

1992, Victory Over Death

Easter

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We are gathered together today to celebrate the occasion of Easter. And, like every major religious holiday, gross misconceptions as to the meaning and significance have arisen in the minds of people concerning that holiday that is called Easter. And so we must therefore ask ourselves the question this morning: What is the meaning and the significance of Easter?

Let me say, first of all, that it's significance and meaning does not lie in rabbits or in eggs or in new dresses. These items like the Santa Claus and the reindeer of Christmas have been promoted and pushed to the forefront by a godless world that is unwilling to speak of or face the reality of what Easter is really all about. These things are substitutes for the reality, and poor ones at that. And so we must return to our question. What then is the meaning and the significance of Easter?

Well, Easter is a time in which we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that event has significance not only because it is unparalleled in all of human history, but because it alone gives us hope for solving the problem of death.

The human race faces many problems. It faces the problems of injustice, of poverty, of war, of crime, of the breakdown of the family. But there is no greater problem that the human race faces than the problem of death. It is the one problem that we as humans are utterly powerless in the face of. It comes to one and all and we stand defeated and helpless to do anything about death. But the good news of Easter and the reason why we celebrate it is that Jesus Christ did conquer death.

Throughout history man has faced death and man has lost. I have been vividly reminded of that in this past week as I held a funeral for the landlord of this building. But Jesus Christ faced death and he won. Death could not hold him as it has everyone else. He rose from the dead never to die again. The Bible says regarding Jesus Christ that, "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."¹

And, you see, it is his victory over death that provides us with the means whereby we might have victory over death.

¹ Romans 6:9.

This is the significance of Easter. His resurrection declares that victory over death has been obtained. Christ faced death. He defeated death and he rose victorious over it.

You see, victory over death is not to be found in nice philosophical ideas. Victory over death is not to be found in medical science. Victory over death is not to be found in a cultic ritual in which we seek to have contact with the dead. Victory over death is to be found in a person, a person who himself has conquered death and that person is Jesus Christ.

And so this is what Easter is all about. It is about victory over death.

Now, in order to better understand this victory over death, I want to examine three aspects of this issue this morning. In the first place, we want to consider together the origin and the cause of death. And then we will consider the result and the consequences of death. And then, finally, we will consider the defeat and the conquest of death.

In the first place, then, let's consider together the origin and the cause of death. After all, why do people die? Where did death come from and what causes it? Is it necessary that people die? Why is that the universal human experience? We must answer that question.

And in order to answer those questions we must go back to the beginning of the human race, to the book of Genesis. And in Genesis chapter one and chapter two and chapter three we have the record of God's creation of man and of his first dealings with man. And from this record we learn that man was not created to die. Man was created to live forever. Notice if you will Genesis chapter two beginning at verse 15.

It says:

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.²

Now the clear implication of verse 17 is simply this, is that if Adam did not eat, he would go on living forever. You see, the threat of death would be meaningless if Adam were going to die anyway. It would be kind of like going to a man who is already condemned to life in prison and to tell him, "Look, if you commit another crime, you are going to serve life in prison."

His response would be, "Big deal. I am already here anyway. What difference does it make?"

And if Adam were going to die anyway, God's threat of death upon him for violating God's law would be a meaningless threat. And so Adam was never created to die. He

² Genesis 2:15-17.

was created to live forever. And yet the sad chronicle is that Adam and Eve did eat in disobedience to God.

We read in Genesis three beginning at verse one:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.³

And then look at Genesis chapter five and verse five.

“And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.”⁴

What is the origin and the cause of death? When did death begin? Death began with Adam and Eve. And what was its cause? Its cause was disobedience to God’s command. They would have lived forever had they not disobeyed God’s command. And their death was a direct result of disobeying the command of God.

Now it is critically important for us to realize this fact. The cause of death is not disease. The cause of death is not old age. The cause of death is not accidents. The cause of death is sin. It is disobedience to God’s commands. And the fact that sin is the cause of death is recorded throughout the Scriptures.

Ezekiel 18:20 says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”⁵

Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.”⁶

John 8:21 Jesus said to the Pharisees, “[You] shall die in your sins.”⁷

And Romans 5:12 declares, “As by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”⁸

You see, there is an absolute relationship between sin and death. The former causes the latter. It is a cause and effect relationship. And death is as broad as the human race because sin is as broad as the human experience.

³ Genesis 3:1-19.

⁴ Genesis 5:5.

⁵ Ezekiel 18:20.

⁶ Romans 6:23.

⁷ John 8:21.

⁸ Romans 5:12.

The Scriptures tell us in Romans 3:23 that “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”⁹

1 John one verse eight and 10 say that if we say that we have not sinned we make him a liar and his Word is not in us. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

It is a fact that we will all die some day. And the reason why is because we have all sinned. Sin is the cause of death. And had sin never entered the human race, death would have never entered the human experience.

Well, this, then, is the origin and the cause of death. It began with the first created humans and it was caused by breaking God’s law.

Now, in the second place we want to consider together the result and the consequences of death. Having considered the origin and the cause of death, we want to consider the result and the consequences of death.

What happens when a person dies?

Well, the answer to that question is important to know what death is. Death is separation. Mark that down. Death is separation. Death is not cessation. It is not termination. It is separation. In the case of physical death it is the separation of the body and the soul. The body stays behind and the soul goes on.

The Bible says, “For as the body without the spirit is dead...”¹⁰

And so when a body and a spirit separate from one another, death occurs. And in the case of spiritual death, it is separation again. In this case the separation of the soul from God.

When we die spiritually that means that there is a separation of our soul from God. And just as physical life demands the union of the body and soul, so spiritual life demands the union of the soul and God.

Now when God told Adam and Eve that they would die if they broke his law, he was talking about both physical death and spiritual death. You see, they immediately died spiritually when they broke God’s law. That is, they became separated from God. They hid from him. They feared him. They were alienated from him. They came under his curse and judgment. They lost his blessing. They were driven from the garden. They lost the joy of fellowship with him. Sin brought spiritual death and sin brought a wall of separation between man and God.

And then they eventually died physically. Their bodies were separated from their souls.

⁹ Romans 3:23.

¹⁰ James 2:26.

Now all of us find ourselves in a state of spiritual death by virtue of our birth. We are born separated from God because we are born sinful. And we engage in acts of sin, breaking of God's law, which further ensures and deepens the separation between ourselves and God. And so all of us find ourselves in a state of spiritual death, of separation from God because of sin. And all of us will find ourselves facing the certainty of physical death, separation from our body because of sin.

And this is important. Listen carefully. If we die physically while we are dead spiritually, we will forever remain in that state of spiritual death.

Right now, if you are not a Christian, you are in a state of separation from God. Your body and soul are still together, but your soul and body are separated. And if you die while your soul and God are separated then your soul and God will be separated from one another for eternity and without remedy.

If we die physically while we are dead spiritually, we will forever remain in that state of spiritual death and will remain forever separated from God.

The separation of a man from his body is a fearful thing that we seek to avoid at all costs. But the separation of man from his God in this life and the next is an infinitely greater disaster. It involves not only losing the blessing of God's fellowship and help, but it also involves becoming the object of his judgment and wrath, of being cast into the lake of fire. Of hearing those awful words, "Depart from me you workers of iniquity. I never knew you. I never had a personal relationship with you."

And if we die physically while we are in a state of spiritual separation from God, we will remain in that state forever. That is the result and the consequence of death. It is physical and spiritual separation from our bodies and from God.

Well, having considered together, then, the origin and the cause of death, having seen that it is sin and the result and the consequences of sin is physical and spiritual death, in their place we want to consider together the defeat and the conquest of death.

See, if I were to stop this message right now and we were to all go home, there would be no hope. We know that we are going to die physically. We know that we are dead spiritually separated from God. What is the remedy and the hope?

Well, the remedy and the hope is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ.

You see, if Jesus Christ had not come to this earth, then the outlook would be bleak indeed. We would have only death to face, separation from God in this life, separation of our body and soul and separation from God forever while bearing the punishment of our sin.

But the good news of Easter is that Jesus Christ did come and he defeated and conquered death. That is the good news of Easter. And what did he do? How did he defeat and conquer death? Well, he defeated death by removing the cause of death.

Now, do you remember what the cause of death is? Is the cause of death sickness? Is the cause of death old age? Is the cause of death accidents? No. What is the cause of death. The cause of death is sin.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”¹¹

And so what Jesus Christ did is he came and he dealt with sin which is the cause of death. We read in the Bible in 1 John, pardon me in the gospel of John chapter one and verse 29 that we are to behold the Lamb of God who does what? He takes away the sin of the world. He doesn't take away old age. He doesn't take away disease and he doesn't take away accidents. But what he does take away is sin. And if the cause of death could be removed, then death itself could be overcome. And this is exactly what happened.

Matthew chapter one and verse 21 tells us that, “[Mary] shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”¹²

When we are saved from sin we are saved from the consequence of sin, namely death. Now how did Jesus save us from our sins?

Well, the Bible tells us that he bore our sins in his own body on the cross in order that we, being dead to sin, should then live unto righteousness. You see, he saved us from our sins and from the consequences of those sins by bearing them himself as our substitute. We should have died. We should have borne the wrath of God. But Jesus Christ took our place. He bore the consequences of sin which is separation from God.

Remember, when he was on the cross he says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

What was he experiencing there? He was experiencing separation from God. You see, he took our sins on himself and he bore the consequences of our sin in himself, one of which was separation from God. He also endured separation from his body. He died.

And so what did Jesus Christ do? He suffered both physical death and spiritual death in the place of and as a substitute for sinful people.

The wages of sin were fully paid. The result of sin was fully experienced. The justice of God was fully satisfied by Jesus Christ so that death and sin no longer have any claim or any power over the sinner. Jesus died not as a result of his own sin because he didn't have any. He died as a result of our sin so we would not have to. And three days after his death he rose from the grave. And the reason why it was possible for him to raise from

¹¹ Ezekiel 18:20.

¹² Matthew 1:21.

the grave is because the power of sin and earth had been fully destroyed and so death had no more claim upon Christ because sin was fully eliminated.

Romans chapter our and verse 25 says regarding Jesus Christ that he was delivered to death on account of our sins and he was raised again on account of our justification. And so Jesus Christ conquered death because he fully dealt with its cause which is sin. His resurrection was God's sign that sin and its consequence, death, had been put away forever.

And, you see, this is what Easter is all about. It is about victory over death, victory over your death and victory over my death.

Now there are two very important things to note, however, and the first is this. The benefits of Christ's victory over death are not automatically ours. The benefits of Christ's victory over death are not automatically ours. Just because Jesus Christ dealt with the cause of death, which is sin, and gained victory over death in that he was raised from the grave, the benefits of those things do not automatically apply to every man, woman and child on the face of the earth.

Jesus said in John chapter six and verse 40, "Every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."¹³

He said, "Everyone that seeth the Son."¹⁴ To see him means to see him for who he is. He is not speaking here of a physical vision, otherwise none of us could be saved. It is not that we have to physically lay our eyes on Christ, but to see him in the sense of understanding him.

We use this terminology all the time. We are explaining someone to somebody and they say, "Oh, yeah. I see." And what they mean is, "I understand. I comprehend. I grasp."

Everyone who comprehends, who grasps the Son, that is, who understands him for who he is, that he is God in human flesh, that he is the Savior from sin, when we understand Christ for who he is. And then it says, "And believeth on him."¹⁵ That is, we trust in him as our Savior. This is more than just a mere mental assent.

Oh, yes, I believe in Christ. He was a great man. But I believe in him as my Savior and I trust in him as my Savior.

To those people shall be granted everlasting life and Jesus Christ will raise them up at the last day to eternal life and eternal victory and eternal blessedness in heaven. They and they alone are the ones who have victory over death.

¹³ John 6:40.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

John chapter three and verse 36 says, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”¹⁶ But, and here is the other category of individually, “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”¹⁷

And so the benefits of Christ's victory over death are not automatically applied to everyone. They are only applied to those who understand Jesus Christ for who he is and who believe in him for what he has done.

And I ask you the question this morning. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you trust in him? Are you casting the whole weight of your future salvation and resurrection from the dead to glory in heaven upon him and upon him alone?

You see, he is the means of victory over death because he is the one who has dealt with and removed sin. And if we do not believe in him as our cleanser from sin and cry out to him to take away our sin, then we have no deliverance from the consequences of sin which is spiritual and physical death. But, oh, if we do cry out to him and trust in him and believe in him and embrace him as our Savior, as our Savior from sin, then the Scripture says that we have everlasting life. And what that means to us is that death has been conquered.

Now the second question you may ask is this. If Christ gained victory over death, then why do Christians still die? Because they do die physically.

Well, Jesus Christ obtained victory over death.

People say, [?] obtained victory over death, but people still die.

Well, indeed, he did obtain victory over death. Death could not hold him. Death was a temporary state of affairs for him. And neither can death hold us.

You see, for the Christian, physical death is a means of release from this sin corrupted body in order that we might obtain a glorious resurrection body.

Paul says, “For me to live is Christ but to die is [what?] gain.”¹⁸ It is an advantage. And instead of death being an awful separation, death becomes an open door, a means of release from this sin corrupted body in order that we might obtain a glorious resurrection body.

Remember the passage we read in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 53 through 54? The apostle declares there for us these words. He says, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”¹⁹

¹⁶ John 3:36.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Philippians 1:21.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:53.

You see, that is what death is for the Christian. It is a means whereby we simply shed this corruptible body in order to put on an incorruptible body that shall be suited to live forever in heaven. Death is swallowed up in victory.

“O grave, where is thy victory?”²⁰

And the answer is the grave has no victor.

“Death where is thy sting?”²¹

Well, the sting of death is sin, but all sins have been cleansed. It has been atoned for. It has been taken away by the person of our Savior.

And if we are to be saved from separation from God, then we must be saved from sin. And if we are to be saved from sin, then we must trust in the Savior from sin who is none other than Jesus Christ.

“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”²²

That, beloved, is the message of Easter, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Is he your Lord? Are you trusting in him to save you? Let me urge you upon you. Go to him. Cry out to him. Find in him that forgiveness, that cleansing and that salvation in order that you, too, might know that glorious victory over death which he has obtained.

Shall we pray together?

Our Father, how grateful we are that we were not left with the consequences of sin, left to face nothing but hopelessness and the grave and eternal separation and torment. Father, to know that Jesus Christ has provided us a new and a living way, a living hope to which we have been begotten by his resurrection from the dead. Father, thank you that we have an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away reserved in heaven for us, we who are kept by the power of God. And, Father, we do trust in the Lord Jesus. We do see him as the only solution to the problem of death. We do see him, Father, as the only Savior from sin and, our Father, we do believe in him and trust in him and cling to him. Father, we thank you for the gift of everlasting life and we look forward to that day in which we will be raised from corruption to incorruption and we shall know the glorious liberty of the sons of God, free from sin, free from death. For in that final day, Father, you shall wipe all tears from our eyes and there shall be no more death nor sorrow nor crying neither shall there be any more pain for the former things are passed away. These things are true and faithful. Father, we do believe them. Bless us, our Father, and give us the confidence and the grace to face life because we can face death

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:55.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Romans 6:23.

*knowing that death has been defeated and that it shall be swallowed up in victory.
Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*