

## DEATH

### **TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 15:51-58**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. I read this story in a book (*Biblical Preaching*, W. Haddon Robinson): An old legend tells of a merchant in Baghdad who one day sent his servant to the market. Before very long the servant returned, pale and trembling, and in great agitation said to his master, “Down in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and when I turned around I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Master, please, lend me your horse, for I must hasten to avoid her. I will ride to Samarra and there I will hide and Death will not find me.” The merchant lent him the horse, and the servant galloped away in great haste. Later the merchant went down to the market place and saw Death standing in the crowd. He went over to her and asked, “Why did you frighten my servant this morning? Why did you make a threatening gesture?” Death replied, “That was not a threatening gesture. It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra!”
2. An appointment with death should not be a cause of fear for a Christian. It is actually cause for rejoicing (cf. 15:54-57).
  1. According to statistics, worldwide, over 56 million people die every year.
  2. I heard that a man read in the newspaper that most people die in bed, so now he sleeps on the floor.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, called death a painful riddle “for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be.”

Freud’s statement indicates his unbelief, because for the Christian, death is not a “painful riddle.”

3. Every day, the newspapers tell us about famous celebrities who have died. Within a few years most of them are forgotten. Where are they now?
4. Sadly, most of them are in hell.

Seneca, the first-century Roman philosopher, said, “Death is the wish of some, the relief of many, and the end of all.”

10. But Seneca was wrong. Death is not “the end of all.” Jesus said that the wicked, “shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:46). Death is not “the end of all.”

## **THE FEAR OF DEATH, THE STING OF DEATH, THE SECOND DEATH**

### **I. THE FEAR OF DEATH (vs. 51-54)**

1. Nineteen times in the Bible – in the book of Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Matthew and Luke – we find the expression, “the shadow of death.” We all live our lives in the shadow of death.
2. However, not all Christians will die. The apostle Paul says, “We shall not all sleep (die)” (15:51).
3. Hebrews 9:27 says, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” but it doesn’t say, “all men.” There is in the Bible a basic principle that all men die, but there are exceptions.
4. For example, in the book of Genesis we see the first genealogy – all the sons of Adam died (cf. Gen. 5:8, 11, 14, 17, 20). But then, we see a break in this sad repetition (Gen. 5:21-24).
5. Hebrews 11:5 says, “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”
6. Another well-known example is Elijah the prophet. Second Kings 2:11 says, “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”
7. Also, the Bible teaches that there will be a generation alive on earth when Jesus returns and that generation will never die (cf. I Thess. 4:13-18).
8. We could be that generation. I hope we are.
9. This is what Paul means when he says, “We shall not all sleep” (15:51).
10. The Bible teaches that unsaved men instinctively have a fear of death and are in bondage to this fear. Hebrews 2:15 says Christ died on the cross to “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”
11. William Randolph Hearst was a rich and powerful newspaper magnate and politician. He was terrified of dying and would not allow anyone to mention the word “death” or “died” in his presence.
12. But though he refused to allow anyone to mention the word “death” in his presence, death came to Mr. Hearst on August 14, 1951.
13. Because the Bible says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

14. If you have a fear of dying, the Bible says the Lord will “deliver” (Heb. 2:15) you if you from your fears if put your trust in Him.
15. Our victory in Jesus is not only over death itself (15:51-53), but over the sting of death (15:54-56).

## II. THE STING OF DEATH (15:54, 55).

1. In Job 18:14, Bildad the Shuhite refers to death as “the king of terrors.”
2. Albert Barnes said, “There would be no death without sin... The idea is, that sin is the cause of death. It introduced it; it makes it certain; it is the cause of the pain, distress, agony, and horror which attends it. Had there been no sin, men would not have died. If there were no sin, death would not be attended with horror or alarm. For why should innocence be afraid to die? What has innocence to fear anywhere in the universe of a just God? The fact, therefore, that men die, is proof that they are sinners; the fact that they feel horror and alarm, is proof that they feel themselves to be guilty, and that they are afraid to go into the presence of a holy God.”
3. But death holds no terror for those who are saved – “Death is swallowed up in victory” (15:54b; cf. Isa. 25:8).
4. Isaiah 25:8 says, “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces...”
5. For the Christian, the sting of death has been removed (15:55). The sting of death is sin (15:56). But those of us that are saved have had our sins forgiven and washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. It is the consciousness of unconfessed sin that makes men fear death. They know that their account with God has not been settled. The heavy burden of sin is wearing them down – it makes the thought of dying terrifying.
7. There is a powerful scene in Shakespeare’s play Hamlet, where the ghost of Hamlet’s father appears to him and explains how he was murdered by his brother. He complains to Hamlet that he was “cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, unhous’led (unprepared), disappointed, unaneled (no time to get right with God), no reck’ning made, but sent to my account with all my imperfections on my head. O, horrible! O, horrible! O, horrible!”
8. This is the sting of death – the heavy burden of unconfessed, and unforgiven sin.
9. The great preacher Spurgeon described how this sting works on unrepentant sinners: “I might picture, O drunkard, when thy cups are drained, and when thy liquors shall no longer be sweet to thy taste, when worse than gall shall be thy dainties that thou drinkest, when within an hour the worms shall make a carnival upon thy flesh; I might picture thee as thou lookest back upon thy

misspent life. And then, O swearer, methinks I see thee there with thine oaths echoing back by memory to thine own dismay. And thou man of lust and wickedness, thou who hast debauched and seduced others, I see thee there, and the sting of death to thee, how horrible, how dreadful! It shall not be that thou art groaning with pain, it shall not be that thou art racked with agony, it shall not be that thy heart and flesh faileth, but the sting, the sting shall be thy sin.”

10. “The strength of sin is the law” (15:56). The law cannot subdue or destroy the strength of sin or the power of sin. Albert Barnes said that the power of sin “is seen most strikingly in the pangs and horrors of a guilty conscience on the bed of death. There was need, therefore, of the gospel, which alone could remove the cause of these horrors, by taking away sin, and thus leaving the pardoned man to die in peace.”
11. The law condemns the sinner – the law says, “Thou shalt not steal...thou shalt not bear false witness...thou shalt not commit adultery.” The law pronounces the doom of all who fail to obey God’s holy precepts.

### **III. THE SECOND DEATH**

1. If there were no sin, there would be no death. Romans 5:12 says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”
2. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).
3. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek.18:4). But this is more than physical death – these Scriptures refer to “the second death” (Rev. 20:6, 14, 15).
4. When certain insects sting a person, they leave their stinger imbedded in the person’s flesh and then they die. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, death lost its sting. Now we can say, “O Death, where is thy sting?”
5. For those of us who are born again, “the second death hath no power” (Rev. 20:6). The sting is gone forever!
6. M.R. DeHaan said, “It is because of sin that we dread death. To die and stand before God with sin upon us unatoned and unforgiven is a terrible prospect which causes fear and trembling in the heart of man. It will mean eternal damnation, and, therefore, death for unbelievers means the passing into the place of outer darkness and condemnation forever and ever. To face God at death without Christ our sinbearer, is an awful, terrible, fearful prospect.”

7. Dr. DeHaan then gives an interesting illustration. He used to keep bees:  
“One thing I learned was that a worker bee can sting only once in a lifetime. Its needle-sharp stinger is equipped with little barbs all along its sides like a porcupine quill, so that when the stinger is inserted it goes in to stay, and causes the death of the bee. The stinger of a bee, once it has entered the flesh, cannot be withdrawn, because of these barbs. The only way, therefore, that the bee can free itself is to tear away from the stinger, leaving it behind in the victim whom it has attacked. It is now a bee without a sting. It is harmless. It can buzz, but it cannot sting.”
8. Dr. DeHaan described how a bee stung one of his sons and then headed for his second son. The boy was terrified and Dr. DeHaan told him: “Listen, that bee cannot hurt you, it can only scare you.”
9. That is the way death is for the saint – it can try and scare us but it cannot hurt us because “Death is swallowed up in victory” (15:54b-57).
10. In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote that “absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (II Cor. 5:8).

## **CONCLUSION:**

Have you gotten victory over the sting of death? One writer described death this way:

*Oh, what is this I cannot see,  
With icy hands taking hold of me?  
Oh, I am death, none can excel;  
I open the doors of heaven and hell.  
Oh, death, oh death, how can it be;  
That I must come and go with thee?  
Oh death, oh death, how can it be;  
I'm unprepared for eternity?  
Yes, I have come to get your soul,  
To leave your body and leave it cold,  
To drop the flesh off from the frame;  
The earth and worms both have their claim.*