

## Easter Sunday

Death Will Be Destroyed

1 Corinthians 15:21-28

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*<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:21–28 (ESV)*

This week I was having lunch with a new pastor from Brownsburg, and as we were getting to know one another, I asked him how many children he had. What he said next immediately created a new level of connection: "Well, we started out by having twins. . . ." Suddenly, we had more in common than what we knew. And I've seen that happen many times over the years. When we meet a family and discover that they are parents of twins, there is an immediate connection.

I'm sure that you have things like that in your life. In fact, I would guess that when you are meeting someone new, you are looking for those kind of connections – trying to find something that you have in common. In fact, there may be people sitting right next to you with whom you have more in common than you thought. A few questions to illustrate this:

- How many of you are morning people?
- How many of you think morning people are nuts?
- How many of you love coffee?
- How many of you are cheering for Duke this weekend? IU?
- How many of you love winter?
- How many of you speak at least two languages?

It is interesting to discover what we have in common with one another. There are probably far more things that connect us than what we even realize. For example, here's one question that is sober and a familiar experience for most, if not all, of us:

- How many of you know someone who has died?

You see, despite all the things that are different about us and despite all the ways that we are unique from one another, we all live with the reality of death. We try to prevent it and delay it. At funerals some people try to minimize it or sanitize it. But the fact remains: Death is tragic and common. Death is a part of what it means to be a human being. It is our great and common enemy. Even if you are not a Christian, I think that you would agree with me that 1) death is real, and 2) death is bad.

Now today is Easter Sunday, and this day celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ – the moment when He was raised from the dead. It is the most important Sunday of the church calendar year, and it is a day when Christians around the world rejoice. But why?

The answer relates to the problem of death. Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ because it set in motion the defeat of the greatest, most common and unavoidable problem for every human. The empty tomb is the beginning of the death of death. Easter Sunday announces the defeat of death.

So today, I want to talk about the problem of death and help you to see why this celebration is so important historically and personally.

## **The History of Death**

In order to understand the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the celebration of Easter, you need to know something about the history of death. There is an important background.

The Apostle Paul talks briefly about the history of death in 1 Corinthians 15. Now, the book of 1 Corinthians was written to a group of believers in the city of Corinth about 20-25 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. There were some believers who were confused as to the connection between what happened to Jesus and what would happen to them in the future. There were some people in the church who were saying that Jesus' resurrection was just about Him and that it had no bearing on their future.

This philosophy was alarming to the Apostle Paul, so he wrote the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of this letter in order to help them understand death, the resurrection, and its implications. He wanted them to know that Christ was "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). What happened to Jesus was only the beginning.

In order to understand the resurrection, we have to start at the very beginning of time. That is where Paul starts when he says (v. 21) *"For by a man came death by a man also has come the resurrection of the dead."* Paul is setting up a very important contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ. They are real, historical people who serve as the embodiment of the problem and solution described in the Bible. Adam is associated with death because of what he did, and Jesus is associated with life because of what he did. So, why does Paul say "by a man came death"? What does this mean?

The Easter story actually begins in the Garden of Eden and in the book of Genesis. After God created the world, the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful garden, enjoyed regular fellowship with God as He visited them, and that they were sinless, naked, and unashamed (Gen. 2:25). It was, in a word, perfect. However, that would not last very long.

God has set the boundaries for Adam and Eve's lives by telling that they could eat from every tree in the Garden, but there was one tree that was forbidden: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree was a boundary marker establishing that God, as creator, possessed the right to define what was allowed and what was out of bounds. The tree and the prohibition were a constant reminder that human beings were not autonomous. The tree was a reminder about who was really in charge.

Genesis 3 tells us that at some point Satan, in the form of a serpent, tempted Eve with the fruit, telling her that if she would eat from it "your eyes would be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). The essence of the temptation was that Eve was missing out, and the promise offered to her was that she would be like God. The Bible tells us that both she and Adam ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree. They disobeyed God's command, and the effect was disastrous. Sin had now entered the world and everything changed.

Adam and Eve now knew that they were naked. They felt ashamed and hid themselves when God came into the garden. When God confronts them about their actions, He levies multiple consequences upon them and the entire created order. God kills some animals and makes them clothing. Everything in the world was now affected. Work would be hard, childbearing would be painful, marriage would be difficult, and they were to be banished from the garden. And if you read on in Genesis, you will discover that that this first family even have a brother-to-brother conflict that results in a murder. The created order has been compromised. Brokenness was a part of what it meant to be human.

And the greatest, most significant, aspect of this brokenness is death. It is the ultimate expression of what is wrong with the world. It is a direct consequence for violating the perfection of God's righteousness. Death is what happens when created beings try to usurp God's authority.

So, when you think about death, remember that it has a history that started with Adam and that it is the direct consequence of sin. "For by a man {Adam} came death. . ."

### **The Scope of Death**

Death not only has a history, but it also has a scope to it. The tragedy of the situation was not just for Adam and Eve. Every human being born into the world is affected by the introduction of sin into our world. The next verse says it very plainly: "For as in Adam all die. . ." (v. 22). Now, if you are reading along with me, you will, no doubt, notice that I'm skipping over the other statements about Christ. We will come back to those.

What does it mean that in Adam "all die"? Romans 5:12 helps us here:

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— Romans 5:12 (ESV)*

This text very clearly helps us to see 1) sin came into the world through Adam, 2) death came because of sin, 3) death spread to every human being, and 4) all sinned. So the scope of the Fall was terrible. It means that rebellion became a part of not just what we do, but also who we are as human beings. And it means that every one of us is a natural born sinner.

Therefore, to be human is to be a sinner. From the very beginning of our lives, no one needed to teach us how to be selfish, how to get mad and throw a fit, how to say things that are wrong, and how to strike out at people. Our humanity is fundamentally flawed, and even if you are not a Christian, you know that to be true. You know that somewhere in your heart there is this dark place where your bad desires and thoughts lurk. Where did that come from? It is a part of what it means to be human, and it is meant to warn us that something isn't right with us.

It doesn't matter who you are, what nationality you hail from, how old you are, or what language you speak, there are two very important realities about being a human being: 1) we are all sinners, and 2) we will all eventually die.

Death and sin are linked together. And the human race, beginning with Adam, is in trouble. Whether it is the darkness and brokenness inside of us or whether it is what you feel at a funeral when someone dies, you know that something is not right with the human race.

And the essence of the problem and the issue that we all have in common is sin and death. It is part of our humanity. It is part of who we are, and it has been like that since the very beginning. Every human being shares in Adam's failure. Sin and death have spread to all of us.

There are three implications of this:

- 1) There are no perfect people. We are all sinners not just because of what we do but because of who we are. Romans 3:23 says, "... for all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory."
- 2) The consequences of sin have affected everything. Romans 6:23 says, "... for the wages of sin is death. . ." Death is the ultimate enemy that every human will face at the end of his or her life, but sin brings death even now. Sin takes any gift of God and can spoil it. We experience an aspect of death with hurtful words, relationship conflict, immoral behavior, deceitful motives, self-centered living, and any number of other areas.
- 3) Every person has to deal with death – either that of someone close to them or with their own. Death is the universal and ultimate problem that every human being faces. So what do you think happens to people after they die? What do you do with death?

So far we have only talked about the bad news. I'll get to the good news in just a moment, but I want you to understand that Easter is celebrated because of the terrible problem of death in the world. There is nothing more problematic, widespread, or common to mankind than the issue of death. It is the greatest issue that every human being faces. Death is our enemy.

## The Future of Death

The Bible tells us the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave had sweeping spiritual implications, and it announced something very important about death. Easter Sunday announces that death – the greatest enemy of humanity – has been defeated.

Remember that the apostle Paul is drawing a comparison between the effects of Adam's action and the effects of Jesus' actions. We've spent the first half of this message talking about Adam. Here is what we see in verses 21-22:

v. 21 – Adam brought death into the world, but Jesus' mission was to bring resurrection. In other words, Jesus came into the world in order to restore what had been broken by sin. And death is the greatest evidence that something is wrong with the world.

v. 22 – The actions of Adam brought death, but the actions of Jesus bring life. Everyone who is "in Adam" shares in the fall of Adam, and everyone who is "in Christ" shares in the life of Christ. Let me explain how this works from God's standpoint. How does someone become "in Christ"?

I think Ephesians 2:1-8 helps us to understand this concept:

*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God... (Ephesians 2:1-8).*

To be "in Christ" means that you have looked to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. It means that you have put your trust in Him as your Savior. It means that you believe you are saved by grace – that God forgives you because of what Jesus did for you. It means that you believe that Jesus became your sacrifice – that He took your place, so that when He died, you died. That is what it means to be a Christian.

But it means more than just death; it also means something about life. To be "in Christ" means that a Christian shares in everything that belongs to Jesus. His death was your death. And what's more, His life was your life! So when Jesus is raised from the dead, it is not just about Him. It is about every person who trusts in Him.

That is why Paul says "in Christ all shall be made alive." You see, the resurrection of Jesus not only signals the defeat of death for Jesus, but it announces the defeat of death for all those who put their faith in Jesus.

Verses 23-26 tell us that death has been defeated once by Jesus, and there is a coming a day when it will be finally and completely destroyed.

*<sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 1 Corinthians 15:23–26 (ESV)*

The Bible tells us that there is coming a day of resurrection, when every follower of Jesus will be raised from the dead and welcomed into eternal glory and rest. The Bible tells us that there is coming a day when God will restore everything that is broken in the world, and there will be no more loss, no more crying, no more pain, and no more sin in the world. God will take the world back to its former state and death, once and for all, will be defeated.

So, the celebration at Easter is only a foretaste of what is yet to come for those who have put their trust in Jesus. We rejoice on this day because the empty tomb of Jesus means that death will not have the final word. The resurrection of Jesus is THE definitive statement that the future of death and sin is certain. Death will be destroyed.

What does that mean – what does this day mean – if you are a follower of Jesus? Easter is a day of victory, a day of celebration, a day for us to remember that THE greatest enemy of mankind and our greatest problem in the world (our sin) has been defeated by Jesus. It is a day to remember that God is for us because of Jesus. If the last year has been filled with sorrow, remember what this day is all about. If the last few months have had some scary or disappointing news, remember what this day is all about. Remember that the resurrection of Jesus is just the beginning. The empty tomb outside of Jerusalem was just the start. You have not seen anything yet.

If you are follower of Jesus, the resurrection also means that you have a new ability and power to walk in newness of life. By the Holy Spirit, and because of Jesus, we are called to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11). While the final battle will be won by Jesus in the future, every time that a follower of Jesus chooses righteousness over sin or chooses godliness over temptation, we participate in the victory of Christ, and we tell a watching world that Jesus is really alive. While the death will be ultimately defeated in the future, there is a real sense in which a believer can share in the victory of Jesus even now. An empty tomb means victory even now.

Finally, if you are not yet a Christian, if you have not turned from your sins and put your faith in Christ, I want to invite you this morning to come to Jesus. You see, we all have sin and death in common. We are all a part of a broken world, and I know that you understand what I'm talking about when it comes to what is wrong with you and the world. Perhaps today, you finally "get it." You see the connection between the resurrection and what God is doing in the world. I would just ask you: Why not turn to Jesus today? Why not come to Him? Why not receive Him today as your Lord and Savior?

It is not an accident that you are here today on this incredibly important Sunday. We all share the common problem of death, and I want you to share in the grace and forgiveness that is offered to you

today through the person and work of Jesus Christ. I want this day to be the day when you find life and when everything about you changes from the inside out.

You see, if you and I started a conversation, it wouldn't be long until we found some kind of commonality between us. But the most important thing that I'd want to have in common with you is that we shared a belief in Jesus.

Because that is what this day is all about. Easter signals the death of death through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And beyond anything else, that is what I want for us to have in common – not just now, but for all eternity. I want for you to know the resurrected and returning Savior named Jesus.

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