

April 15, 2007

“Death Abolished” 2 Timothy 1:10

FCF: Universal need to rightly understand death

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because Christ has abolished death,
(magnet) His people can face the separations of this life in a whole new way.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It’s said that the only constants in this life are death and taxes. Taxes are surely on our minds this week. But if the truth be told, so too is death – the shadow looming over us all, rattling the cages. Think of the recent storyline from the TV series, “Grey’s Anatomy.” The main character, Meredith, has a near fatal accident. The experience jars her and gives needed perspective on her life. But her near death affects others around her, causing them to ask some serious questions as well. And it would seem, if ratings are any indication, that television audiences felt the effect as well. Ratings for the show have jumped, blogs and reviews are glowing. The storyline has hit a nerve. And hard.

Do I need to say that this is an issue of which we must gain an understanding clear and true? I don’t think any of us needs convincing on that. What then, in the wake of the celebration of Easter, should we consider on this point? Let’s look at the text.

SCRIPTURE READING: [2 Timothy 1:3-12a](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

([READ quote from “Death” – Dictionary of Biblical Imagery](#)):

(It) is the greatest of humankind’s enemies, a relentless Grim Reaper that shows no respect for age or wealth. It robs parents of a precious child, leaving them to mourn their loss for the rest of their lives. It deprives wives and children of their breadwinner and protector, leaving them vulnerable in a hostile world. It takes away an aging spouse, leaving a gray-haired senior citizen without a lifelong companion and closest friend. Sometimes it arrives suddenly and unannounced; at other times it approaches slowly, as if stalking or taunting its helpless victim. Sometimes it hauls away its victims en masse; on other occasions it targets individuals. It uses a variety of methods and weapons, but only rarely does it capture its prey without inflicting pain and terror. Power, beauty and wealth can usually overcome any obstacle, but (with it) they meet their match.

What is this horrendous foe described here? What lies behind such terrible assaults on all we hold dear? Death. Death – more than just an event, it’s the very state of things which the Bible clearly says is the result of sin. The LORD warned Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil “*for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” Genesis 2 says this is what would come to pass. And in Genesis 3, this is what did come to pass – the curse, sin having brought death upon the totality of life. Life and our fellowship with God disrupted. Death and its separation from God now upon us. Indeed that is exactly what death is and brings – a series of separations, tearings, and rifts.

All of which Paul tells us Christ has “abolished” – rendered ineffective, canceled, done away with, defeated, destroyed, nullified, overthrown. Now think of what Paul is saying. Christ redeemed us from sin. He also redeemed us from the effects of sin – including death. In Christ, the tyranny of sin and death has been broken, ruling us no more. Our Savior, Christ Jesus, has abolished death. What does that mean? What does that mean? Well, to get at the answer, we need to consider the manifestations of death, how it shows itself, and then ask, “What has Jesus done here? What does this mean?”

I. PHYSICAL DEATH

First, think with me just in terms of physical death and the separation it brings.

A) The Separation

1. Gradual decay

We are all getting older. Not just that, we are aging. There is physical decay and disease.

2. Final passing

Then there is the passing “from dust to dust” – that which comes to mind at the mention of “death” – the termination of our physical existence, the separation of soul from body.

B) The Restoration

But with the reality of this separation there is also the hope of a restoration.

1. Fear removed

Death is a portal. With Jesus’ having abolished death, there is now no need to fear it.

2. A new order

With the resurrection, we see things will not forever be this way and a new order awaits.

Revelation 21-22 – listen to what will and will not be (**READ Revelation 21:4-5a**).

All things new – the whole cosmic order and all who long for Jesus’ return.

Application:

Which, as we take this to heart and consider it deeply, it begins to rob death of the fear we give it. For while we haven’t been there and it remains for us the “undiscovered country,” Jesus has. He has been there, done that, and done it in. And He has assured us as to what awaits. And so we can face this separation in a whole new way – without fear.

II. RELATIONAL DEATH

But the separations of death come in other forms. Physical and relational as well.

We are torn from one another – sometimes with warning, sometimes without.

A) The Separation

1. Very real

And the Christian ought not to play that down. It’s very real. Think of Mary and Martha at Lazarus’ tomb in John 11 – the agony, the tears, the tearing, the heartache, the grief.

2. Very right

Death’s separation one from another is very real. And feeling it is very right. Think now of Jesus’ actions at Lazarus’ tomb. He did not condemn the grief. In fact, He joined in it.

B) The Restoration

But the grief caused by this horrible separation is now tempered by this coming restoration. Listen to Paul’s counsel in 1 Thessalonians (**READ 1 Thessalonians 4:13**).

1. Not isolated to our own clouds

Never in the Scriptures do we see any description of heaven resembling the silly image of our each having our own cloud, playing our own harp. There is no isolation in heaven.

2. But brought together as one

Rather, the imagery is of our being brought together as one. The picture is of a great gathering, a banquet, a convocation, a reunion – all of us caught up together in a song of wonder, rapture, and praise to the One who has loved us so and made all things right.

And so we can really feel the loss of a loved one. But with hope. With hope.

Application:

The point is that we can grieve this relational death, these separations. And we should grieve. But we should know that – for Christians – it is not “goodbye” but “see you later.” For those who are gone have ultimately but gone ahead. They are with the Lord, truly better off now than they were before, truly better off now than we are now. And so we then can then face the pain of this very real separation in a whole new way.

III. SPIRITUAL DEATH

Which brings me to the third of the separations sin has ushered into this world – spiritual death. The other separations are really but expressions, manifestations of this.

A) The Separation

1. A state of deadness

Again, the Scriptures describe death as not just an event in time but a state of being (READ Ephesians 2:1-3). We were the living dead, communion with God ruptured. We were spiritually blind, hardened in our hearts to God, unwilling to depend or trust Him.

2. A lasting deadness

And this state of deadness is also described as a lasting deadness – an eternal separation of the creature from the Creator, of both the body and soul from the Lord. A day of judgment is coming. And we will all stand before God in union with our representatives – one with Adam in his act of rebellion or one with Jesus in His work of redemption.

B) The Restoration

The fact of this separation is real. But again, so too is the hope of restoration.

1. Life restored

(READ Ephesians 2:4-6) God must punish the guilty. God is holy and just and must punish the guilty. And Jesus has borne our guilt. Jesus has borne our guilt. Death in terms of a separation from God has been rolled back, and life in its truest form restored.

2. Life begun

And this begins here and now. Communion with God beginning now. For we have been freed from sin. He makes us no longer content with it, beginning and strengthening us in a struggle. Life as it was meant to be begun now and perfected in heaven. For a day is also coming, for the believer in Christ, where we will need struggle no more. No more.

Application:

Christ has conquered sin by His death on the cross. And He has conquered death by His resurrection from the grave. Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul – taunts that ought to thrill our souls (READ 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57). And then, in the wake of all that, Paul encourages us, spurring us on with this charge (READ 1 Corinthians 15:58).

CONCLUSION:

When it comes then to the issues of life and death, Christians should be more passionate, feel more deeply, respond more strongly than anyone. For we know the truth. Regarding death, we should mourn more deeply than anyone. For we know that death and the misery it brings in these separations point to a vandalism of our Father's world. We have the perspective of caretakers at a gallery that has been looted, naturalists in a park gutted by arson, botanists in a garden overrun by trash. We can see the vandalism that has taken place and can mourn with a profound sense as to what has been lost. Death and these separations don't belong here. It's not how things were meant to be.

And knowing all of that, we should mourn more deeply than anyone else. And yet, at the same time, we should also be able to rejoice more fully than anyone else as well. For just as surely as we can see the vandalism, we can also know of the restoration that has begun and is coming in full. We know that Christ has abolished death and so we can have peace in knowing things will be set right, this is not how things will forever be. Dare I say our King takes pride of ownership in what is His? And we can take joy in knowing what has already come – death has been abolished – and what is coming fully – the final abolishing of all its power, the dissolution of every vestige of its very presence.

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