

Death Swallowed Up In Victory

04/04/2021

Scripture: 1 Corinthians
15:54

Series: Special Message

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Happy Easter! I'm so glad you have chosen to join our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Easter message this year is taken from, 1 Corinthians 15:54, *Death is swallowed up in victory*. The words are in quotation marks because Paul is quoting from the Old Testament. In Isaiah 25:8, we read, *He will swallow up death forever*. And Paul makes it clear that these words find their fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus and in the triumph over death that will be ours because of Him.

One of the marvelous things about the Bible is that God speaks in language we can understand, and here, God uses the picture of death being swallowed up or devoured.

God might simply have said, "one day death will be defeated." But in order to impress this wonderful truth on our hearts and minds, God uses a picture: Death is **swallowed up** in victory. He will **swallow up** death forever.

Death being "swallowed up" is marvelous picture because death is the great swallower. Death is like a monster with an insatiable appetite. It is the great devourer, and sooner or later it swallows us all.

Little children are fascinated by the image of a monster that wants to eat you up. They want to hear monster stories and play monster games. But there is nothing imaginary about this monster.

Most people avoid this monster for many years, but in the end, death swallows us all.

Death has an insatiable appetite. This monster is always hungry and always on the prowl. Death has never had enough. It is never satisfied. Day by day, month by month, year by year, this monster works its way through the entire human family.

The grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit (Isa 5:14 NIV). Death is the great devourer. But here we are told that death itself will be swallowed up in the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Death is swallowed up in victory*.

Victory!

Jesus' victory over death unfolds in stages or installments. There is an indication of this earlier in this chapter where Paul says that the resurrection of Jesus is the "firstfruits" (vs. 20). *Each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ* (vs. 23).

And we are told in our verse today that, *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"* (1 Cor 15:54).

So, I want us to think today about four days when death is swallowed up in victory.

1. The Day Jesus Rose
2. The Day Jesus Saved You
3. The Day Jesus Calls You Home
4. The Day Jesus Comes Again

The first installment of Jesus' triumph over death was the event we celebrate today

1. The Day Jesus Rose

Death is swallowed up in victory (1Cor 15:54).

Death tried to swallow Jesus as soon as He was born into the world. The devouring monster showed up in Bethlehem when, through the edict of an evil king, the infants of the town were all killed (Matt 2:16).

But Christ's time had not yet come. *An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, and warned him to take the child and His mother to Egypt (Matt 2:13).*

Death was prowling again at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth. Our Lord went to the synagogue, and read from the prophet Isaiah, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (Lk 4:18).* Then He said, *Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Lk 4:21).*

The people would not accept this. *Is this not Joseph's son? they said (Lk 4:22).* *And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill...so that they could throw him down the cliff (Lk 4:29).*

But Jesus time had not yet come, and Luke records that *"passing through their midst, he went away (Lk 4:30).*

The monster showed up again in Jerusalem when Jesus was teaching in the temple. He said, *Before Abraham was, I am (Jn 8:58).* And John records that *they picked up stones to throw at him (vs. 59).* But again, Jesus time had not yet come, and we read *But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, (Jn 8:59).*

Jesus time **did** come, and when it did, the gospels make clear that it was Jesus who confronted death. Jesus said, *No one takes my life from me. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again (Jn 10:18).*

Death did not overcome Jesus. He went into it at the time of His own choosing. He came into the world to destroy the power of death and He did it by going into death Himself (Heb 2:14).

After six hours on the cross, Jesus cried out in a loud voice *It is finished (Jn 19:30).* *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Lk 23:46).* Death swallowed Jesus, but it could not keep Him down.

The story of Jonah in the Old Testament gives us the picture of what happened when Jesus died and rose. The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And *Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17).*

Jesus spoke of this as a picture of what would happen when he died, *Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth* (Matt 12:40).

But after Jonah had been three days and nights in the belly of the fish, Scripture says, *The LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land* (Jonah 2:10).

The fish swallowed Jonah, but it could not keep him down! And that's how it was when death swallowed Jesus. Death couldn't hold Him.

Peter says, on the day of Pentecost, *God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was **not possible** for him to be held by it* (Acts 2:24).

Isaiah said, *He will swallow up death forever* (Isa 25:8). And Jesus did this on the day He rose from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus was the first disgorging of death, but it was certainly not the last.

The first installment of victory came The Day Jesus Rose. The second installment came the day Jesus saved you.

2. The Day Jesus Saved You

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world (Eph 2:1-2).

The Bible speaks about our human condition as being "*dead in...trespasses and sins*" (Eph 2:1). The inward part of us that should respond to God with love and trust has died. That is why, by nature, we love life and pleasure more than we love God (2 Tim 3:4). We have been swallowed by the monster. By nature, we are dead even while we live (1 Tim 5:6).

Think about what that tells you: If it said, "you were stuck in trespasses and sins" there would be something you could do to get out. You could try harder. You could call out for help.

But it doesn't say you were stuck. It says *you were dead*. Dead means that you were powerless to act. Dead means that you are never coming out.

Then Paul describes the miracle by which God gives us new life. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**— by grace you have been saved* (Eph 2:4-5).

You were dead. And when God made you alive with Christ. Death was swallowed up in victory.

How does this happen? How does God make a person who is dead in sins, alive with Christ?

Our Lord Jesus gave two answers to that question, and they are found right next to each other in two verses in John 5, *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (Jn 5:24).

Jesus speaks about how you pass from death to life. How you move from being dead in trespasses and sins to being alive with Christ. How does that happen? *Whoever hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me.*

The words of Jesus are given to us in the Bible and Jesus makes this marvelous promise: "If you will hear my words and believe the Father who sent me, You will have eternal life!"

Death will be swallowed up in victory for you, and here's why: You have already "passed from death to life." Jesus Christ calls on you to hear His words and to believe. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved* (Acts 16:30).

You may wonder, "How can anyone believe if we are all dead in trespasses and sins?" Listen to what Jesus says in the next verse, *Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live* (Jn 5:25).

Jesus spoke about His word, now He speaks about His voice. There are words that have been spoken and then is a voice that speaks. Jesus Christ is our Living Savior. He speaks with a voice that raises the dead.

In the beginning, God spoke into the darkness. God said, "Let there be light" and there was light.

In the same way, God speaks into our death: When He says, "Let there be life," there is life! And Jesus says, "This is happening now." "Those who are dead in trespasses and sins are hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming to life."

The great illustration of this is the story of Lazarus: Jesus went to the tomb of a man who had been dead for four days. What did He do? He spoke. He shouted out in a loud voice, "Lazarus come forth!" and Lazarus came out of the tomb, grave clothes and all (Jn 11:28-44).

This is what happens when Jesus saves you. His word enters your life and enables you to do what you could not do before. When Jesus saves you, He swallows up death in victory.

This is really important, because without this, the resurrection of Jesus would be a supreme irrelevance. "A man rose from the dead 2000 years ago. What does that have to do with me today?"

The One who rose is the One who swallows up death in victory. He does this, not only by rising from the dead Himself, but by saving us from being dead in trespasses and sins..

He does this by bringing us to life by the power of His Word, *Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, He...has passed from death to life* (vs. 24). Death is swallowed up in victory.

3. The Day Jesus Calls You Home

Death is swallowed up in victory (1Cor 15:54).

The great preacher C H Spurgeon once gave a sermon entitled, “The Believer’s Deathday Better Than His Birthday”¹

How could that possibly be true? Think about what lies ahead of you on the day you are born. Examinations. Years of hard work. The gradual decline of your body and of your mind.

Now of course we are born into a world where there is a great deal of pleasure. We can experience the joys of love, and of home and of travel, and of sport. And we should be thankful for every good gift we enjoy

But life in this world is always a mixed experience. Job says, *Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward* (Job 5:7). Jesus says, *In this world you will have trouble* (Jn 16:33).

But now think about what lies ahead of a believer when Jesus calls us home: To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord, which will be better by far (2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:23).

You will see face to face the One you have loved and trusted heart to heart. All the pain, disappointment and sorrow you have ever known will be behind you, and God Himself will wipe all tears from your eyes.

When Jesus calls you home, death will be swallowed up in victory.

The death and resurrection of Jesus has changed the nature of death for all who belong to Him.

Death is our **enemy**. *The last enemy to be destroyed is death* (vs. 26). But in the Old Testament, we are told that God the Father has said to God the Son, *Sit at my right hand, until I make your **enemies** your **footstool*** (Ps 110:1).

The enemies of Christ become His footstool. Death is the last enemy, so God will make death Christ’s footstool.

The Puritan preacher, Richard Sibbes, asked this question: What do you do with a footstool? You step on it in order to reach higher! So here is what our Lord Jesus Christ has done: He has made our greatest enemy – death – into a footstool. He has made it the means by which we step up into His immediate presence.

Spurgeon says, “Depend on it, your dying hour will be the best hour you have ever known! Your last moment will be your richest moment. Better than the day of your birth will be the day of your death. It will be the beginning of heaven, the rising of a sun that shall go no more down forever.”²

When Catherine Booth, wife of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was dying, she sent this final message to the Army. She said, “The waters are rising, but so am I. I am not going under, I am going over.”

Jesus has swallowed up death in victory:

¹ Sermon #1588, based on Ecclesiastes 7:1. delivered March 3rd 1881.

² Sermon #894, Christ with the Keys of Death and Hell

He did it on the day He rose. He did it on the day that He saved you. He will do it on the day He calls you home. Jesus will swallow up death in victory.

4. The Day Jesus Comes Again

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" (1Cor 15:54).

There will be a day when all that Christ has accomplished in His resurrection from the dead will be ours.

When Christ returns in power and glory, the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (1 Cor 15:52).

Isaiah says, He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces (Isa 25:8)

God will not leave the drying of your tears to angels. God Himself will wipe all tears from your eyes. And if He is to wipe away your tears, He must wipe away the pain that caused them.

So here is a marvelous verse for Easter. *Death is swallowed up in victory.* Death is the great swallower of the human race, and yet is swallowed up by Jesus Christ. How should we respond to this marvelous truth today?

a. Believe

The Bible speaks about a day when all who are in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of God. Jesus Christ will summons all people. And when He does, death will give them up. In the end, death will disgorge all it has swallowed.

*And the sea **gave up** the dead who were in it, Death and Hades **gave up** the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done (Rev 20:13).*

Death will not hold you. You will rise. And when you rise, it will either be to the *resurrection of life* or it will be to the *resurrection of judgment* (Jn 5:29).

Now in the light of that reality, I plead with you to hear these words of Jesus, *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever **hears** my word and **believes** him who sent me **has eternal life**. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (Jn 5:24).*

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today.

And then, as you believe,

b. Rejoice

Christ is risen, Hallelujah. Risen, our victorious Head
Sing His praises! Hallelujah! Christ is risen from the dead.

I know that my Redeemer lives; What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, Who once was dead; He lives my everlasting Head

No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life.
Life is nought without Thee, aid us in our strife
Make us more than conquerors, through Thy deathless love
Bring us safe through Jordan, to Thy home above.
Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son
Endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won!

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