

Death Swallowed Up in Victory

by C.J. Mahaney

The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides a gracious solution to the problem of death and sin, offering forgiveness and hope for those who trust in Him.

Duration: 52:57

Scripture: John 11:25, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15:17, Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Death"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the reality of death and the illusion of safety that we often cling to. The events of September 11 serve as a reminder that no matter how careful or distant we are from evil, death can still find us. The speaker emphasizes that death is inevitable for all of us because we are all sinners. Sin is described as a universal moral deformity that separates us from God, leading to both physical and eternal death. The sermon draws from the book of Genesis, highlighting the repetition of the phrase 'and he died' to emphasize the consequences of sin and the spread of death throughout humanity.

Transcript

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Direct your attention to a single verse. This single verse will occupy our attention this morning and actually a phrase within this verse will primarily occupy our attention this morning as God addresses us through His Word.

1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 17 What a privilege, what a privilege, what a joy it is for me to address you on this special day. For today, genuine Christians throughout the world are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the rising of the sun to its setting this day, the church universal is celebrating the one who died as our substitute on the cross for our sins, the Savior who has indeed been risen from the dead.

He has been raised from the dead and what a privilege it is for us to celebrate His resurrection together with the church universal this day. But Easter is not only a most appropriate occasion for celebration, Easter serves as a yearly sobering reminder of a topic that we work hard to ignore and avoid. Easter is not only a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Easter serves as an annual reminder of the harsh reality of death.

An annual reminder of the harsh reality of death. This relationship between Easter and the harsh reality of death was effectively captured in an article I read not long after the 9-11 terrorist attack. The title of the article was Easter in an Age of Terror, subtitled Living and Dying and Living Again After September 11.

The author writes, people flood churches on Easter because they know they are going to hear good news. But then he writes, but Easter is also terrifying news. According to Mark's Gospel, early on a Sunday morning Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome made their way to a tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus.

Mark also tells us that these women had earlier watched the crucifixion of Jesus quote, from a distance. When it was all over, they saw Joseph of Arimathea pull the dead body off the cross, wrap it in a linen cloth, lay it in a tomb hewn out of rock, and then roll the stone over the door of the tomb. They watched it all.

They watched it all from a distance. That is our favorite perspective on death. We do all we can to keep our distance from it.

We try to stay healthy, work out, watch what we eat, and we're careful, so careful. It's all a way of keeping death at bay. But occasionally, it catches up to someone you love and then you know, like these women, that you have to go and see death up close.

On September 11, it became painfully clear that death can always bridge the distance to find any of us. What crumbled on that dark day were not just skyscrapers, but also our illusions that we were somehow safe from the violence the rest of the world has known for a very long time. It doesn't matter how wealthy, well defended, or far removed we are from evil men.

Terror can still find us. Every time I drive past the Pentagon, I'm reminded that not even powerful generals and admirals in a seemingly impenetrable fortress can keep death at a distance. And then finally, what hope? What hope do the rest of us have? What hope do the rest of us have? Well, if we're looking to avoid death, there is no hope.

Because each of us will have our own encounter with death. Our hope this morning as Christians is not in the avoidance of death. Our hope is in the triumph over death that Jesus Christ provides through His death and resurrection.

This morning we're going to contemplate the relevance of the resurrection to the subject we most like to distance ourselves from. Death. And we all need to be reminded of the harsh reality of death, because each day most of us do all we can to avoid thinking about death.

From the moment we draw our first breath, we all live under the threatening shadow of death. And from our earliest years, we do all we can to avoid thinking about death in my life. This tendency to avoid even thinking about death continues to this very day.

Each day I read the Washington Post and each day I read the sports page intentionally and only arrive at the obituaries accidentally. And when I accidentally arrive at the obituaries, my impulse is to immediately turn away from the obituaries and to return to the sports page or another part of the paper. It's part of this daily tendency to avoid thinking about death.

I don't take walks in cemeteries. I prefer weddings rather than funerals. Each day, each day I try to avoid making eye contact with death.

Perhaps you do as well. My historical hero, Charles Spurgeon, made the following insightful observation. And if you're honest, this is a description of you.

He wrote, We admit that we shall die, but not so soon as to make it a pressing matter. We imagine that we are not within measurable distance of the tomb. And even the oldest man gives himself a little longer lease.

And when he has passed his 80 years, we have seen him hugging life with as much tenacity as if he had just commenced it. Death will not spare us because we avoid him. We are deceived if we think that by ignoring death, we postpone death.

Don Carson captures the mood of our culture in relation to death when he wrote the following, The modern mood is living life as if death were not waiting for us at the end. That is indeed the modern mood. Living life as if death were not waiting for us at the end.

To differing degrees, we have all been influenced by this modern mood. That modern mood of living life as if death were not waiting for us at the end, that's the air you've been breathing prior to entering this auditorium. That is the modern mood in relation to death.

But this modern mood in relation to death certainly doesn't represent the mood of the Bible on the topic because here in Holy Scripture, we encounter a different mood altogether in relation to death. The Bible does not avoid the topic of death. The Bible actually stares unflinchingly into the eyes of death.

And this morning, you could, even now at this moment, open your Bible randomly. I could lead this entire congregation in the practice of each of us randomly opening our Bibles and I could assure you that wherever you find yourself in your Bible, after randomly opening your Bible, you are not far from some reference and reminder related to death. Whether it's a reminder of the ever-present reality of death or a detailed treatment of death as we find in 1 Corinthians 15.

The Bible repeatedly references the harsh reality of death but the Bible does more. The Bible does more than simply referencing the harsh reality of death. The Bible also informs us about the theological significance of death.

And this we must grasp. We must grasp the theological significance of death if we are going to truly understand, appreciate, and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, what does the Bible teach about the theological significance of death? Well, biblically, death is no accident.

Death is no accident. Death is not simply a most unpleasant, predictable, natural phenomenon. No.

The Bible describes death differently. The Bible describes death as God's just punishment for our sins. That is the theological significance of death.

Death is God's just judgment for sin. Now, before I proceed, I must not assume that our understanding of sin, that everyone's understanding of sin present here is theologically informed because our culture has really emptied the word sin from its theological content. Therefore, I must remind you of the theological definition of sin.

I actually came across an article this past week in USA Today. The title of the article was, Has the Notion of Sin Been Lost? The article begins with this reference, Is Sin Dead? It's not only a concern reflected in this article for the redefinition of sin in our culture, but my good friend Al Mohler was interviewed for this article and he makes the following statement expressing his concern for the church. Dr. Mohler said the following, I wonder whether even some Christian churches are making the connection between Christ's

death and resurrection and victory over sin, the linchpin doctrine of Christianity.

Well, I pray that all churches, all genuine churches are making that connection. But by God's grace, Covenant Life Church will make that connection. That is a connection that must be made.

Now, maybe the finest definition of sin I've come across is provided by J.I. Packer. So, allow this to theologically inform our souls so that we might understand the theological significance of death. Dr. Packer writes that Scripture diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature found at every point in every person.

Both Testaments have names for it that display its ethical character as rebellion against God's rule, missing the mark God set us to aim at, transgressing God's law, disobeying God's directive, offending God's purity by defiling oneself, and incurring guilt before God the Judge. This moral deformity is dynamic. Sin stands revealed as an energy of irrational, negative, and rebellious reaction to God's call and command.

A spirit of fighting God in order to play God. A spirit of fighting God in order to play God. Death is God's just judgment for sin as just described.

Death was introduced when Adam and Eve first sinned. Adam and Eve were given the gift of life. They were given physical provision, relational companionship, purposeful responsibility, and divine fellowship.

There was only one prohibition given to them in the Garden. But, they rebelled. They rebelled against the goodness of God, the authority of God, the wisdom of God.

And as a result, they forfeited the gift of life. God gave them the gift of life, and they used it to rebel against Him rather than to serve and glorify Him. And so, He took it back from them.

They experienced, upon sinning, immediate spiritual death and separation from God's presence. And ultimately, they would experience physical death. Sin enters the world in Genesis 3. Death enters the world in Genesis 3. And once sin enters, death spreads.

Spreads immediately in chapter 4. Cain murders his brother Abel. In chapter 5, there is a lengthy genealogy. And throughout this lengthy genealogy in Genesis chapter 5, we read the following phrase.

And He died. Eight times. Eight times in Genesis chapter 5, you will read, And He died.

It has a certain monotonous repetition to it. And one day, it will be written, And you died. We will all eventually die.

For we have all sinned. And sin is a universal moral deformity. We are all born in sin.

We all inherit a sinful nature. Each of us commits actual sins. Each of us has sinned against God.

Each of us is guilty before God. Scripture is clear. All have sinned.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There are no exceptions.

No exceptions. This is similar to, All must wait in line for hours at the Motor Vehicles Administration, only it's far, far more serious. There are no exceptions.

All have sinned. And because all have sinned, all will die. Why? Death is God's just judgment against our sin.

Now, why death? Why death? Why death as God's just judgment against sin? And in response to sin, well, it would be difficult to improve on Dr. Carson's answer to this important question from his excellent book, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. Dr. Carson writes the following, *But why death? Here's why*. Death is God's limit on creatures whose sin is they want to be gods.

We are not gods. And by death we learn that we are only human. Our pretensions are destroyed.

Death is God's determination to limit our arrogance. Death is God's determination to limit our arrogance. Oh, God has effectively limited our arrogance.

Funerals are always humbling and sobering because funerals require us to look death in the eye. Funerals require eye contact with death. And funerals remind all present that all present are merely standing in line.

They will one day, too, be placed in a casket and lowered into the ground. Funerals are always humbling. God has indeed effectively limited our arrogance.

But listen, the righteous judgment of God against our sin is not confined to death. Though death is the appropriate judgment for sin, it is not the only judgment for sin, and it is not the ultimate judgment for sin. For sinners who have offended a holy God and who have refused to turn from their sins and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ for their sins, there awaits for those individuals the terrifying experience of the righteous and eternal wrath of God.

For we read in Scripture, it is appointed unto man once to die, but the passage doesn't end there. There's not a period. Only a comma.

It is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment. And then the judgment. And though this offends the sensibilities of arrogant mankind, this is the appropriate judgment of a holy God to those who though made in His image and for His glory, have rebelled against Him and against His authority.

Physical death leads to eternal death in the form of eternal punishment. Now, no doubt, at least a few, and maybe more, are thinking right now, *Why? Why is He belaboring these points?* This was not what I anticipated. I thought He said, didn't He say at the outset that today the church universal was celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ? I thought He mentioned that at the outset of His sermon, but since mentioning that at the outset of His sermon, I would say that I've been more than a little surprised at the content of this sermon and the tone of this sermon, for I arrived today hoping, expecting, anticipating something more cheerful than this.

That's for sure. So, why does this guy seem to be preoccupied with death and sin and judgment? Doesn't he know? Here's why. Here's why I belabor these points.

Here's why. We must not. We must not.

We cannot approach the resurrection of Jesus Christ apart from contemplating, considering, and applying the purpose of His resurrection and ultimately the effect of His resurrection. Resurrection is not merely or simply a point of doctrine. Now, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most gracious, divine solution to the problem of death and sin and judgment.

And if we are going to fully understand, appreciate, and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then we must understand the realities of death and sin and judgment. Now, Easter is a yearly reminder of the harsh reality of death. Easter is a yearly reminder of the theological significance of death.

Easter reminds us that death is divine punishment for sin. And Easter reminds us that death is not the ultimate punishment for sin. But, that's not all Easter does.

Easter not only reminds us of death and sin and judgment. No, Easter also reveals the divine provision for death and sin and judgment. And Easter proclaims that death and sin and judgment don't have the final words.

That's what Easter proclaims. That's what Easter announces. So, let me draw your attention to two points.

Two things the resurrection announces. Two breathtaking realities that are announced on Easter Sunday as we contemplate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how that relates to death, sin, and judgment. Number one, forgiveness of sin.

Forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of sin. We have no greater need this morning.

We have no more serious need this morning than to be forgiven of our sins by God. Than to be forgiven of our countless sins. Than to be forgiven of our innumerable sins against God.

We have no greater need than to be forgiven of our innumerable sins against God by God Himself. We have no greater need. We have no more serious need this morning than the forgiveness of our sins.

Our friend John Piper has written the following in relation to this point. I put this forgiveness of sins as the basic need. Yes, the basic need and longing of our hearts because listen, if God holds our sins against us, then there is no hope of anything else from God.

The foundation of every other blessing from God is that God won't hold our sins against us. Everything hangs on forgiveness. Oh yes it does.

Everything hangs on forgiveness. This is our basic need. This is our most serious need.

We have no greater need than this. All present have sinned against God. Each of us.

Each of us is guilty before God. Each of us brings into this auditorium this morning an undeniable and unalterable sin. We have sinned in our arrogance.

We have rebelled. We have offended the Holy One. We are all, everyone here, everyone here is guilty.

We are all guilty and left to ourselves, left to ourselves only condemnation and wrath await us upon death. And divine wrath is real. R.C. Sproul calls the greatest myth of the 20th century this.

The myth that there is no wrath in God. Well, divine wrath is real. Divine wrath is frightening.

Actually, there's nothing more terrifying we read in Scripture than references to divine wrath. And listen, the wrath of God, justly exercised against our sins, cannot be satisfied by human activity. Cannot be satisfied by human activity.

Cannot be set aside by human activity. Cannot be set aside by good works. Listen, we are in desperate need of forgiveness from God.

We are entangled by sin. We cannot extract ourselves from sin. Listen, if God holds our sins against us, there is no hope for any of us.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ announces a most gracious divine solution to our most serious problem. The resurrection of Jesus Christ addresses our most serious need. The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides what we desperately need and cannot resolve the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness of sins is available to us only, only if He was resurrected from the dead. Look with me quickly again in chapter 15 and look with me at verse 16 where we read, For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised. Verse 17, And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.

In this passage, Paul is addressing the error of the Corinthians who were denying the resurrection of the dead. They were not denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but they were denying their resurrection. They were denying the resurrection of the dead.

They had in effect been influenced by and adopted a Greek worldview where material reality is inferior to the spiritual. So to them the body was undesirable and the resurrection of the body was unthinkable. And Paul is refuting their error.

And he refutes their error by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the dead are not raised, listen to verse 16, then not even Christ has been raised. So if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised.

And listen, the implications of Christ not being raised could not be more concerning or frightening because in verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, well then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. So if the resurrection did not occur, well then His death on the cross for sinners like you and me as our substitute and for our sins was not effective. And if the resurrection did not occur, His death was not effective.

And if His death was not effective, then I and you and all of us were still in our sins. And all that awaits us is condemnation and wrath. Eternally without the resurrection, the cross is meaningless and ultimately fruitless.

But listen again, listen again for the very first time to the good news. Please fasten your attention and your affections on verse 20 where we read, but in fact, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Oh yes, He has indeed been raised from the dead. And so what does this reveal? What does the resurrection reveal? What does the resurrection confirm? Well, the resurrection reveals the Father's satisfaction with the Savior's sacrifice for our sin. That's what the resurrection reveals.

John Stott writes, He who had been condemned for us in His death was publicly vindicated in His resurrection. The resurrection is God's decisive demonstration The resurrection is God's decisive demonstration that He had not died in vain. See, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is our assurance that His sacrifice for our sins was sufficient.

The resurrection was a public demonstration, a public attestation by the Father that the Father was satisfied with the sinless sacrifice of His Son. Salvation has been secured. Forgiveness of sin assured.

His death was not in vain. The cross secured forgiveness of sin and the resurrection assures us of forgiveness of sin. All those who have turned from their sin and trusted in the Savior are no longer in their sins.

They have been forgiven of their sins. And that's what Easter reveals. That's what Easter announces.

It announces this divine provision for those who deserve, richly deserve, to be divinely punished. It announces forgiveness of sin for all those who will turn from their sin and believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ for their sin. So, our greatest need, the forgiveness of sin, is assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, here's my concern at this moment. It is possible for us to affirm this truth, this glorious truth, without allowing this glorious truth to have its appropriate effect on our souls. It's possible to affirm this without applying it.

In fact, I would argue that it's actually easier to affirm this than it is to apply it. So, it is quite possible for someone present today to affirm the resurrection and not fully enjoy the effect of the resurrection. It is possible to affirm the resurrection and live as if you are still in your sin.

So, let me ask you two questions. Number one, how certain are you of the forgiveness of your sins by God? How certain? Are you certain? Do you live certain? How certain are you of the forgiveness of your sins? Are you certain? Are you certain you've been forgiven of your sins by God or are you suspicious? Is there low-grade suspicion in your soul that they might not all be forgiven? I'm certain most are forgiven. I'm not certain all are forgiven.

Are you convinced this morning? Are you convinced God is satisfied? Are you convinced God is completely satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son as your substitute for your sins? Or, do you think this morning, I must add, in order for God to be satisfied, I must add, I must add my obedience. I must add my service. I must add my good works.

Then, and only then, will God be satisfied. So, we always have to ask ourselves, if the Father is satisfied with the Son's sacrifice, why aren't you? Why aren't you? See, Easter is about celebrating the Father's satisfaction with the Son's sacrifice for the forgiveness of each and every sin so that we might be certain of the forgiveness of sin and truly celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, understanding the theological significance of His resurrection. So, if you, if you trust Him and apply the resurrection of Jesus Christ to your life, you will, by the grace of God, be certain of the forgiveness of sin and, listen, you will be less vulnerable to legalism and less familiar with paralyzing condemnation because you will have been satisfied with His sacrifice and the Father's attestation of His satisfaction with this sacrifice for your sins.

Better news does not exist than what I'm about to announce. Because He was raised from the dead, you, all who turn from their sins and trust in the One raised from the dead, are no longer in your sins. You are forgiven of your sins.

You are freed from the power of sin. You are, and will be one day, freed from the presence of sin. So there's forgiveness, free from the penalty, free from the power, one day even free from the presence of sin.

How certain are you? See, the resurrection should convince you if God is satisfied, you should be satisfied as well. Secondly, how grateful are you? How grateful are you for the forgiveness of sin? We could preach the whole sermon on this as well. Dick Lucas has written, I hope you don't underestimate the forgiveness of sins.

For many years he wrote, I did. I had gotten the impression that forgiveness was rather preliminary. Rather than preliminary, the forgiveness of sinners, providing reconciliation of God and man, and man with God, is the most exciting thing of which the Bible speaks.

And we never get beyond it. Oh yes. Listen, we never get beyond this.

We will never get beyond this in this lifetime and in an eternity future as well. We'll never get beyond it. And we'll never get over it! The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world so that we might be forgiven of our sins and become objects of mercy instead of objects of God's wrath.

We will never get beyond this and we will never get over this. We will only grow more appreciative of this in eternity future. So, let the celebration begin.

Let the gratefulness begin. There's no reason to postpone gratefulness to a future date. I say we have fresh gratefulness in our souls this day for what Easter announces because He was raised from the dead by the Father.

The Father was satisfied with His sacrifice. And now we, today, are no longer in our sins. Oh, let's not just affirm that.

Let's apply that and experience the transforming effect of that. Secondly, secondly, Easter also announces freedom from fear of death and future wrath. Freedom from fear of death and future wrath.

The resurrection addresses our most common fear and our most serious predicament. Most common fear, death. Most serious predicament, wrath.

If He wasn't raised from the dead, we would still be in our sins and only death and condemnation and wrath would await us because of our sins. But the resurrection changes everything. The resurrection changes everything.

Yep, everything. The resurrection redefines death for the Christian. Redefines death.

Because the resurrection addresses the cause of death, sin, the experience of death, then, is redefined for the Christian. Now, so there's no misunderstanding. Christians still die.

But Christians no longer need to fear death in the same way they did prior to conversion. And Christians no longer need to fear the deepest horror and terror of death, which is not death itself, but encountering and experiencing the righteous wrath of God eternally after death. For the Christian who's been reconciled to God through trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ, death, ha, it no longer holds.

So, the experience of death and the day of judgment that awaits have been redefined. They've been redefined and transformed for the Christian. And I experienced the effect of this redefinition on a flight from Washington, D.C. to Orlando in a most unexpected way.

I was taking my family on vacation. Our eventual destination was Sarasota to be with Carolyn's parents. And as we flew toward Orlando, eventually we were informed, as you will be on every flight, that we would now be beginning our descent, and so all of the passengers need to make preparation for that descent.

Only we didn't descend. And having flown a great deal, even though I was reading, I was aware we're not descending. We're circling.

We're holding. And initially you just assume that many planes are arriving and therefore they have no small challenge to accommodate all those on flights to Orlando. But this continued for an unusually long period of time and was eventually interrupted by an announcement from the cockpit that there was hydraulic failure.

Those were the exact words. Hydraulic failure. Now, please understand, I am ignorant of all things mechanical.

And that would be all things, okay? But I had seen a documentary about a plane that experienced hydraulic failure. And immediately vivid in my mind was that plane descending, attempting to land, and exploding into a ball of fire. At the conclusion of the announcement, there was a seating arrangement.

Chad was next to the window. I was in the middle. Carolyn was next to me, across the aisle.

Nicole and Janelle. Kristen was married to Brian. They were in Chicago and they would be coming separately.

As soon as the announcement was finished, Chad turned to me and he asked what everybody was thinking. He said these words, Dad, are we going to die? Now, I was still trying to comprehend what I just heard. I should have been prepared.

I wasn't for his question. I turned to him. I could not lie to him.

I didn't know. So I said, Son, I don't know. But, Chad, God is present with us and he will care for us.

The entirety of that plane was immediately paralyzed by fear. It went silent immediately following the announcement. The fear was immediately discernible and the silence was only interrupted by people who were openly weeping as we went through a process of preparing for an emergency landing.

I forget the flight attendant who was responsible for our section, she's doing her best to calm us and prepare us, but she was being overwhelmed with fear. She stood in the aisle and tried to rest and steady her hand on the seat to her right, but she could not. And so as she tried to draw from her training and her instruction, what I couldn't ignore was how her hand would not stop moving.

She was trying to calm herself. She could not. Now, look, I don't want to hold you in suspense.

I lived. The plane didn't crash. Family lived.

But in that moment, I didn't know if I was going to live. Well, your mind works very fast and furious in those moments. I immediately prayed, Father, give me wisdom.

I have sought to lead my family in life. Give me grace. If you are now calling me to lead them into death.

I was grateful that Kristen was not with us. I was grateful she was married to Brian. I thought she will be cared for.

Here's... Here's what unexpectedly interrupted my thinking at this time. As I surveyed the cabin, as I overheard the tears, as I prayed and sought to listen to God as to how I could comfort my son, I realized just in passing that I was frightened. I was frightened like everyone else.

I was frightened. I didn't want to die. This would be... This is the third flight I've been on where this has happened.

Emergency landing. It's not my preference. You know, I'm not sitting there thinking, oh, this is going to make... You know what? This is going to make a great sermon illustration.

This is going to work. Tie this into the resurrection. Resurrection redefines death.

Perfect. No, that's... That's not what I'm thinking. Here's what I'm thinking.

I won't die. Here's what I'm thinking. I'm afraid to die.

I'm no hero in this story. But here's what interrupted my thinking. I realized I was afraid, but I wasn't terrified.

I wasn't terrified. Why wasn't I terrified? Here's why. I knew that if we died, the next face we would see, the next voice we would hear would be the Savior who died for our sins and was raised from the dead by the Father who was satisfied with His sacrifice for our sins.

The resurrection had redefined death. I feared death, but I was no longer terrified of death. And I no longer feared future wrath.

Why? All because. That's why. Martin Luther experienced this redefinition of death derived from the resurrection as well.

His 13-year-old daughter, Magdalena, was dying, and she was dying in his arms. Martin Luther's wife, Katie, stood at the end of the room. She was unable to watch as Magdalena died in her father's arms.

Luther prayed, Oh God, I love her dearly, but Thy will be done. And then he asked his daughter, Magdalena, my little girl, would you like to stay with your father here? And would you just as gladly go to your father in heaven? She answered, Yes, dearest father, as God wills. And she died in his arms.

He turned to his wife and said, Dearest Katie, let us think of the home our daughter has gone to. There she is happy and at peace. And as he placed his daughter in her coffin, he said the following, My darling, you will rise and shine like the stars and the sun.

The resurrection, unimaginable. And the resurrection can have the same effect on our lives. Perhaps, and I'm sure this is accurate given the large number assembled here in this congregation, perhaps someone you love, who loved the Savior, has recently died, and you arrive here today in pain.

They used to be here. They're no longer here. You miss them.

Stuff happens that reminds you of them. Here's the difference the resurrection makes. Your grief is a gift from God.

And because of the resurrection, you do not grieve without hope. There is a hope that comforts you and sustains you in your grief. It's the same hope that comforted and sustained Luther in his grief.

And all of us should prepare to die because we all eventually will die. It was said of Edwards that he lived his whole life preparing to die. Are you prepared to die? Apart from the Lord's return, you will die.

You would actually be wise to begin preparing now so that as death approaches, you will be sustained by your understanding and appreciation of the difference the resurrection makes. The resurrection redefines death for the Christian. The Christian experiences freedom from the tormenting fear of death and freedom from fear of future wrath.

It was said of the Puritans that they died well. The reason they died well was because they lived wisely. Understanding the resurrection and not just affirming it, but applying it to their lives so that it made all the difference as death approached.

No wonder. No wonder, Paul writes, death is swallowed up in victory. Oh, death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting? 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.

That's what Easter announces. Let's pray.

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