

Theme: THE DEATH OF DEATH

“Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ **“Where, O death, is your victory?**

Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

It may seem cruel to remind you this week of all weeks of words famously attributed to Benjamin Franklin: “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” Perhaps even crueler still because you don’t have to pay your taxes this week if you haven’t. The spread of death has ensured it.

Speaking of death, we gather for a funeral today. Surprised? It’s not the funeral we expected. As the day dawned for the Resurrection of our Lord, the funeral parties changed. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Today, we don’t remember Jesus’ funeral. Rather, his resurrection creates another funeral, a cause for celebration: THE DEATH OF DEATH!

Any child with eyes can see death is still alive in our world. Funeral homes remain in business. Death has been more active with the outbreak of pandemic. So how can we say DEATH IS DEAD?

Paul, who wrote this letter to Corinthian Christians, tells us a “mystery.” It’s something you’d never know unless someone else told you, like the quadratic equation; some of you may not remember that mathematic formula even now. The mystery is that not everyone will die. Even among Christians who die, death isn’t the end. Dead and living alike will be changed. It will happen so fast, you’d miss it if you blinked. If you could miss it.

A trumpet blast will ensure you won’t miss anything. Why a trumpet? We know trumpets as musical instruments, but the 1st-century world used trumpets differently. They marked the start of war or the crowning of a king. Shepherds gathered the flock with a trumpet call. It marked the beginning of a trial; trumpets even marked God’s appearance on Mt. Sinai when he gave the 10 Commandments to Moses. The “last trumpet,” though, will mark the end of war, and the crowning of King Jesus forever. It will gather Jesus’ sheep to his side and begin the last judgment on all mankind. It will mark God’s coming to be with his people. Then the dead will rise first, and all God’s people will be changed.

It’s the end of an era. The world hasn’t seen anything that remarkable since Jesus rose from the dead. Since then, the Church has been proclaiming Jesus, who defeated death. But when our bodies, subject to death and decay as they are, finally change, we will become imperishable and immortal. Then the Word of God will prove itself true on a whole new level: **“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”** Death has been drunk down to the dregs; not a drop remains. It’s THE DEATH OF DEATH.

At four years old, she had no idea how badly it would hurt. The tiny, black-and-yellow banded bug, swarming around to protect the hive. A scream, and it was over in an instant. The bee, stinger protruding from the girl, had only an hour to live; the girl had hours of pain to endure.

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Paul quotes the Old Testament prophet Hosea. What power does death have left? Has it stung us, like that bee?

Most of us are *too* familiar with death’s sting. Some of us feel our mortality pressing on us. Others see it all around us. Every funeral. In the news. When we see those old people we love, we wonder if it will be the last time. Every time we remember those we’ve loved and lost. Death rules over humanity like a tyrant. It bows to no one. It doesn’t cave; claims everyone. The sting it holds over us like a cattle prod is sin. Sin is leverage that forces us to submit to death. **“The sting of death is sin.”** Sin is entirely our fault.

“The power of sin is the law.” That’s right, God’s law. God’s own Word opposed us, demanded our death. So is death God’s fault? You’d have an easier time blaming the government for your taxes. Pay your taxes; they are the “thank you” you owe to the government God has put over you for your good—like them or not. Even how begrudgingly we pay our taxes shows how corrupt we have become. Instead of incorruptible, imperishable, immortal, as God intended us to be, we have broken his law. It’s not the law’s fault. The criminal can complain all he wants the drinking age should be lower; it’s still the law. And that’s just human law! We sinned against God’s own, good law. Death isn’t God’s fault; I’m the lawbreaker. I opposed his laws, made myself his enemy. Here I stand, enthralled by death itself. Last I checked, the death rate remained roughly 100%.

That’s why Easter is so important! **“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** You and I could not defeat death with its sting. The law opposed us. The law condemns lawbreakers, not the innocent. So the innocent one came. He drank deep from the cup of death. He took the sin of the whole world in that cup. He lived a perfect life. Died a sacrificial death. On the cross, Jesus made a mockery of death. Death stung him in exchange for us. But Jesus’ death is THE DEATH OF DEATH!

Christ is risen! Jesus is alive! Dead no longer, he defeated tyrant Death. Jesus conquered! He has won! Our Savior, our perfect substitute, defeated death! It would give us great hope just to know this man defeated death. Today we celebrate THE DEATH OF DEATH! God gives us Jesus’ victory. God, to whom we were opposed, brought us to Jesus. He gives us faith. DEATH IS DEAD! Jesus is the first, but not the last. You will follow.

Since Jesus defeated death, you can defy death. **“Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O death is your victory?”** Death may take you. It cannot end you. Christ is risen! God promises you will rise. Jesus’ empty tomb causes us to celebrate THE DEATH OF DEATH.

As the world around us suffers death, we have the message of eternal life with the God who loves us to death. DEATH IS DEAD! Celebrate. Sing for joy! Give God thanks! Death and taxes may be certain, but your resurrection is just as certain. Sins forgiven. Peace with God. Joy forever. Eternal life. THE DEATH OF DEATH. Christ is risen! You will rise! Alleluia! Amen.

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”