



# THE DAY I DIED

JAPOC  
JUST ANOTHER PIECE OF CLAY

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Isaiah 64:8

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## One Hell of a Day



**M**y name is John. My last name ...well, it doesn't even matter. I won't be alive tomorrow. I haven't done a single thing in my life that will last beyond a week. I don't have any kids...anymore. I'm not married...not anymore...I don't think. My friends are a collection of people that I owe and who would rather not see me coming. I have one brother...he's really my cousin. He loves me and he's worse off than me. He's the one person in the world that might miss me. My dad already wrote me off...I think.

I have known clearly in my heart that God chose me to be a preacher. I couldn't even go to church and sit quietly in the pews without seeing things I didn't want to see...like flashes of a future I did not want responsibility for. My father is a preacher and I saw enough to know I could not live up to that standard. I don't guess there's any point praying about it. I have known that this is what I was on this planet to do for many years. I guess you can only say No to God for so long; forty-two years of nothing coming to a sudden end.

I awoke in a puddle lying in my bed. It was a big puddle. I swished in the water sitting up, looking at the ceiling to see if the water had come from it. The ceiling was dry and I didn't have a roommate to plan such a prank on me. My dream was still crisp in my mind. A hero, from comic book I used to read, was about to drown me. The words on his lips said, "Today, you die" as his beastly hands pushed me under.

I awoke suddenly from the dream and either I had just died or was about to die. I knew this as plainly as I now sat in this puddle of water. I was soaked from my head to my toe. I stood and looked down at the puddle, wiping water from my face and squeezing it out of my hair. "It's not real," I said.

A loud voice boomed in my head in a loud kind of silence, "Make peace." The words were clear like a terrifying shout in my mind. My body recoiled as I closed my eyes and I saw a large, shining hourglass in the dark. The puddle was real. And with the image of the hourglass, I knew I would die before the end of the day. I wasn't sure what make peace meant. But I knew someplace deep in my spirit that God was telling me to get ready for my own end. My time was already running out.

I looked around my smelly, studio apartment. I lived in a rat hole above a rat's nest. The rat's nest was full of cars I couldn't afford. I loved cars; both finished and those in need of work. I never saw a car that I hated. But right now, I hate my apartment. I hated the way it looked, smelled and made me feel – like, I was better than this. So, I started cleaning it. I found a few dollars but mostly cleaning helped me clear my head. I still knew I was gonna die today. I felt it like a dull sickness in my belly that I could scarcely ignore. Even more specifically, I somehow knew my death would involve water. It was eerie to have such a specific impression about your own impending death. Mostly, though, I wanted to force myself to think about how I wanted to go out. I want to go out on some sort of high note, like a hall-of-fame athlete having a monstrous game on the day he announced his retirement. I'd like to go out like a hero. Yeah, it would be nice to die saving somebody. I could get a memorial or something.

I caught my reflection in a cheap framed mirror over a bureau in the eating area. It was a look of sincere satisfaction. *Yes, if today is my day to die, I'll die a hero... if I can.*

I eventually finished cleaning. My place looked even cleaner than it looked when I moved in. I had bags and bags of stuff I was keeping but I didn't really need: magazines, newspapers, decks of cards missing cards. I had an old combination printer/fax machine that didn't print and probably didn't fax. I had cheap plastic plants that had thin layers of dust on all the leaves. I had a bulletin board with all sorts of stuff stuck on it, dreams about things I'd eventually do. I wouldn't get to do any of those things. Nope. No bucket list for me. No fancy homes with lavish enclosed pools. No fancy cars. I wrote a check to myself for ten million dollars postmarked for three years from next month. I almost tore it up months ago. Something made me hold onto it. I decided to fold it up and put it in my pocket. *Yeah. I'll die a rich man,* I laughed to myself.

I took the last of the bags I filled with stuff I wasn't going to need anymore and took it downstairs to the trash pile. I tossed it up, but the bag fell short of the opening of the dumpster and half of it hung inside the dumpster and the other half hung outside. I hadn't tied the top, just pulled the drawstring, so the stuff I'd put in the bag was scattered across the asphalt in front of the dumpster opening. I knelt to pick up the trash and one magazine had words on the cover that hit my mind kinda hard.

"MAKE PEACE ..." I ignored the rest of the words. It was an old Time magazine reflecting past days and conflicts about wars. Make Peace? How am I supposed to do that? Go to Washington D.C. today and make a big presentation to Congress? I tossed the magazine and the rest of the trash into the dumpster. As I reached the top of

the stairs, I heard a phone ringing. It was mine. I extended my strides and entered the open door of my upstairs apartment. I'd left my phone in the kitchen. The caller ID showed "Duck." I answered it.

"Duck! What's up, man?" I was glad to hear from my cousin.

Duck seemed to be gathering his words, "Yo, cuz. I'm in a bad spot man."

"What you need, man?" I asked.

"That \$300 you owe me. If I don't get it today, I'm in trouble man...with Erick," Duck explained.

Duck was once a high-profile football player. He was a wide receiver, fast, nimble, and crafty...until he messed up a knee in college. He tried rehab without surgery and only made it worse when he tried to return. Then he had to have a surgery he couldn't afford, and he got cut from the team. He returned home in disgrace to very little opportunity. He got a factory job and got hurt there, too. The company fired him for not following safety procedures—procedures that were neither practiced nor encouraged. But they were well posted, and he didn't follow them. The result, a busted vertebrae and regular pain that was only helped by smoking marijuana or popping some sort of illegal or heavily regulated pill he couldn't afford. Duck had resorted to getting either marijuana or medication from wherever he could whether he had money or not. I could guess what sort of trouble he was in. But today, he was in luck. I didn't have \$300 but I did have things worth \$300 that I was willing to sell. I wouldn't be around to use them after today anyway.



“I thought Erick was gonna be your manager way back...before you started with that other guy. How did he become your dealer?” I was confused.

“He ain’t the kid you remember from the sports highlights, man. He was in music outta nowhere. Then, his dad went to jail and then he got outta music. Next thing I knew he had products. I don’t know the whole story.” Duck became silent.

I don’t got it, Duck ...but I’ll get it. I’ll get it to you today, man.”

“Thank you, Johnny. Thank you. I’ll be home.”

So, now I knew what *Make Peace* meant. It meant paying my debts. Paying what I owe. The words were clear. Make your peace. Since I know today is my day, I guess it’s pretty cool that I have a chance to go out clean, not like a piece of trash guy that everyone probably is glad to see gone. Ok. That’s it then. I will die debt-free. That’s how I’ll make my peace. It would really be cool if I could die a hero...like, save somebody’s life. I mean, I could have a bridge or a street or something named after me. I paused for a moment. Yeah, that’s how I will die. None of this crap matters really. It’s the last things you do that matter. The last things I do will be pretty freaking spectacular!

I felt oddly grateful ...knowing that today was going to be my day and having a chance to decide how I use it. It occurred to me that really...I had that opportunity all of my life. We all do. But right now, I WILL do great things with the time I have left. If today’s my day to die, I’m goin’ out in sparkling fashion. I found a Superhero t-shirt that needed to be put away. I decided to put it on. Today’s gonna be one hell of a day.

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