deadliest aviation accident in history (involving two 747s at the Tenerife airport in 1977). As he called on the Lord, **he was shocked to hear how many – as they faced their inevitable date with death – were screaming profanities and using God's name literally in vain**. And it haunted him the rest of his life.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. – Romans 10:13 ESV

[But, they couldn't help it; because] A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. – Luke 6:45 NAB

[So, whatever you do] "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." – Matthew 6:19-21 NIV



Did you see who died three Sundays back? *Harrison Tyler*, the grandson of John Tyler, our 10th president! He was a sermon illustration that day, wherein I said that Harrison could say, "My grandpa was born during George Washington's first year in office in 1790!" Thing is, I'd told Noah I was moving the message up, cuz I didn't know how long we had! Several of you emailed me the next day. And I wondered if what I'd said was or wasn't true. But it was. Cuz he passed away that Sunday evening. Weird. Right? I mean, the timing. Not the passing. Because, as Ethan says in his Psalm:



O Lord God Almighty! ... Powerful is Your arm! Strong is Your hand! Your right hand is lifted high in glorious strength. **[Especially on the cross]** ... **[And]** Our power is based on Your favor. ... Remember how short my life is ... No one can live forever; all will die. No one can escape the power of the grave. **[Snap out of it, man!]** – Psalm 89:8-16, 47-48 NLT

Our God is a God who saves! **[Says David in his Psalm]** The Sovereign Lord rescues us from death. ... Sing to the One who rides across the ancient heavens, His mighty voice thundering from the sky. Tell everyone about God's power. ... **[It may not look like much from this side of the ride, while He's forced to hide, to form our faith, but]** His strength is mighty in the heavens. ... The God of Israel gives power [over the grave] and strength to His people. **[To face it, defy it, and defeat it! Together!]** – Psalm 68:19-35 NLT

While the passengers of flight 236 sat in dark silence, awaiting an open-ocean crash-landing, the pilot powered critical instruments with a wind generator, and located a tiny Island with a military base and an emergency runway for the Space Shuttle. One of the world's longest. 70 miles away. And yet, their Captain managed to glide that jet for 20 minutes! A world record!

And with no power, no flaps, and no reverse thrusters, it hit that runway at 230 mph – blowing out 12 tires, and grinding some down to their axels as it skidded safely to rest, wherein everyone miraculously escaped certain death! I wonder how many passengers prayed something akin to:



O Lord, God of my salvation ... let my prayer come before You ... For *my soul is full of troubles*, and *my life draws near to the grave*. ... [And] *I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead* – Psalm 88:1-5 NKJ



But *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* ... will *escape*, just as the Lord has said. [And] *These will be among the survivors* – Joel 2:32 NLT



So we must *listen very carefully* to the *truth* we have *heard*, or *we may drift away* from it. ... What makes us *think* that *we can escape* if we are *indifferent* to this *great salvation* that was *announced* by the *Lord Jesus* himself? – Hebrews 2:1-3 NLT

I survived a near plane crash of my own. And by that I mean, I almost crashed a plane. When I was twenty, I got a pilot's license and a perm. And on a solo flight above the mountains of Oregon, I realized too late, that the clouds below were smoke from a huge forest fire. For as far as I could see. So I turned back, with fuel running low, and headed for a small airport on the border. But the smoke was blowing north. And as the gauge dropped below "E" there was still no clearing. And so, descended into a whiteout of smoke, not knowing if I'd drop into flames or crash into a mountain. And I reflexively braced for impact. And **I prayed a very simple prayer: Catch me**. And then, surprisingly, **I became calm**. Because **I knew He would**. And then I dropped below the smoke, above the trees, and followed a power line to the Columbia river, to I-5, to the airport. And the man refueling asked if I'd glided in; because the gauge rod he sunk into the tank came out dry! Now, if you knew you were going to end up in your own flight 236, and you had the option of choosing your pilot, would you pick one at random, ignore your option, try to land it on your own, or opt for the one Captain who proved his ability to miraculously land everyone safely? I mean:

We *know* that Christ being *raised* from the *dead* will *never* die *again*; [because He *pretty much proved that*] *death* no *longer* has *dominion* over Him. – Romans 6:9 ESV

... who as to His *human nature* was a descendant of *David*, and who ... was *declared* with *power* to be the *Son of God* by His *resurrection* from the *dead* – Romans 1:1-4 NIV

For it was *fitting* ... to make the *Captain of their salvation* perfect through sufferings. For ... [we] are *all of One*, for which reason *He* is not *ashamed* to call them *brethren*, saying ... "Here am I and the *children* whom *God* has *given* Me." – Hebrews 2:10-13 NKJ



[So let's] Be *devoted* to *one another* in *brotherly love*. – Romans 12:10 NIV



Which leads us to the *third insight* of flight 236. Once saved, **the strangers who boarded that plane, embraced and rejoiced and wept and cared for each other with great affection**. Ages, races, and income brackets flew out the window. Because, **facing certain death, and sharing a miraculous deliverance, instantly transformed them into something far deeper than friends**. They became a family – by a sincere bond of brotherly and sisterly fellowship. And with one voice they praised their pilot.

And, **happily, this is a great analogy for our love down here.** Because, **when someone has a brush with death, everything is suddenly precious ...** especially people. So it stands to reason that **we who share so great a salvation should express a special kind of family affection.** So the Captain of our salvation rightly expects His sincere followers to be a rich example of this.

“[My children] Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples” – John 13:33-35 NIV

Which is great, *in theory*. But *in practice*, it’s like the old poem says: **To dwell above, with saints in love; that will be our glory. But to dwell below, with saints we know, well that’s a different story!** “But, do you have to *like* someone in order to *love* them?” *Nope*. But don’t *kid* yourself. Jesus isn’t talking about a *disconnected type of religious politeness* that offers only the *surface mechanics of His love*. **Our love must come from a survivor’s heart**, and it must be sincere.

[Because] We *know* that we have *passed* from *death* to *life*, *because we love* our *brothers*. [Whom we *otherwise probably wouldn’t*] Anyone who does *not love* [like someone who’s “passed from death to life” obviously] *remains in death*. – 1 John 3:14 NIV



When flight 236 came to a stop, the crew got all 306 out in 90 seconds! The only injuries were from exiting. But those who knew they’d escaped the clutches of death didn’t say, “Well, that wasn’t very courteous.” Or, “See the gal with the big scrape on her leg? Her shoes totally clash with her blouse!” **These are not the thoughts of those who’ve been rescued from death, and given a new lease on life.** It doesn’t mean we don’t see those faults and flaws and fashion faux pas; it just means **we look past them. To Him.** Because of how little it means in the great scheme of things. Because:

“I am the living One who *died*. [And] Look, I am *alive* forever and ever! And [this is your Captain speaking] I *hold* the keys of *death* and the *grave*.” – Revelation 1:17-18 NLT

“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. ... and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. ... [Because] No one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand. [And, p.s.] I and the Father are [the living] One.” – John 10:27-30 NIV

“O *Death*, I will be your *plagues*! O *Grave*, I will be your *destruction*!” – Hosea 13:14 NKJ

[This is] our *God* forever and ever; He will be our *guide even to death*. – Psalm 48:14 NKJ

“In this world you will have trouble. But take *heart*! I have *overcome*” – John 16:33 NIV

Therefore my heart is glad and my *tongue rejoices*; my *body* also will *rest secure*, because You will not *abandon* me to the *grave* ... [for] You have made *known to me* the *path of life*; [and] You will fill me with joy in Your *presence* – Psalm 16:9-11 NIV

So here we are—**on a flight we didn’t schedule, heading toward a destination we can’t avoid.** The *engines sputter*. The *skies darken*. But **we don’t fly in fear.** We fly in *faith*. **Because we know we’ve chosen the Captain who conquered death.** So, *if we believe in Him*, we better *listen to Him*, and *love just like Him*. Because, He *promises a bumpy ride*, and *guarantees a safe landing*.