

Death Defeated FCC 4-11-21

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

1)The greatest fear of humankind is death. 2)All religions are motivated by the need to resolve the death question. Death is such a major issue that humans have built their religions around it. Some say that when you die you will be reincarnated in a higher state or a lower state based on how you lived. Some say that when you die you will go to a place called paradise. 3)Death is the only power that controls every human. Nobody can stop it. Nobody can defy it, regardless of their earthly state or status. 4)No one can resist death. We can delay it somewhat by medical science but we can't resist it. 5) No one can avoid death. The Bible says it is required that all people die. 6)Death is the equalizer. Whether you are the president or the janitor, you are subject to death. You may have a more expensive tombstone than other people, but you're in the same kind of hole. No matter how high you are or think you are, death brings everybody down. You might feel like someone else is cooler or better than you, don't worry, just outlive them and you'll see.

I was with someone once during the process of choosing a casket for a family member and this person pointed to a very elaborate and expensive casket they wanted to be buried in themselves one day after they died- they called it their Cadillac to heaven. Our costly attempts to dress up death do nothing to hide its reality.

There are different responses to the reality of death, and most of them are ultimately based on fear. Two extremes will serve to illustrate this for us. On the one hand are those who share the Epicurean philosophy- eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Today we say the same thing in our American lingo with only four words instead of nine- you only live once. The implication is that risky or even irrational actions are justified by the pursuit of pleasure, which is justified by the brevity of life. The fear that stands behind this is the

fear that one would die without having what culture would define as the ultimate experiences.

On the other hand are those called ascetics, who have used various methods to inflict physical pain on themselves in an effort to discipline themselves not to sin. Of course this does not eliminate sin. It may help them avoid some sins, but I would argue that those methods in themselves are sin- sin against their own body. Ultimately, this strategy is also rooted in fear: fear that unconquered sin will yield an undesirable eternal outcome. While most of us don't resort to physical pain as a means of self-discipline, some of us do inflict emotional pain on ourselves in an effort to avoid sin. We think that if we make ourselves feel bad enough for something, then we won't repeat it. That is also not an effective means to overcome sin; I would argue that it drains even more of the life out of us.

There are also people who feel so much anxiety about the idea of death that they can't stand to talk about it.

Why all this fear and fuss- I mean, why do we die? Where did death come from? First of all, death was not created by the devil or introduced by the devil. According to Genesis, death was created by God. Death was inherent in life. If something is alive, then there is built into that thing the possibility of not being alive. At the same time, death was also created without power. Death did not have life of its own; it did not have the power to take life. And that power did not come from the devil.

Notice in Genesis that God was the first one to talk about death.

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

*Gen 2:17 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."*

God introduces the topic and tells man that death exists. God introduces death as a potentiality. But did Adam know what death was? He hadn't seen it before, hadn't heard of it before. On an intellectual level he may have understood the meaning of the word

'die'- to cease to live. I've been told that it would have taken the equivalent of three doctoral degrees to name all of the animals the way Adam did. So Adam understood terminology. He encounters a word that means the opposite of life, the cessation of life. It's possible that he understood that on an intellectual level. But has he ever observed it? No. Has he ever experienced the grief that the death of a loved one brings? No. Has he ever felt the fear of death before? No. Has he ever contemplated the implications that death has regarding how one lives their life? No. He never had to. Nothing in his world had ever died.

When God created death, it was dead- it had no power to kill. It was toothless. But that soon changed, and that change was triggered by human action. This was instigated by the devil but the devil did not bring death. Death would be activated specifically by disobedience. But if Adam and Eve did not eat the fruit, death could not touch them. Death would be like a bee without a stinger.

But as we know today death is activated; death appears to be alive and well. Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they sinned, that's basically what sin is, rebellion against God. God kept his promise that this would lead to death. Death on its own is powerless. It only has power because of sin.

*Rom 5:12 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—*

Sin brought death to life. Death has a sting because of sin. Sin in the world is your fault and my fault just as much as it is Adam's fault. Now, before Adam and Eve were given that command by God, they didn't know what sin was either. Sin was not a part of their lives just like death was not a part of their future. Sin was defined when the command was given.

Death does not have power on its own. It is activated by sin. Therefore, we gave death its life, its power. And if we could take away what we gave to death to give it life then we could put death back in its

lifeless, powerless state. That would then allow death to no longer be a cause of fear. But to do that, we would have to take away sin.

1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

Therefore, the defeat of sin would imply the defeat of death. Sin was defined when the command was given.

A natural question might be- why did God have to give that command to Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit? I mean, if he wouldn't have done that, then sin could not have happened, right? Then this whole mess could have been avoided. Well, God's made us in his image. Part of that image is free will- the capacity to have desires, to make choices, to carry out actions. God gave them the ability to choose, and then he presented them with options from which to choose. God's command, God's law, defines that choice- to choose God's way or to choose your own way. Free will means nothing without options in which to exercise choice. God's law gives us that choice. But God's law does not tempt us to sin, it simply lays the options before us.

Jas 1:13 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.

Jas 1:14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

If we use our power to choose to rebel against God, then our power to choose empowers sin. That's how the power of sin is the law, even though God's law is perfect Jesus said it will not pass away.

Bottom line, if you can get rid of sin, death dies. The problem is you are the sinner. So you can't defeat sin in order to take the power out of death. Jesus did that by living a life in complete union with and submission to God and then voluntarily dying for our sins. Death could not hold him.

1Co 15:21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

1Co 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

1Co 15:24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

1Co 15:25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

1Co 15:26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Now this is interesting. Jesus did not cause death to cease immediately when he rose from the dead. Death will be destroyed when we are resurrected. Death is still active as long as there is a sinful world with sinful creatures in it. But for those who believe, death is no longer a cause of fear. It has no power over us.

Jesus said in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

We will read Paul's explanation of this in a moment.

Jesus also said in John 6:40 "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Paul tells us more about this time that is coming when God is going to blow the whistle and say game over.

1Co 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

1Co 15:50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1Co 15:51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

1Co 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

1Co 15:53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

1Co 15:54 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."

Paul got this from the OT.

Isa 25:8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

One day death will be swallowed up in victory. This will not be a victory won by violence because the victory is already won. It was won by the death of Christ, it is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, and death will simply be swallowed up when we are resurrected.

The resurrection of Christ is the sign and seal of the defeat of death. If we believe in him, we still die, but death does not have to have a reign of terror over our lives. We even look forward to it, knowing that it is simply a part of the transition to a new reality. We will look at that in more detail in a few weeks.

Jesus rose because he defeated death by defeating the thing that gives death power, which is sin. He defeated sin by obeying the Law of God, by not sinning, and then sacrificing himself for sin. Death could not hold him, it could not even demand his life from him in the first place, because Jesus was sinless and did not deserve death. Death only has power to take life when there is sin in that life. Jesus had no sin, so death had no power to take his life. Jesus laid down his life willingly so that he could experience death. We know that Jesus defeated death because he rose. His rising was the natural result of him defeating death. So we can declare that Jesus rose from the dead because he defeated death.

Are you certain today that Jesus defeated death for you? Are you certain that when you die, your soul will live eternally in the presence of Jesus and one day you will be resurrected into the new earth? When I was in college, we did some door-to-door evangelism, and when asked

this question, several people said 'I don't know how God will judge me'. They were assuming that God would weigh their good deeds against their bad deeds and decide if they're worthy of heaven. They were surprised to learn that the Bible actually says that salvation is by grace and not by works.

1Co 15:55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Paul also drew this from the OT.

Hos 13:14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plaques? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

1Co 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Victory over death is a gift of God that is given as an act of grace because of the death and resurrection of Christ. If you believe in and confess the name of Jesus, you receive that victory. Because he lives, so too shall we. Let us pray.

Benediction:

1Co 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Co 15:58 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.

Go live in the victory he has won for you.