

# The Defeat of Death

April 4, 2021

John 20 and other texts

He is risen! He is risen indeed. Thank you for choosing to worship with us this Easter morning here at Hillcrest. We certainly are glad you are here, whether this is your weekly routine, your yearly routine or if you just wandered in today for the first time. We are glad you are here.

If you were with us on Friday, you know that our focus for this Easter season is on Jesus as the Victor, taken from my understanding of the Psalms, where so many of them seem to me to be dedicated, not to the choir master, or to the director of music, as the word is translated in our English translations, but instead to the Victorious One who comes at the end, or “to the Victor!” This is our focus this year.

On Friday, we considered Jesus’ death as His victory over sin, culminating in His last word on the cross, a cry of victory, “It is finished!” For many of us, this is the key moment, the key concept in all of Scripture: Jesus died on the cross for my sins. And this is surely a true, right and central concept, the core message of Scripture. But it is also true that the Scriptures do not stop at the cross, the story goes on in a way that is equally important to the message of the cross. That is the message of the resurrection. Indeed, Paul says in I Corinthians 15 that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then (in Curt’s paraphrase) we are wasting our time getting together. It is belief in the resurrection that is highlighted as the central concept in Romans 10:9-10. Why the resurrection?

That is our focus of this morning: just as important as is the fact that Jesus defeated sin when He died on the cross, so it is central that Jesus rose from the dead. He defeated death when He rose on the morn of that first day of the week following His crucifixion. And there is good reason for both concepts, they are intimately intertwined. Paul puts it in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death.” The result, the consequences of sin is death, the two go together. And so, just as important as is the crucifixion, so is the resurrection. We are here

today to celebrate Jesus' victory over death. For just as was true with His victory over sin, so it is with His victory over death. His victory means our victory!

Hear the words of Jesus' friend and witness John in John 20:1-23.

Main point: Jesus' victory over death means we have the sure hope of victory over death.

His resurrection assures our resurrection. Death is our first and final foe. So when Jesus rose from the dead, it was intended by God to give us hope that we will follow Jesus in the resurrection. We can follow Him with abandon, we need not fear losing our lives. If we lose our lives, we can be assured that we will gain our new lives, eternal lives. For those who are thinking really deeply, I am going to use eternal life and the resurrection somewhat interchangeably. I know they are different, but not for my purposes this morning.

So, as we ponder some deep thoughts, I ask you to focus on the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead gives us hope for the future. What can you do to harm someone for whom death itself poses no threat? (2 parts)

I. The sure and deserved consequence of sin is death.

This concept is clear and consistent throughout Scripture, throughout history. Indeed, it ought to be clear to all people who have ever lived, we die because of sin.

I pick up this point as I usually do in the Garden of Eden. When God made Adam and placed him in the garden, even before there was Eve, even before there was sin, He placed before Adam two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Just the fact that these two trees are placed in the garden is instructive. Adam had life, God breathed into him the breath of life. And so, he could freely eat from the tree of life...as long as he was obedient to God's commands. And specific for our purposes, the command was that he NOT eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Stay away from that tree, don't touch the fruit of that tree. And then God adds, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:17) Are you seeing this? There in the garden, before

there was sin, God declares that the wages of sin is death, the consequence for sinning is death. You die if you sin, or you die because you sin.

Then, when satan, the serpent shows up in the garden to tempt Adam and Eve, what is the core of his temptation? You will not surely die! God is lying to you. He tries to disconnect sin from death. In fact, rather than think about death, satan would rather we think of all the good and fun things that result from going the way of sin. So, his message to people is that you will not die, but you will experience some really cool things. And the truth is that he is the one who causes us to die. His mission is to deceive, kill, and destroy. When we sin, he has permission to seek to put us to death. Just look at the Law under Moses. How many of such laws come with the death penalty: if you kill someone you will be put to death, if you kidnap someone you will be put to death, if your son is unruly, he shall be put to death. Sin and death are inseparably linked...until Jesus came.

What happened to the corrupt people in the days of Noah? They all died. What happened to so many of the Egyptians in the days of Moses? They died. What happened to the Israelites as they left Egypt and refused to go into the Promised Land? They ALL died. They all sinned, they all died. No, death is not a "natural" part of life. It is an unnatural part of life. It is a consequence of sin. Sinners die. Paul makes this point in Romans, part of what we call the Romans Road. "All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) And the second step is this: "the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)

There is one exception to this rule: sacrifices. By definition a sacrifice is someone or something that dies even though they do not deserve it. The sacrifice dies in your place. They shed their lifeblood so you don't have to shed yours. That's the essence of a sacrifice. But the problem comes when the sacrifice itself deserves to die. If that is the case, then it cannot be a sacrifice. That is why even the animals who were sacrificed had to be without blemish, with no imperfections. Sacrifices had to be perfect. And yet, we all know that none of them were. None were perfect, all had blemishes. People were no different. No person could present himself for sacrifice because no person was without sin himself. The wages of sin is death, therefore no person qualifies as an acceptable sacrifice.

And yet, we read in Isaiah 53:6 this description of sinners like us. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one---to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” There WILL BE a sacrifice some day who would bear the load of all that sin. He would be the one true clean and pure sacrifice.

But even there, the text sends a mixed message because later in the chapter we read, “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days, the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” (Isaiah 53:10) So, this sacrifice will be crushed, yet will live again to see His children. So, according to Isaiah 53, there would come a day where a Savior would die for His sinful, wayward people and yet live again to see His children. It sounds like a resurrection!

So, the clear message of Scripture is that because we sin, we die. And yes, death comes to us all. It is the great equalizer. All of us sin, all of us die. And we die because we deserve it. The only one who will die without deserving it is the One who comes as a sacrifice to die for the sins of His people. What ought to happen to Him when He dies? This brings us to Jesus.

II. When Jesus rose from the dead, it validated His promise that we too will rise from the dead.

Jesus’ rising from the dead, His triumphant defeat of death gives us confidence that His promises in this regard toward us will be fulfilled.

Despite the fact that we are all sinners and therefore we all die, still there are scattered throughout Scripture people who experienced life after death...before Jesus did it. Rev. 1:15 describes Jesus as the firstborn of the dead, and yet He was not the first person raised from the dead. Even in the Old Testament, there were glimmers that it didn’t have to be like this, that the God of Scripture could raise people from the dead. I think of time when Elijah raised a boy from the dead. In fact, let’s read that story together. READ I Kings 17:17-24.

v.17- After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” 19 And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. 20 And he cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again.” 22 And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” 24 And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”

Did you see the connection between sin and death? Why has the man of God come to remind me of my sin causing the death of my sin? And yet, Elijah raised that boy from the dead. The raising of that boy from the dead proved to the woman that Elijah came from God. Only God can raise the dead! Just as we see in Genesis 2, there is a God who brings dead people to life.

And there were a few others, Elisha did something similar. But I turn to the New Testament and the ministry of Jesus. Jesus raised the dead. He raised Jairus’ daughter. He raised the widow’s son right out of the funeral procession! He raised Lazarus in dramatic form, calling him out of the tomb. And then there was the somewhat strange situation described in Matthew 27:53 where when Jesus died, suddenly there was an earthquake, the temple curtain tore in two, and people walked out of their graves. They were raised from the dead. Nothing more is said about these people. What’s going on here? If Jesus’ resurrection was to prove that He defeated death, what were these other resurrections all about?

From my perspective, all of these other raisings of the dead showed that God COULD. Since He is the God who gives life even to dead corpses, He can

raise the dead, He is able to do that. But Jesus' resurrection was more than that. Jesus' resurrection demonstrated that He WOULD raise the dead. It's not just that He could, but that He would. It turns the event from a powerful and unique display to a promise. He promises to do for us what He did for Jesus. And this difference means all the world!

With Jesus' resurrection, it's not just that it happened, it is that He told us it would happen. He boldly predicted that He would rise from the dead. He said that if they tore down the temple of His body, He would raise it up three days later. Just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the beast only to be raised back to dry land, so the Son would be raised. In fact, the predictions of His rising from the dead were so well known that the chief priest and Pharisees went to Pilate after Jesus was buried to request that a guard be placed at the tomb so no one could come along and steal the body and then claim that Jesus rose from the dead. And Pilate agreed to this, giving them permission to "make it as secure as you can." (Matt.27:65)

Then, as we read at the beginning of the message, when it actually happened, none of His followers could or would believe it. Everyone was shocked when it happened. First the women came, prepared to cover the stench of death, but instead they found the empty tomb. Then they ran and told the disciples, who had a foot race (John wants us to know that he was faster than Peter, but Peter pushed his way to the front to go in first.) And yet, they just went home! They didn't get it. Then Jesus showed Himself to Mary Magdalene. She didn't recognize Him. He finally showed Himself to the disciples who were gathered so they would believe it. Then famously, He showed Himself to Thomas, offering Thomas to stick his finger in the holes in his hands if that would help him believe. In all, Jesus showed Himself to hundreds of people, 500 at one time it says in I Corinthians 15.

The fact is that Jesus rose from the dead. He defeated death. Death had no hold on Him. His Father did not leave His body to decay as Psalm 16 puts it. He left this earth not by being buried but by being raised, first to life and then later to heaven. He is alive and active today awaiting His return which could be soon.

But this is not the end of the story. It is not just that Jesus rose from the dead, it is that He has promised the same for His followers. He claimed that He actually IS the resurrection. Hear these words of Jesus to Lazarus' sister Martha as Lazarus lay dead in the tomb, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26) All resurrection comes through Him, it is part of His identity. He offers this life after death to all of His followers, the "if we believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) If you have Him, you have eternal life, so that you can KNOW, (for sure, for sure for sure) that you have eternal life. (I John 5:10-13) Oh yes, there are many more such promises. An important message of Scripture is that people who are right with God will live even if they die. But how can we know that we are right with God? If Jesus is our Savior, then we are right with God. We learned that on Friday. Well then, how can we be sure that God will actually give us eternal life? Because He has promised He would and proved that He will by raising Jesus from the dead.

I end this message just about where I started it. Romans 6:23 tells us indeed that the wages of sin is death. But it also goes on to say that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you have Him you have life. If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved! That is the good news, the gospel. Can you see why it is so important that we believe in Jesus' resurrection? It is what gives us hope for the future, a hope that extends even beyond the grave. That is why we celebrate today. This is the day we remember when Jesus defeated death so we might defeat death, we might experience what He experienced! Like Lazarus, we too will walk right out of that grave!

If we believe this is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) Our perspective will extend beyond the grave.
- 2) Our faith will be firmly anchored in the fact of Jesus' resurrection.
- 3) Our hope will not be shaken by death.

4) Our praise will all go to the One who conquered death.

To the Victor!