

Putting Death in Perspective

A Godly Response to a Pandemic – Part 4

Series Overview

Proverbs 27:1 says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” The COVID-19 outbreak certainly shows that this is true. When 2020 began, we had no idea we would face this new kind of challenge. Though it caught us by surprise, we know God was not surprised. He knew this would happen and will guide us through this challenging time.

This study guide is the second in a new Faith Baptist Bible study series called “A Godly Response to a Pandemic.” Each lesson will provide biblical teaching that enables us to think, feel, and live in a Christlike way throughout this pandemic experience.

Together, we’ll tackle topics like fear, anxiety, and loneliness. We’ll also examine our behavior as a church. Most importantly, we’ll learn about our loving, sovereign God who is all-knowing, almighty, always present, and trustworthy in every way.

Series Guidelines

This series will continue throughout our period of “social isolation” in New York City. To participate, please take the following approach.

1. A new study guide will be provided each Saturday at Shepherd Thoughts. You can follow the guide online or download and print it as a PDF.
2. Use each guide for an in-home Bible study from 9:30-10:30 a.m. on Sunday.
3. If you live with a Christian family, you can study together. If not, try studying together with another believer from Faith by phone or internet using a service like Facebook Video Chat, Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom.
4. For each study: (1) begin with prayer, (2) read the Scripture passage, (3) work through the study guide, then (4) end with prayer.
5. Then tune in early to the Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson. Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.
6. You can also leave comments on the blogsite at the end of the study guide page and Pastor Overmiller will respond by sometime Sunday.
7. As a bonus, memorize a verse or more from the passage and think about it throughout the week ahead.

Lesson Introduction

Death hurts. Just ask the men who suffered the excruciating loss of their dear friend and teacher on a cross. Christ’s death hurt them so deeply that they huddled together in self-isolation (John 20:19). One of them, Thomas, even isolated himself from his friends and entertained serious, depressive doubts about his faith (John 20:24-25). Others had been

so shaken that, even after the resurrection, they nearly abandoned their God-given mission (John 21:1-3).

We face similar challenges today. Though death always lurks in the shadows, it feels like a monster running loose in the streets right now, knocking on our doors, banging on our windows, and busting into our houses. Every day we hear news of friends, relatives, friends of friends, and relatives of friends who are sick, dying, or dead due to the coronavirus.

In times like these, we need to review our doctrine. We must put death into perspective and embrace the reality of the resurrection with open arms. Since Christ lives, death loses. His resurrection reduces the pain of death in the present and the presence of death in the future. For those who know Christ, death is nothing to fear, as sad and sobering as it may be. That's why we should keep on living and serving with confidence and resolve, even as death casts its long, dark shadow upon us.

1 Corinthians 15:56-58

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

Study Guide

Consider the Background

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives a long defense for the truth of the resurrection. He does this for two reasons: (1) it is the final, essential fact, the capstone of the gospel message (1 Cor 15:1-8) and (2) some people in the church at Corinth were questioning this doctrine (1 Cor 15:12). These verses, 1 Cor 15:54-58, are the conclusion to his lengthy argument.

Throughout church history, people have criticized the truth of the resurrection. Yet this doctrine faces a challenge more subtle than the attacks of secular humanism and the denials of false religion. This challenge occurs when we fail to keep the doctrine of the resurrection firmly in mind as we face the challenges of life and the problem of death as followers of Christ.

Death without the resurrection. It's more than an incomplete sentence. It's a painfully incomplete perspective. But death with the resurrection in view is the mindset we all need right now, or we'll shrink back in fear from the work that God has called us to do.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- Have you been tempted to doubt the truth of Christ's resurrection?
- Have you kept the doctrine of the resurrection firmly in mind as you face the reality of death around you, or has this doctrine been "out of sight, out of mind"?

Examine the Scripture

- *Sting* refers to either a goad or stinger (1 Cor 15:56). A goad is a long, pointed stick or pole used to poke animals in the ribs to make them move. A stinger is like a wasp or a bee stinger. Both of these things produce feelings of intense pain. Who doesn't remember screaming in terror when a bee chased you as a kid (or even as an adult!)?
- *Sin* refers to any behavior that departs from what is right in the sight of God.
- *Strength* refers to the "power" or "might" – the "strength" or "force" – of the sting of sin.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- Why do people die?
- Why does death hurt so much?¹

Reflect on Scripture

Death is not merely the result of illness, decay, violence, natural disasters, or other seemingly random or capricious natural causes. Circumstances like these are secondary and necessary causes that would be entirely unable to inflict pain or cause death without the primary root cause of our sin. So then death is not our real problem – sin is.

Examine the Scripture

- *Thanks* refers to giving praise, credit, and recognition to someone for something good that they have done.
- *Gives* describes the act of giving someone a gift.
- *Victory* is a translation of the word *nikos* (νίκος) (from which we get the word, *Nike*). It means to be victorious, conquer, overcome, come out on top, have supremacy over an opponent – win the ultimate prize and not lose.²

¹ To better understand the way that sin inflicts intense and deadly pain on us through the law, check out Paul's Old Testament quotation, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Cor 15:55, quoting Hos 13:14). In Hosea, God called on death and the grave (hades) as judgment and punishment for Israel's many persistent rebellious sins from which they refused to repent. They had sinned and the Law of Moses had made that very clear. The pain of this realization would have been terrifying and unbearable. But today, thanks to God for the death and resurrection of Christ, we no longer live in fear of death and the grave. The sting and pain of death has been removed for us because we are "in Christ" and he has taken the full sting and pain of our judgment and punishment for us. How did he accomplish this? Not only by taking the full sting of death for us on the cross, but by emerging victorious from the grave. We've all sinned and deserve the full pain and force of death to swallow us up, but if we believe on Christ as our Savior (1 Cor 15:1-2), then he shields us from death and promises to resurrect us from the grave with him so there's nothing to fear about death any longer.

² For some Old Testament background to the full scope of this victory of the resurrection, check out Paul's quote from the book of Isaiah, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54, quoting Isa 25:8 and fulfilled in Rev 20:14). This quotation and prophecy will be fulfilled when God destroys death completely prior to the eternal state. This will be the end of death once and for all, having been set in motion by our Christ's resurrection which has already occurred. So whatever work we do for Christ today and whatever we may suffer in this present life as far as death is concerned, we do so knowing that death itself will die in the end (it will be "swallowed up") and we will emerge with Christ completely victorious in every way forever.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- How can Paul (and the Corinthian believers, and us) be so thankful to God even as we stare the painful reality of death in the face?
- Name the enemy or opponent over which we have complete victory and dominance.
- Why is it important that God *gives* us this victory as a gift?
- Through whom has he provided this full, complete victory?
- How did our Lord Jesus Christ accomplish this victory (see 1 Cor 15:3-8)?

Reflect on Scripture

- We know that the victory of Christ's resurrection secures our forgiveness of sins (in the past) and eternal salvation (in the future), but how should this victory shape the way we respond to threats and ravages of death in our everyday lives (in the present)?
- Which reality is the greater influence in your mind right now – the pain of death or the victory of Christ's resurrection?

Examine the Scripture

- *Steadfast* means "sitting tight" much like a cowboy who stays firmly planted to the saddle of a wild bucking bronco and refuses to be thrown off.
- *Immovable* means "fixed in place" so firmly that you cannot be moved from your present location or removed from your present belief.
- *Abounding* means "more than enough," "excessive," "to a very great degree," "over and above."
- What kind of work or activity is Paul referring to when he says "the work of the Lord"? (Hint: it's a spiritual kind of work, see 1 Cor 9:1.)
- *Labor* refers to copious, difficult, toilsome work that may even require suffering, pain, agony, and weariness that goes on for a long time – even in the face of death. The way that our medical personnel, for instance, labor on the front lines of this COVID19 epidemic is a good example of this kind of work.
- *Vain* means "empty-handed," "useless," "with no results," "of no value," as in "meaningless" or "a total waste of time."

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- Why do our union with Christ and the victory of the resurrection allow us to "sit tight" and "stand firm" in the face of death?
- How does the victory of Christ's resurrection and the future certainty of our resurrection with him enable us to abound (rather than dial back) our efforts to reach people with the gospel and make disciples for Christ together as a church?
- How have recent challenges and the shadow of death caused or tempted you to retreat from making a difference for the kingdom of God?
- How can you/we abound in our work for God during these difficult times? What change(s) might this mean for you in the week ahead?

- How does the resurrection help us put death into its proper perspective in our minds?

Reflect on Scripture

From these verses that remind us about the truth of the resurrection, we learn to face death courageously because Christ has conquered death, we will resurrect with him, and death itself will die in the end. Though the eleven disciples of Jesus cowered in fear before the resurrection and nearly withdrew from their God-given work after the resurrection, they went on to abound in the work of the Lord because of the resurrection. Will you do the same right now?

Share Your Feedback

Now that you've finished this study, don't forget to tune in early to the Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson! Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.