

✠ Jesu juva ✠

## DEATH'S DESTRUCTION

Mark 16:1-8; I Corinthians 15:51-57; Job 19:23-27

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

**N**o one expects the dead to rise. I've conducted a lot of funerals and have been to several others. And no matter how good of a job the mortician did embalming and presenting the body of the person, I've never thought that the body would start breathing again and get up out of the coffin. And once the person has been buried, the fact of death is pretty well confirmed. And even though you may visit the grave you don't expect to find it open again and empty. Everyone recognizes the finality of death.

So it is little wonder that the women who appear at Jesus' tomb on Easter morning are terrified and amazed. They had watched as their friend and teacher was marched out to Golgotha, stripped of His clothing and dignity, and nailed on the cross. They had witnessed His agony as both blood and vitality seeped out of His many wounds. They had heard Him cry out while dying and watched Him breathe His last. And they had seen the proof of His death when the soldier thrust the spear into His lifeless body. St. Mark tells us that Joseph of Arimathea then received the body of Jesus from Pontius Pilate, wrapped a linen shroud around the body, laid Him in his own tomb, and rolled the great stone in front of the door. And "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed where He was laid." He was dead, there was no question about it.

And so they expected to find a corpse and anoint it with the spices. But instead they find an angel sitting in the tomb who announces to them what must certainly have been the most astonishing thing they had ever heard: "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him..." Yes, they could see with their own eyes that the tomb no longer held the body of their rabbi who had been killed on the cross. According to Luke, the angel also said to them: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" He had certainly been dead, but now He was not here. He was alive! And they were terrified and amazed and, yes, frightened by this revelation. The angel's words didn't make sense, but what he said was true. Christ was risen! He had said that He would die and then rise again and He had!

Death itself is surprised at this! Death thought that it had the victory over Christ Jesus. But this Man it could not hold down. It should have known that Christ had power over it, after all He Himself had raised several people from the dead

before this. And yet death did not know what lay in store; for Elijah too had raised the dead, but in the end death claimed both the one who was raised again and the one who did the raising. It would claim again the daughter of Jairus, the young man of Nain, the pious Lazarus. And now, it thought, I have claimed the Man who raised them. But death was wrong. The Lord had promised through the prophet Hosea (13:14): "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!" And through Isaiah He said that: "He will swallow up death forever."

When death tried to bite into Christ Jesus, its jaws broke. When it tried to swallow Him up, its belly burst. Christ Jesus was not just another prophet or miracle worker who could be so easily defeated in the end. When death took hold of this Man, it found itself attempting to grasp and devour not another sinful mortal, but a righteous Man over whom it could claim no authority; and not only that, but it found this righteous Man to be the very Son of God, the Lord who is Life. And death's power was overcome. St Paul says in his second letter to St. Timothy (1:10): "Christ Jesus... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."



And now that sin has been taken away and paid for, now that the power of death has been undone, the devil too is defeated. Hebrews says: "He shared in [our] humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Now, St. Paul reminds us, those prophecies of Hosea and Isaiah are fulfilled for us. "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Your sins have been paid for by Christ's death. But now the grave of Christ is empty, and because He has risen, so you too have been raised up in Spirit (by Baptism) and will also rise physically from your grave as well, for you are in Christ and He is in you. So now the devil too really has no power or authority over you. He has been defeated and disarmed.

So his only recourse is to try to make you doubt either the fact that Christ did rise from the dead or the power of that resurrection for you. From the very first he attempted to lie and say that Christ did not rise, but that His body had been secretly removed by His disciples to another place, or that it had been stolen by someone. But Christ proved His resurrection beyond a doubt. He appeared first

to the Mary Magdalene, then to the women on the road, then to the two disciples travelling to Emmaus, then to the twelve, then to over 500 people, then at last to St. Paul. He is alive and the devil cannot undo that fact!

So the devil usually relies on the second deception, that Christ's resurrection, while it may help some people get to heaven, will not help you. Luther addressed this in one of his Easter sermons. He says:

“If the devil approaches us and says, Look here, see how great your sin is; see too, how bitter, how terrible is the death you must suffer; then you must counter with, Devil, don't you know the power of my Lord Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection? In him there is eternal righteousness and eternal life; his resurrection from the dead is mightier than my sin, death, and hell, greater than heaven and earth. My death and sin are minute drops, but my Lord Jesus' death and resurrection is a vast ocean. This is all so very true that the devil cannot deny it... Even though there were a thousand hells and a hundred deaths, they would be mere sparks and droplets over against Christ's resurrection, victory and triumph [And] Christ bestows the gift of His resurrection, victory and triumph to all who believe in him. Since we have been baptized in Him and believe in Him, it follows that even if you and I had one hundred thousand sins, deaths and hells, it still would nothing, because Christ's resurrection, victory and triumph, which become ours through faith and baptism are far greater” (House Postil for Easter Sunday, 1533).

I can't put it much better than that! Christ's victory is your victory. He lives, so you too will live. Christ's resurrection is the final answer to the apparent finality of death. Death and the devil have nothing more that they can say about it to you. No one expects to the dead to rise up. But you will rise up. And now you can say with Job and all the saints: “For I know that My Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last upon the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes behold, and not another.” This is our sure hope and trust. For death has no power, no teeth, no holding power any more. Christ has destroyed it. Christ has risen! Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠

