

**I Corinthians 15: “50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

## **"Christian Burial & Lamentation"**

**In our journey through Luke and Acts some years ago we paused after the account of Stephen being martyred when Luke told us that, “devout men carried Stephen to his burial, & made great lamentation over him.” After some questions, I preached an additional message where I stressed that when we face death in our congregation or with our extended families or friends, we are to be devout people who come to bury the dead and make proper lamentation. It would be good to review this subject of death once more to remind us about how important our Christian witness is in such times:**

- **Both in how we weep with those who weep AND how we celebrate the victory of Jesus over death.**

**When considering the question of death, we must keep in mind the grand story of Creation which God has revealed to us in the Bible: The story of Creation : Fall : and Redemption.**

**The Bible is very clear that Adam’s sin in the garden is what brought forth death and destruction for the human race and for all of creation.**

**But God did not leave us in our sin and misery, but promised right there in the Garden that a Savior would come to crush the head of Satan.**

- **Jesus, the eternal Son of God entered history as a man to save His people from their sins!**
- **Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and set us free.**

**There is a question some might ask at this point:**

- **If Christ has conquered death, then why should there be a focus on burial and lamentation?**
- **I want to argue that it is here where we must show the world both the reality of death and the victory over death won by the death & resurrection of Jesus.**

**It can be one of the most important parts of our Christian witness to a very needy world!**

**First we must understand as Christians that death is with us until the end. The Apostle Paul aptly pointed to this fact while explaining in I Corinthians 15, the importance and the power of the resurrection: 15:20 “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death...”**

**So again, we have a tension that must be held in our Christian lives and our Christian witness:**

- **We know death has been defeated by the work of Jesus on the cross & His resurrection! But death will also be the final enemy to be defeated after the Kingdom of Jesus has filled the earth at the end of history.**
- **We know that we have victory over death and yet each of us will face death: In our own physical death and the death of others, until Jesus returns!**

**The Bible gives us some very wise and comforting teachings about how we are to handle deaths:**

- **We are to face the reality of death and not be afraid to lament the loss of those who suffer death.**

**And as with most true paths in our Christian walk, we have ditches or cliffs on either side to avoid when confronted with death: On the one side is simply ignoring death or pretending it is not as serious as it is in reality. [my example]**

**We are not to fear death or act as if it is no big deal: Just think of all the ways the Hollywood tries to tell us nothing has really changed after death or those silly poems about how we live on in the thoughts of others or some pretty flowers. Death is real & must be faced.**

**On the other side we are also to avoid the type of mourning which was common in the days of Jesus: What I would call putting on a show... They would actually hire professional mourners to wail and carry on so everyone would know you were making great lamentations.**

- **Again, we weep with those who weep, but we are those who know the victory over death!**

**Understanding that death will be with us until the end, we should next address the question of burial... Burial of the dead is the pattern that we see in the Scriptures! We are living in an age where this focus has been largely lost. Gone for the most part are the family or even church gravesites. With all of our moves and travels in this country it is difficult to even picture a family being buried together in any cemetery.**

**More and more people are choosing cremation with the ashes being scattered as was done with my father and brother. Now you can even go “green” opting to have your body dissolved in an environmentally sensitive way!**

**Now first and foremost I need to stress that what happens to the body has nothing to do with what will happen at the end of time when the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised as we saw in our morning text... John clearly teaches us in Revelation chapter 20 that ALL will stand before Jesus in resurrected bodies no matter where they died or how their bodies were disposed of:**

**“11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

**As the writer of Hebrews proclaimed, it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment! Thus, we will all be called into the presence of God in resurrected bodies, no matter how we died or what was done with our body.**

**So why does the Bible put a focus on burial and lamentation?**

- **I believe they are related to understanding and facing the reality of death & Christ's victory.**
- **They bring us both wisdom and comfort!**

**I will commend to your further study the entire 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Genesis ... There you will find an incredible amount detail about how Abraham came to bury and lament over his wife Sarah: It takes an entire chapter! When those devout men came and buried Stephen with great lamentation I am sure they had in mind what God included in the Book of Beginnings with the burial of Sarah. They understood how burial and lamentation reminds us that death is our enemy and that the resurrection of Jesus from the grave gives us great hope as we wait for the day of our resurrection!**

**This is what anyone can learn from that important chapter in Genesis and it just what those faithful disciples did for Stephen: At Genesis 23:2 we read that "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." And then in verse 19, "And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Mach-pe-lah, before Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan."**

- **Even though we know that death has been defeated we must not be afraid or hesitant to lament and mourn over our dead!**

**One of the most powerful verses in all of the Scriptures is also the shortest and brings great comfort to those who feel the loss of a loved one in the time of death:**

- **Let me take you to John chapter 11, where we have the account of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead...**

**Lazarus, a friend of Jesus has died and Jesus waited to go in order to demonstrate His power over death, so at verse 14 we read, "Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."**

**When Jesus arrives He is met by Martha, the sister of Lazarus and she grieves over the fact that Jesus was not there to heal her brother, but Jesus explains what He is about to do.**

**23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."**

**There we clearly see the grand picture of Creation : Fall : Redemption! But Jesus came to demonstrate His power and in the midst of that demonstration, Jesus faces the reality of death and teaches us about how & why we lament.**

**At verse 33 we read, "Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34 And He said, "Where have you laid him?"**

**As they take Jesus to the grave, we see the humanity of Jesus, and that shortest verse I just mentioned: They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." And in verse 35 "Jesus wept."**

**38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."**

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"  
44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."  
*[there is a lesson on sanctification there for another day!]*

Lazarus was dead and buried four days and yet Jesus knew that He would bring Him back to life demonstrating the Father's power... BUT, as Jesus stood before the grave which contained the body of His friend, the Bible tells us in very strong terms, "Jesus weep."

Death is the last enemy to be defeated because it is the greatest enemy which has brought pain and agony to the lives of all who have lived, and to the creation itself.

- Jesus, as He stands in death's presence, is moved to tears and quite honestly, we must do no less.

There is no such thing as a good death: Death is always the enemy. Knowing and understanding this, we lament over the loss of the one who has died and we bury their body as a symbol of our hope for the resurrection!

- Just as Jesus called Lazarus to 'come forth' so at the end of time, Jesus will command ALL those who have died to come forth!

The account in Genesis 23 also tells us that Abraham went to great length to purchase a burial place giving us many, many details. Now I don't want to put anyone on a guilt trip here this morning, but this passage was certainly convicting for me as we journeyed through Genesis

- We should ask, are we prepared for the day of our death or the death of those close to us?
- How and where will we make such preparations?

I think one of the lessons for us to learn from that lengthy account in Genesis is that we can certainly make all the arrangements that are necessary after someone has died. But it can also serve as a reminder that it might be wise to make such preparations before hand as well!

Certainly our age and financial situations can impact how serious those preparations should be, but we must remember that death will find us all until the return of Jesus.

- The account in Acts simply tells us that devout men came and buried Stephen with great lamentation. It is a godly example & we should strive to do the same!

Brothers & sisters, this is part of our being witnesses for Jesus: We are those who know that the great enemy death has been defeated. We are those who can bury and lament over those we have lost and yet know the hope of the victory we have at the resurrection. We certainly have a better truth & testimony than anything Hollywood or the world have come up with!

- But it must be lived and demonstrated in our lives before a watching world, just as Abraham did for the men and women of Hebron, and those men in Jerusalem did even in the midst of persecutions.

We are to be those who rightly know the pain and agony of death, those who rightly lament the loss of our loved ones...

- And we are to be those who know the hope of the resurrection!

In closing I want to return to our text from I Corinthians 15 where Paul goes on to instruct us about the impact the power of the resurrection and the final defeat of death at the end of history should have in our lives when he writes:

**"Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.  
57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

➤ **And that hope & victory should lead to our living new lives...**

**58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."**

➤ **Wise words for all of life,**

**but certainly wise words when we face the time where we must bury and lament over a friend or family member!**

➤ **In properly doing so, we will remember, and proclaim, that death will be swallowed up in victory!**

**Communion Meditation: Proverbs 24**

**"13 My son, eat honey because it is good,  
And the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste;  
14 So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul;  
If you have found it, there is a later end,  
And your hope will not be cut off."**