

Christ Reformation Church

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CHRIST IS RISEN

He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. (Mat 28:6)

“The Death of Death”

Easter Sunday, April 20, 2014

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:14-15

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 2

Introduction-

From the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, the resurrection of Christ was inevitable. Why? Because sin brings *death*, and if there were going to be a real salvation from sin and its effects, *life* from the dead was necessary. This is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding those who would deny the real resurrection of Christ:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (1Co 15:12-17)

It is not surprising then that from the very earliest pages of Scripture we have the announcement that Christ would deal with death:

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your

life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3:14-15)

Christ would destroy the serpent, the devil. He is the one who brought death into the creation by tempting man to sin –

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (Jas 1:13-15)

This is the fatal process the devil initiated in Eden-

Temptation Desire Sin Death

I want us to look at a rather amazing passage in Hebrews this morning that teaches us about how Christ effected the death of death by conquering the devil.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the

devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14-15)

This is not the only New Testament passage that connects Christ's work with the destruction of the devil:

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1Jn 3:8)

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. (Luk 10:18)

Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. (Joh 12:30-31)

The Devil and the Power of Death

In what way did the devil have what is here called "the power of death"? How did Christ destroy the devil through death? And how did the fear of death once hold us in slavery? These are the issues this Scripture addresses.

Where there is sin, there is death—

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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 2:16-17)

And –

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6:23)

Satan, by his wickedness in Eden cast this web of death over all creation. Man's sin gave the devil his basis of accusation, and thus, power:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come,

FOR THE ACCUSER OF OUR BROTHERS HAS BEEN THROWN DOWN, who accuses them day and

night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Rev 12:7-11)

Power to accuse, you see. And it was a real power because the Law of God demands the death of a lawbreaker. As long as that condemnation stood, the devil had power.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col 2:13-15)

See it? The armament of the devil (rulers and authorities) was the Law and its demand for our death. That gave the devil *power*. The power of death. He still possesses it in regard to every human being who is not in Christ. Listen to John Calvin on this:

This passage expresses in a striking manner how miserable is the life of those who fear death, as they must feel it to be dreadful, because they

look on it apart from Christ; for then nothing but a curse appears in it: for whence is death but from God's wrath against sin? Hence is that bondage throughout life, even perpetual anxiety, by which unhappy souls are tormented; for through a consciousness of sin the judgment of God is ever presented to the view. From this fear Christ has delivered us, who by undergoing our curse has taken away what is dreadful in death. For though we are not now freed from death, yet in life and in death we have peace and safety, when we have Christ going before us.

Calvin, John (2012-08-26). The Complete Biblical Commentary Collection of John Calvin (Kindle Locations 504371-504374). . Kindle Edition.

F.F. Bruce explains this matter very clearly for us in his commentary on Hebrews:

Who are those "children" whom God has given to Christ? Men and women, creatures of flesh and blood. But if his solidarity with them is to be real, he also must be a true human being, a genuine partaker of flesh and blood. Moreover, he must partake of flesh and blood "in like manner" with them-that is to say, by the gateway of birth. No docetic or Apollinarian Christ will

satisfy their need of a Savior or God's determination to supply that need. And if they, entering this earthly life by birth, leave it in due course by death, it was divinely fitting that he too should die. Indeed, this is stated here as the purpose of his incarnation-that he should die, and in the very act of dying draw the sting of death.

It calls for an exceptional effort of mind on our part to appreciate how paradoxical was the attitude of those early Christians to the death of Christ. If ever death had appeared to be triumphant, it was when Jesus of Nazareth, disowned by the leaders of his nation, abandoned by his disciples, executed by the might of imperial Rome, breathed his last on the cross. Why, some had actually recognized in his cry of pain and desolation the complaint that even God had forsaken him. His faithful followers had confidently expected him to be the destined liberator of Israel; but he had died-not, like Judas of Galilee or Judas Maccabaeus, in the forefront of the struggle against the Gentile oppressors of Israel, but in evident weakness and disgrace-and their hopes died with him. If ever a cause was lost, it was his; if ever the powers of evil were victorious, it was then.

And yet-within a generation his followers were exultingly proclaiming the crucified Jesus to be the conqueror

of death and asserting, like our author here, that by dying he had reduced the erstwhile lord of death to impotence.

The keys of death and Hades were henceforth held firmly in Jesus' powerful hand, for he, in the language of his own parable, *had invaded the strong man's fortress, disarmed him, bound him fast, and robbed him of his spoil (Luke 11:21f).*

This is the unanimous witness of the New Testament writers; this was the assurance which nerved martyrs to face death boldly in his name. This sudden change from disillusionment to triumph can only be explained by the account which the apostles gave that their Master rose from the dead and imparted to them the power of his risen life. The prince or angel of death is here identified with the devil—that is, Satan. It is not easy to parallel this outright identification, but it is not inconsonant with the general teaching of the New Testament. "The reason the Son of God appeared," says another New Testament writer, "was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8), and while the particular work of the devil most prominent in that context is sin, the association between sin and death is close enough for the destruction of death to be included in the purpose of the Son of God's appearance. Our author [of Hebrews] in all probability belonged to the circle from which the book of Wisdom came

at an earlier date, and shared the sentiments on this subject which find expression there:

God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, . . . and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. (Wisdom 1:13f.)

God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it. (Wisdom 2:23f.)

These quotations do not amount to a statement that the devil "had the power of death," but they come very near to it.

Jesus broke the devil's grip on his people when in death he became the death of death, when (in S. W. Gandy's words)-

He hell in hell laid low,
Made sin, he sin o'erthrew,
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death, by dying, slew.

F. F. Bruce. The Epistle to the Hebrews (Kindle Locations 1091-1093). Kindle Edition.

We have then the answers to our three questions derived from Heb 2:14-15 –

- In what way did the devil have what is here called “the power of death”?
- How did Christ destroy the devil through death?
- And how did the fear of death once hold us in slavery?

The devil had the power of death because he had a ground of accusation against us through the Law. “The soul that sins shall die.”

Christ destroyed the power of the devil by becoming flesh like us, taking our sin upon Himself, perfectly meeting the Law’s demands so that it had no more demand upon us, and thus removing any legal power of Satan to accuse us. In Christ we have died to the Law.

As to the remedy for the fear of death that we once were oppressed with, here is John Calvin once more:

First, the destruction of the devil, of which he speaks, imports this -- that he cannot prevail against us. For though the devil still lives, and constantly attempts our ruin, yet all his power to hurt us is destroyed or restrained. It is a great consolation to know that we have to do with an enemy who cannot prevail against us.

That what is here said has been said with regard to us, we may gather from the next clause, that he might destroy him that had the power of death; for the apostle intimates that the devil was so far destroyed as he has power to reign to our ruin; for "the power of death" is ascribed to him from the effect, because it is destructive and brings death. He then teaches us not only that the tyranny of Satan was abolished by Christ's death, but also that he himself was so laid prostrate, that no more account is to be made of him than as though he were not.

Calvin, John (2012-08-26). The Complete Biblical Commentary Collection of John Calvin. Kindle Edition.

Through death – and this is the irony of the thing – through death Christ destroyed the power of death! By dying, he conquered the grave because His death met the demands of the Law. As we read earlier, Paul said that the Law's demands were nailed to the cross and have now been removed from us.

He Arose

As proof that the power of death was removed and we have been set free from that fear of death in Christ, we have the resurrection. This is the ultimate victory. It was essential.

When Christ rose from the dead it was a declaration that all the demands of the Law, all of the condemnation brought against us by the devil, were met and removed. Not only were our past sins paid for, but the very BASIS of any future condemnation was nullified. The devil can no longer accuse Christ's people because there is no foundation for accusation any longer. Death's power is no more and Christ's resurrection is proof of it.

Here is A.W. Pink-

The particular kind of "death" which is here in view is explained for us in the words "that through death lie" etc. The death which Christ died was "the wages of sin"—the penal infliction of the law, suffering the wrath of a holy God. The point raised here is a deeply mysterious one, yet on it Scripture throws some light. In John 8: 44, Christ declared that the Devil was "a murderer" (literally "man-slayer") from the beginning. In Zechariah 3: 1, we are shown Satan standing at Jehovah's right-hand to resist Israel's high priest. Upon the subject Saphir has said, "But which death did Christ die? That death of which the Devil had the power. Satan wielded that death. He it was who had a just claim against us that we should die. There is justice in the claim of Satan. "It is quite true that Satan is only a usurper; but in saving men God deals in perfect

righteousness, justice, truth. According to the Jewish tradition the fallen angels often accuse men, and complain before God that sinful men obtain mercy.

Our redemption is in harmony with the principles of righteousness and equity, on which God has founded all things. The prince of this world is judged (John 16 :11); he is conquered not merely by power, but by the power of justice and truth.... He stood upon the justice of God, upon the inflexibility of His law, upon the true nature of our sins.

But when Christ died our very death, when He was made sin and a curse for us, then all the power of Satan was gone.... And now what can Satan say?

The justice, majesty, and perfection of the law are vindicated more than if all the human race were lost forever. The penalty due to the broken law Jesus endured, and now, as the law is vindicated, sin put away, death swallowed up, Christ has destroyed the Devil." Inasmuch as the Devil is the one who brought about the downfall of our first parents, by which sentence of death has been passed upon all their posterity (Rom. 5: 12); inasmuch as he goeth about as a roaring lion "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5: 8); inasmuch as he challenged God to inflict upon the guilty the sentence of the law (Zech. 3: 1); and, inasmuch as

even the elect of God are, before their regeneration , under “the power of darkness” (Col. 1: 13 and cf. Acts 26: 18), dead in trespasses and sins, yet “walking according to the Prince of the power of the air”; the Devil may be said to have “the power of death.”

The word “destroy him that had the power of death” does not signify to annihilate, but means to make null and render powerless. In 1 Corinthians 1: 28 this same Greek word is rendered “bring to naught”; in Romans 3: 3 “without effect”; in Romans 3: 31 “make void.” Satan has been so completely vanquished by Christ the Head that he shall prevail against none of His members.

This is written for the glory of Christ, and to encourage His people to withstand him. *Satan is an enemy bespoiled.* Therefore is it said, “Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4: 7). To such as believe there is assurance of victory. If the Devil gets the upper hand of us, it is either because of our timidity, or lack of faith.

“To ‘destroy him that had the power of death’ is to strip him of his power. It is said by the apostle John, ‘for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, to destroy the works of the Devil,’ i.e. ignorance, error, depravity, and misery. In the passage before us,

the destruction is restricted to the peculiar aspect in which the Devil is viewed. *To destroy him, is so to destroy him as having ‘the power of death’— to render him, in this point of light, powerless in reference to the children... ”.* Pink, Arthur W. (2014-03-14). An Exposition of Hebrews (Kindle Locations 2762-2775). Wilder Publications, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

A Challenge to All Who Are Not in Christ

Listen to F.F. Bruce once more:

The fear of death is a most potent fear. Through fear of death many will consent to do things that nothing else could compel them to do. Some braver souls, it is true, will accept death sooner than dishonor; but for the majority the fear of death can be a tyrannous instrument of coercion. And death is indeed the king of terrors to those who recognize in it the penalty of sin.

F. F. Bruce. The Epistle to the Hebrews (Kindle Locations 1099-1100). Kindle Edition.

Why do people fear death? Perhaps because it is the end of life, it is separation from loved ones, it can be painful – and yet when it comes to the actual physical aspect of death many

people have faced it heroically. Others have even embraced it through suicide and made it out to be a good thing. So what is really the *essence and root* of the fear of death? It is this:

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, (Heb 9:27)

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:26-31)

Man knows this. Every human being knows it. The most outspoken atheist knows that God exists, that man is accountable to God and that there is a judgment coming once a man dies. He knows it. And that is the fear of death.

The fear of death is *the terror of standing before the Lord for judgment*. The fear of death is eternity in hell. It is a real fear because these things are real. God is real. His judgment is real. Hell is real. And it is forever. The fear of death is the fear of God! If you are here this morning and you are not in Christ, if you have not been put right with God through faith in Christ, then death holds its power over you – and you know it. You fear death because you fear God's judgment. And you should! To meet God without Christ is to meet a consuming fire. To live with that fear is to live under the power of death.

But Christ is risen. There is no need for a single human being to end in hell. Here is the good news – that we have a Savior who has conquered sin and hell and the devil and who has established a perfect righteousness ready to be applied to anyone who puts their faith and trust in Christ alone as their righteousness before God. For all then who are joined to Christ by faith, His resurrection becomes ours:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the

trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O 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. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1Co 15:50-58)

no more, dread of death yields to peace and joy.

Edwards, Thomas Charles (2011-03-24). *The Expositor's Bible: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Kindle Locations 503-505).

No wonder John Owen entitled his book, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ!* Because Christ has destroyed the one who had the power of death and has thereby set His people free from the slavery of the fear of death and hell and judgment, the Christian's dying day is his greatest day!

It has been well said that the two terrors from which none but Christ can deliver men are guilt of sin and fear of death. The latter is the offspring of the former. *When the conscience of sin is*