

“The Death of Death”

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## Opening Prayer

Good morning, I hope and pray that you are doing well whenever you are watching this. We have not ceased to be in prayer for you, and God willing we will see you again in person very soon! As always do know that we are here for you in all of this, please do not hesitate to call upon your church and your minister for anything that you need. There is help available to you, please don't suffer in silence alone. Financially, mentally, spiritually, etc. we are here for you folks.

As we are now on the other side of Easter and yet are still in this quarantine, our sermons are going to be focused on something positive until we meet in person once again. Last week we looked at Romans 8 and Isaiah 61 to see how Christ has set us free from sin and death, today we look at something similar by talking about how death dies. In order to do this, we first have to understand where death came from.

Today we begin with the beginning, which is where death came from in the first place out of the book of Genesis. Our first reading was really short, Genesis 3:15. It read “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” These words are spoken to the serpent (Satan) in the Garden of Eden just after he caused Adam and Eve to sin. The result of Adam and Eve willfully disobeying God, trying to make themselves God's equal, was that they were cast out of the garden. Before they sinned they lived in complete harmony and in full community with the Lord. They were never going to die, they did not sin, they spoke with Him face to face, and all was right. However, as a result of sin, as a result of being cut off from the source of life (the Lord Himself), they were told they were going to die. Indeed, eventually they did. But in scripture there are, as we know, two types of death. There is the physical death that you and I will experience if the Lord doesn't return first, where our bodies cease to function, decay, and we do not continue on. However, the soul does not die in that death. Your essence, the part of you that makes you you, that continues on in one of two places, heaven or hell. Heaven, our natural eternal home where we will be in full communion with the Lord and His people as we were meant to be before sin entered the world, we often call eternal life. Hell, though, is known as the second death. As God is pronouncing all this to Adam, Eve, and the serpent, He then throws in verse fifteen, our first reading. The phrase, “He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel” has great meaning for us. It is recognized as the first Messianic prophecy in scripture.

The concept here, the great plan, right from the beginning is that although Satan will “bruise Him on the heel” (meaning Jesus will be killed for our sins), Jesus will “bruise him on the head.” By going to the cross for our sins, by taking our punishment, Jesus in effect kills sin and death. Satan, often known as the “accuser” in scripture, has one big goal with regards to you and me. He wants to see as many of us in eternal damnation with him as possible to hurt the Lord, and to do this he accuses us of our sins and tries to take us far from the Lord. You have probably heard that voice in the back of your head telling you that “you aren’t good enough, the Lord could never love you...” or something like that. That is how Satan tries to take us away from our Lord and bring us under death’s power. Of course we still die here. Our physical actions still have consequences, even if we are forgiven, but that second death is completely obliterated by Jesus for us and ultimately too we don’t stay physically dead.

Jumping ahead to the end of the Bible in our second and third readings, we see in Revelation that at the Judgement Seat that Christ stands in for us and brings us with Him to eternal life. We see in Revelation 20:14 “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” He literally ends death (including the physical death at that point), by killing it. For us in Revelation 21:3 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.’” Eternal life is a return to the Garden of Eden, without the serpent or sin in any fashion, where we will be with Him in all His glory fully and freely.

Beloved, when we talk about judgement, or being judged, or judging another, we tend to think it as always a negative thing. We think about the verse that is taken out of context from Matthew 7:1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” We always forget the direction that Jesus takes that statement. In Matthew 7:2 He continues “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” The point there is not to never ever judge another for their behavior (we do that all the time anyways), but to understand that if we judge someone else that we will be judged by that exact same measure. As Christians, we recognize that we are sinners like everyone else, so instead of looking at others with disdain we should point them towards the only one who forgives sin, Jesus the Christ. Jesus, because He is perfect, is absolutely qualified to judge and pass judgement. When we talk about judgement, we always think it is negative coming from above... but the truth is that judgement is actually an extremely good thing for the one who is rightfully judged. If someone is accused of a heinous crime that they did not commit, and they are judged rightfully, then the judgement passed on them is a positive thing. They are set free. Similarly, for a victim to see the thief, the rapist, the abuser, rightfully judged is also a positive thing as it ensures protection. (Or at least it should of course.) When it comes to judgement for us at the hands of the Lord, it will ultimately be a good thing because Christ took our punishment and pronounces us clean. For death, it will be the end. When Jesus judges death in Revelation 20:14, the punishment for death is death... and so at the hands of Jesus death will die. What this will

realistically look like for us can be seen in our final reading for this morning, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:50-58, epitomized in verse 52 which reads “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

In this section of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Paul is finishing up his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the church of Corinth. The only chapter after this one is simply his instructions and greeting for folks. In essence, the final lesson he is teaching the Corinthians is on the resurrection. Paul begins our little section by telling us something that we already know. Verse 50 says “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” But he follows that up with an extremely important teaching that we should not forget “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” We already know, Beloved, that at some point our hourglass will be empty. We will all die physically, the young and the old. But while we will physically die, we definitely won’t stay that way by the grace of God.

How this works is explained in verse 53, “For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.” If you have ever heard a preacher or another Christian reference “putting on Christ” this is exactly what they are referencing. We are mortal, but He is not. With His death on the cross He gives us that immortality if we receive His free gift of salvation. This is how we defeat death, and how death dies, because the ruler of all takes death’s power over us away. As Paul says in verses 56-58 “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

Knowing that death will be defeated on judgement day, and knowing that judgement will be good for us as we are cleaved to Jesus, the brass tacks for us in this time is that final verse. We should be steadfast, immovable, always abounding the work of the Lord, knowing that our toil in Him is not for nothing. It is easy to get frustrated in times like this. One of the resources that I use reminded me of this while I was preparing to give the sermon this morning. Every single one of us has eternal longings in our hearts, whether we want to admit it or not. Often when someone we love passes on, or when we are heartbroken, or when our lives are flipped upside down (as they are for all of us now), we feel the eternal urge within us. The desire that what we do would be important and last forever, the desire for our eternal home, the desire for eternal peace. Beloved, by the grace of God, by Jesus’s death and resurrection, by the death of death, all that does come true for us in His time. The work you do in the Lord here will last. Raising your children in the church has eternal consequences for them. The time you spend in prayer for others has an everlasting impact. Because death dies, we live, and because we live with Christ, the work we do is not in vain if it is done in the Lord.

So what should you take away from this message today on this beautiful Sunday? You should take away some peace and some joy in knowing that Jesus has overcome death. The work we do has value because of this, and we can heartily look forward to judgement and the return of the way things should always have been in the Garden of Eden in heaven. Coronavirus, isolation, depression, political garbage, and everything else cannot take this from you. Rest in Christ, sound and secure. Praise the Lord, let us pray,

### **Closing Prayer**