

Death's Defeat

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the last passage we read, the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 54.

Then shall be, the end of verse 54, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

Now I know that you would agree, and especially in these days for us as a congregation, that death seems to prevail everywhere.

There are evidences of its reign. And there are many empty hearts and empty chairs and empty homes and deserted communities tonight.

Monuments and memorials and gravestones, which seem to preach to each one of us, that death is a mighty conqueror.

[1 : 21] And so it is. But the gospel brings before us a greater conqueror, a greater deliverer.

There is a greater than death here. And that is the person of whom this verse before us speaks. The person who himself has swallowed up death in victory. And through whom, and in whom, his people will also be able to say, O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory? Jesus is brought before us. Jesus is brought before us as he who has abolished death.

And who has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And I would like to look with you tonight at these words which remind us of the glorious victory and the glorious conqueror himself.

[2 : 38] Look at them in the light of their context and see what they suggest to ourselves. Let us look first of all at the context in which these words are placed.

And then look secondly at what this means. Christ swallowing up death in victory. Look at how he accomplished it.

And then look at what it means to ourselves as individuals. Has this got anything at all to say to us? Is this relevant in any way for us tonight?

Now what is the context in which the apostle is placing these words? Well the whole context, the whole chapter, deals with the great subject of the resurrection.

You know that this Sunday throughout our land, emphasis is placed upon the resurrection. And that is as it should be because every Sunday is that which reminds us of the glorious resurrection of our Lord from the dead.

[3 : 54] Be it this Sunday or any other Sunday. We are reminded every Sabbath day of the raising of our Lord from the dead.

Well the whole chapter deals with the resurrection. And it deals with various questions. Which can in themselves be extremely difficult.

And the question that he deals with in this context from verse 50 to the end of it is this. After resurrection, what kind of bodies will we have?

And so he says in the first place, remember he says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

In other words, after resurrection, the body which we have just now, that's the meaning of these words flesh and blood in this context.

[4 : 52] The present body, the body with which you and I live, in which we live, and the body which you recognize as belonging to yourself, and the body which someone else has you recognize belonging to them, that is not the body that will arise in the resurrection.

It won't be, in other words, as you and I see it today. And he uses two words to tell us what kind of body we will have.

This body, he says, will be changed. This body will be changed. And what he says is this. It will put on incorruption and immortality.

It will be clothed with incorruption and immortality. Now, when he says it will be clothed, that doesn't mean that the body that you and I have will take on something else or something extra.

Immortality and incorruption will not clothe the present body, but rather incorruption and immortality will replace the natural properties of the body here.

[6 : 13] Now, incorruption and immortality really mean this, that the resurrection body will be imperishable. It won't be subject to corruption.

It won't be subject to decay. You know that our bodies here change all the time. And there's a sense in which every single one of us is decaying towards death, changing, getting older and older and old as we head towards the end.

You can't deny that. The body is, as I said, what is solving. Paul uses a figure in the next letter to explain this. He speaks of his body like a tent.

We, he says, who are in this tent, we who are in this tabernacle, we are changing. It is decay. And in this body we groan and we moan.

In this body there are times when we're tired, when we're sick, when we're very ill, when we're at the gates of death. Sometimes we're restored. Other times people just fall into death.

[7 : 33] This body is decaying, changing, because of sin. But the resurrection body, and he speaks of the resurrection body of believers, will be incorruptible.

It will not be capable of decaying, because sin will have been left behind at the resurrection. This body will be raised in the resurrection, and whatever else will be true of it, this will be true of it, it will be incorruptible.

And then he says, it will be immortal. It will put on immortality. Now as you and I are constituted, our persons, we have soul and body.

The soul is immortal. It is not eternal. It is immortal. It's at a beginning, like your body's at a beginning. But the soul will have no end.

The difference between something which is eternal and immortal is that. That which is eternal has neither beginning nor end. That which is immortal has a beginning, but no end.

[8 : 39] Our soul lives on after death. It will go to either heaven or hell. But our bodies decay. And over a period of years, our bodies disappear, and they merge into the dust of the earth.

But when they are raised in the resurrection, those who will be with Christ, those who are going to heaven, their bodies will be immortal.

They will never again be subject to change, never again be subject to death. They will be undying. Now whatever is going to be true of the body, these two things will be true of the resurrection body.

It will be incorruptible, and it will be immortal. That's one thing he says. And the next question he deals with is this. When will that take place?

Well, of course, we know one answer is at the resurrection. It will take place immediately, he says, at the resurrection. Behold, I show you a mystery.

[9 : 41] We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Now you remember that Paul wrote this letter 2,000 years ago. And at that time, there were some people in the Christian church who believed firmly that the second coming of Christ and the resurrection was very imminent.

They were waiting for it every day. Now in the gospel times, we know that the second coming of Christ is still imminent. We know it's coming. We don't know when.

But when he comes, he will come very suddenly. Very suddenly. And when he comes, there will be a tremendous, I think this is the idea of these verses, at the last trump, the trumpet shall sound.

Now the trumpet in the Bible was the instrument, certainly in the Old Testament. When it was sounded, it gathered people together at certain times in Israel's history.

[10 : 47] The silver trumpet was blown, and the whole congregation would assemble. And the New Testament uses the word to speak of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel is like the sounding of a trumpet.

And it must give a certain sound, says the writer. And the purpose of the gospel is to bring people together. It gathers people together.

It's the gospel that does this. And at the resurrection, Jesus himself tells us that when he speaks, the day is coming, he says, when they that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they will come forth.

And the Bible frequently speaks of the power with which Christ speaks. It will be visible. It will be audible. It will be heard by everybody. And it leads us to believe that this day of the resurrection is a day in which there will be a tremendous noise, tremendous commotion.

[11 : 53] The graves will open. The sea will give up its dead. And all that will happen instantaneously.

It will be a tremendous moment. Suddenly. Now, in those days, as I said, there were some people who believed the coming of the Lord to be very imminent.

And they believed that they would still be living when the Lord would come. Some of them had died. They had slept. This is the way in which the New Testament speaks wondrously of the death of the Christian.

It's a sleep. When you go to sleep, when you went to bed last night, and you look forward to a night's sleep, so that you could awake refreshed, you entertained the hope that you would awake in the morning, that you would waken up.

So is the death of the Christian. It is a death which is filled with hope, even as the soul is released from the body. There is entertained the glorious hope of the gospel that they will one day awake in the resurrection.

[13 : 01] And soul will be reunited to the body. Now he says, we will not all sleep. Some will have died before Jesus comes. And when he comes, those who have died will be raised up, and their bodies will be changed.

But he says, those who remain, those who will live, those who will be alive when Christ comes, their bodies will pass through the same change at the resurrection.

That's the point that he's making. I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. Whether we're alive at his coming, or whether we have died. When he comes, if we are to be with Christ, at his coming, instantaneously, our bodies will be clothed with incorruption and immortality.

That's the point that he makes here. And it will happen immediately. Then he says, it is then, when this corruptible shall appear on immortality, and this mortal shall appear on incorruption, and this mortal shall appear on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

It is then, at the resurrection, that those who are the Lord Jesus Christ's will receive the full and final and complete victory over death.

[14 : 37] It will be swallowed up forever in their experience. They will never again see death, never again be pained by the parting which death causes from soul and body, from friend from friend, and loved one from loved one.

It will be at an end forever, and throughout the end the ages of eternity, they will live forever with Christ, never again to leave one another's company, and never again to leave the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For them, at the resurrection, they will receive the fulfillment and the final and the complete victory over death.

death. And all this because Christ himself swallowed up death.

And that leads us to consider the second point, what does this mean? Death being swallowed up in victory.

[15 : 45] Now, as I said at the beginning, today, death is swallowing up people.

Death comes and none of us can resist it, and death takes us. It swallows up. Just as wild animals swallow their prey, so death swallows people up.

You know that frequently the Bible speaks of things and people even being swallowed up.

Remember the dream that Pharaoh had? He saw the seven linn cows swallowing up the seven fat ones.

You know that in the book of Exodus and the Old Testament frequently Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the Egyptian magicians.

The earthquake swallowed up Korah and death. The sea swallows up its prey and so death swallows up generation after generation.

[17 : 09] The idea here is that death comes upon people with its gaping mouth and swallows them up. But the interesting thing here is this that death itself was swallowed up by Jesus.

The epistle of the Hebrews tells that he has destroyed him that at the power of death that is the devil. Now you all know how death came into the world.

Death says the Bible came by sin and that's a point that Paul is making here as well. The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law.

That means justice. Death is pictured here like the tongue of a serpent. And when it stings there is no recovery.

There is no recovery. It is a point that a man wants to die because the wages of sin is death. Some people play fast and loose with sin.

[18 : 24] Some people don't believe in its existence. They don't like the word sin or evil. And they try to eliminate it from their vocabulary and from their dictionaries. But you can't my friend. The evidence of sin is death.

This is what God told Adam at the very beginning. The day that you disobey me you will die. And Adam brought death upon mankind. And we trace death right back to its source to the sin of Adam. That's why we have death in the world today because of sin. And not only is the sting fatal it is also powerful.

The strength of sin is the law. It seems that there are some serpents which not only sting but there's tremendous power in the tongue when they sting.

There are times when people are stung and they don't know they've been stung until they see the evidence of it. Other times they feel they're real back because of the power with which they have been hit.

[19 : 34] And that's the idea here. That sin comes with tremendous power and strength. What is its power? The law.

The law of God. God said when you disobey me you will die. And that is written large in the law to this very day.

The soul that sinneth it shall die. It is the law that gives sin its strength. The law of God gives it its strength. But what happened was this.

God purposed to save people from death. And the way in which he did it was to send his son into the world.

Jesus came into the world. And Jesus purpose in coming into the world was to destroy death. And when he came death was waiting for him.

[20 : 42] Like a serpent waiting to pounce. And the moment he was born death tried to sting him to death.

And death used Herod. And Herod tried to get at Christ by destroying all the infants born at the time.

And he failed. Death failed. Jesus was saved from the jaws of death. Then the people of Nazareth tried to destroy him.

They tried to push him over a cliff. But he escaped out of their hands. Then the devil tried the temptation and he suggested to him, look, if you throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple, if you throw yourself down from that height, nothing will happen to you.

The Bible says that the angels will look after you. And that was an attempt to destroy Jesus, putting him to death. And that failed. And all along the line, death was trying to get a hold of it, trying to swallow him up.

[21 : 51] Ultimately, ultimately, the priests and the mob and the religious leaders of the day were used. They arrested him, they accused him, they sentenced him, they used the power of the Roman Empire.

eventually, they got their way, crucify him, crucify him, get rid of him, put him to death. And he was put to death, he died. As you know, outside Jerusalem, and to all intents and purposes, death had prevailed over Jesus like it prevailed over everybody since the day that Adam died.

It seemed that death was victorious. Jesus was the victim of circumstances, the world wouldn't have him, his own people wouldn't have him, they rejected him, they refused him, and they gave him to death, and he died.

But my friend, that is quite wrong. That is quite wrong. That is not the way that Jesus died. He didn't die the way you and I die. He wasn't taken by death at all.

Jesus gave himself to death. And when the jaws of death were open wide against the Lord, the Lord went into the jaws of death and by his death he swallowed up death.

[23 : 16] He destroyed death. He was victorious over death in this way, in that he gave himself to death. I have power, he said, to lay down my life.

I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my father. Now you know that this is not the way. That even the most triumphant Christians die, this is not the way it is.

There are some Christians who have gloriously wonderful deathbeds, triumphant deathbeds. There are some Christians who preach the gospel to people when they die.

They die, as Dr. Martin Jones said he wanted to die triumphantly. He wanted to die gloriously. And there are people who die like that.

But no matter how wonderful they die, how wonderfully they die, death takes them. Death savers soul from body. They have no power at the end over death at all.

[24 : 22] It takes them. No matter how much they resist and no matter how much they fight, death takes them at the end. But Jesus died triumphantly.

Jesus died victoriously. He said it is finished and he gave himself to death. No one does that. He poured out his soul unto death.

No one does that and no one did but himself. This is how he died. He took the sting out of death. He took the strength from sin.

And the way in which he did it was this. He took out sin upon himself. He was obedient unto the law which demanded obedience unto death and in his death honoured the law, fulfilled it and magnified it, made it honourable.

And that is how he himself swallowed up death. and the proof of it was this, that he was raised in power at the resurrection.

[25 : 35] That was the evidence that the death of Jesus had abolished death, destroyed death. The proof of it was in the resurrection of our Lord from the dead.

now someone is going to say to me, that in no way proves to me that Jesus has made me victorious over death.

Well, let us know what I want, the way in which I want to apply this, these words finally. To show to you how the believer has the victory in Christ over death.

There are three ways in which the Bible speaks of death. Spiritual, physical, and eternal. Now, spiritual death is this.

Over and over again the Bible speaks like this. We are dead in trespasses and in sins. it means that the life and the favor and the fellowship and the blessing of God does not flow into our hearts.

[26 : 59] It means that we are severed from the life and the fellowship and the favor of God. Just as death severs soul from body, severs loved ones from loved ones, so spiritual death severs us from the life and the favor and the fellowship of God.

We are dead in trespasses and in sins. Now, that does not mean, as I've told you often enough, that does not mean that a person who is spiritually dead can't sit and enjoy the gospel, can't sit and be touched by the gospel.

You know, there are some times when people wrongly try to illustrate spiritual death in this way. A person who is spiritually dead doesn't feel a thing, doesn't hear a thing, and doesn't know a thing. That is not true. The spiritually dead can quake under the gospel. They can be moved by the gospel.

They can be afraid of death. They can resist death. But the point is this, that they are strangers to the life and to the blessing and to the favor of God.

[28 : 13] God. They are dead. Spiritually dead. Now, Jesus comes into the life of a passion like that with life. Restores them to the favor and to the fellowship and to the friendship of God.

Brings them from death unto life. Spiritually, they hear the voice of the Son of God. They are quickened. They respond in faith to his call.

They are made to love him. They are constrained to love him. They are brought to life so they exercise faith in Christ. They look to him. They live in him.

They live for him. They long for him. They love him. They serve him. They pray to him. They hear him. And they obey him. They are brought to life.

So, he triumphs over spiritual death in their lives. But death is also natural. Death severs soul from body.

[29 : 22] And you say to me, where then is the Christian's victory in death if, as happens to everybody else, his soul is severed from his body?

Does he not die like everybody else? Where then is a victory for the Christian in death? Well, I'll tell you. The death of the Christian, though it is the same as everybody else's death, physically, naturally, is different from everybody else's death.

in this letter, at the very beginning of it, Paul is reminding the Corinthian church of the many blessings bestowed in them through faith in Christ.

Now, the Corinthian church was a problem church for Paul. It had lots of problems, moral and doctrinal and practical.

and one of them was this. They were split into factions. There were divisions among them. And what you and I would call today cliques.

[30 : 36] Some followed Peter, some followed Apollos, some followed Paul, some even followed Christ. And he writes and he says to them, you're silly, splitting yourselves up in this way, claiming these gifts, claiming that you belong, to this person, to that person.

That's not the way to look at it, he says. All the gifts and the blessings of God and Christ are yours. It doesn't matter who he is. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, they're yours. You're not theirs, they're yours.

The ministers of the gospel belong to you, for your gratification, for your blessing. Life belongs to you. Yes, even death belongs to you.

How can that be in this way? Though death takes the Christian at the end, it is still something that belongs to him.

It is an enemy in that it severs soul from body, and that was never meant to be the case. It is an enemy in that it severs friend from friend and loved one from loved one.

[31 : 44] it is an enemy because it brings sorrow and grief and darkness and desolation.

It brings all that in no matter where it comes. Let's make no mistake about this. Don't let us speak sentimental nonsense and rubbish about death as though you are not supposed to shed any tears if the person who died was a Christian.

That is not the biblical picture. Death is an enemy, and this chapter tells us that. But there are a day coming when the last enemy will be destroyed.

What I'm going to say to you is this. Without a shadow of a doubt, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that the death of the Christian is a day which is better than the day of his birth, because there was so a soul is severed from his body.

His soul goes immediately into the presence of Christ as he said to the thief on the cross, in paradise. Their souls are made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory at death.

[33 : 04] So you see, though death takes them, it is a death without a sting. Jesus has taken the sting out of death, he has died their death, he has taken sin away.

You see, I think that everybody, in a sense, is afraid of death. I'm afraid of it, and I'm sure that you're afraid of it.

There are various reasons why we're all afraid of death, death. But the thing which is really at the heart of that fear is this, sin, sin, sin.

And I say this to you, if you tonight had the assurance that your sins were forgiven, that your sins were removed by the death of Jesus, you could face death with confidence.

though there is still fear connected with it. The fear of the unknown, the fear of what you may have to pass through in the throes of death. But if sin were removed, if only you knew tonight that your sins were forgiven, that your sins were blotted out, that your sins were taken away, then you could enter into the valley of the shadow of death, and know that when death comes, your soul will be delivered forevermore from sin.

[34 : 46] So you see, death is swallowed up in victory for the Christian through faith in Christ. And then there's this third point. Death is also eternal.

death. The Bible speaks of the second death. And what that means is this, after resurrection, there is either going to be a resurrection of the just or a resurrection of the damned.

You are either going to enter into eternal blessedness or into eternal war. You are going to be raised to be forever in heaven with Christ or to be forever in hell with the devil and his angels.

The Bible is perfectly clear in the sense there's no jubiety here. No grey areas. Clear. The second death is that which is going to happen to the unbeliever, to the unrighteous, at the resurrection.

Soul will be reunited with the body, will be cast forever into hell, to be severed throughout the endless ages of eternity from the love and the fellowship and the favour and the blessing and the love of God.

[35 : 57] Not to be severed from God. God will be there. And that is what is going to make hell, hell for the lost. That the God whom they hated in this world and the God whom they avoided, the God from whom they ran away, will confront them eternally in hell, soul and body.

But the Christian, he is going to be raised at the resurrection. soul reunited with the body, soul glorified in a glorified body, in the whole totality of his personality, glorified like unto the glorious body of Christ himself, never again to be severed in his passion, soul from body, never again to be severed from the church, would be with him in glory, never again to be severed in his body from Christ consciously.

He will be forever with the Lord. Death is swallowed up in victory.

And therefore the Christian can say through faith in Christ, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

[37 : 46] What's he saying? Therefore, my beloved believing friend, keep on in the faith. Fight on, no matter the difficulty, no matter the distresses, no matter the anguish, no matter the anxiety, no matter the pain of being parted one from the other.

Keep on, be steadfast, don't be moved from your moorings, from the fundamentals of the Christian faith. your labor will yet be rewarded and the day will come when you will stand with the Lord Jesus Christ in the resurrection, your soul reunited to your body, clothed gloriously with immortality and corruption to be forever with the Lord.

Death will then for the church be swallowed up in victory completely. Oh my friend, and I come back to what I said at the beginning, death is our constant companion, reminding us of the cost of our fellows who not so long ago sat with us here and sat with us there, and are now no more.

it will be said of you and of me soon, the place which knew him once will one day know him no more. With what confidence can you face that inevitable eventuality?

Can you look at it through faith in Christ and will you be numbered among those ye who will even welcome it as that which releases them from the stresses and the strains and the tensions of life and who can look beyond it to the day when in the resurrection their soul will be reunited to the body when they shall serve the Lord throughout the endless ages of all eternity.

[39 : 59] let us pray. Bless to us thy word the word that reminds us of the triumph of our Lord over death in his own death.

We bless thee that his death was truly the death of death and that through that death we tonight have life and immortality.

O Lord make him precious to us part us with thy blessing now and forgive sin and him Amen.