

The Death of Death (Romans 8:1-17)

As most of you know, I've spent many months preaching through the book of Acts. I prefer expository preaching. Generally, I think it is the best kind of preaching. Following the model given in Nehemiah 8:8, I like to read distinctly from the word of God, give the sense, and help you understand the meaning.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. God's word is truth, and as Jesus Himself prayed, we are sanctified by exposure to God's truth. So by preaching carefully through a book or a section of scripture, I do my best (with the Lord's help) to build word upon word, precept upon precept. That's expository preaching.

But once in a great while, I feel led to preach a topical sermon. This is one of those mornings. So we're going to take a break from our journey through Acts to explore a little of what the Bible says about a particular topic. The topic is death. How should we as Christians, view death? It is appointed for a man once to die, but why is it so? How should we respond to death? How should we deal with the inevitability of death as we navigate our way through this transitory existence?

Over the past several weeks, death has touched our community of faith pretty closely. Ethel Pier was called home to be with Jesus following a devastating stroke. Peggy Armstrong passed away the Thursday before Kris and I left for our retreat. Pierce Beach, just 15 years old, was killed only two weeks ago. That tragedy left many of us stunned. It certainly has grieved my soul. My heart breaks for the family left behind.

And I'm sure many of you were shocked, as I was, when you learned of the seven Christians gunned down in the midst of a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina.

Most of the time, we deal with death by trying not to think about it, but when it strikes close to home, it shakes us up. It can be scary ... terrifying, even and the grief that accompanies the death of a loved one can be absolutely overwhelming. Life coming to an end is unsettling.

This morning, Lord willing, I want to change your perspective. I want to let the Word of God transport you from this temporal perspective where we live our lives to the eternal perspective where Almighty God dwells. Although the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Jesus, there is no death! Jesus not only conquered sin on our behalf, He conquered death itself. There is no need for us to fear. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

On this Lord's Day, let us look death in the face and let us celebrate the death of death!

When God finished the work of creation, He made a very important determination:

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

God created a perfect universe. He created a perfect world, a perfect environment. Everything was self-sustaining. We have an echo of that perfect creation in our own bodies. You are fearfully and wonderfully made! Isn't it amazing how the body can heal

itself? You get a cut or a bruise and you might bleed, but the blood clots and over a short period of time, the wound simply heals.

Of course, that doesn't always happen. Sometimes our bodies are damaged beyond repair. And as we get older, we find that we start to break down but that was not the original state of the creation. When God saw everything that He had made, He knew it was very good – perfect, in fact.

And God created our first parents. Adam enjoyed a very close relationship with God, a *koinonea* relationship; perfect fellowship. There was no fear nor was there shame because there was no sin. And God gave Adam a very simple, yet very profound command. We find it in Genesis 2:16-17. (Page 3 in the pew Bibles)

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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." (Genesis 2:16-17)

It's the very first time death is mentioned in the Bible and the literal translation is "dying, you shall die." It describes our current existence. In our natural state, we are spiritually dead and even though we continue to draw breath, our bodies are already breaking down.

Dying, we shall die.

I believe scripture is describing an actual, literal event in Genesis, but I also believe it is pregnant with symbolism. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is symbolic of a fundamental philosophy, a fundamental rule of life: Who gets to determine what is good and evil? Who gets to decide what is right and what is wrong?

Well, in our post-modern society, most believe that we get to decide what is right and what is wrong. "Truth is culturally determined and if what is right makes you uncomfortable, we simply redefine what is right. We saw a prime example of that this past week with our Supreme Court.

But what scripture is teaching us in this Genesis passage is that we have absolutely no right to determine what is right and what is wrong for ourselves.

but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat!

We don't get to redefine God's truth! God makes up the rules. God defines what is good and what is evil and He has given us His divine revelation to teach us exactly that. If you or I arrogantly try to change God's rules, if we rebel against God's commands, well, the wages of sin is death.

Our first parents rebelled against God. Death entered the world.

For the wages of sin is death ... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Turn to Romans, chapter 8; it is on page 1300 in the pew Bibles.

The first 11 chapters of Romans contain a theological treatise. There is so much doctrine there ... so much important study, but we're going to pick a nugget out of the first 17 verses of chapter 8 because this contains the good news about death.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the

*Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*
(Romans 8:1-17)*

Now, go back to verse 11.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

Your mortal body is subject to death. Why? Because you are Adam's spawn.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

But if you have the Spirit of God in you, He has promised to give you life! And He's not talking about the life we experience in this temporal realm.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is **eternal** life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

God is willing to restore you to humanity's original condition. He wants you to walk with Him in the cool of the evening. He wants to bring you to a place where He will ...

... wipe away every tear from [your] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

God loves you so much!

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Jesus died so that you could live eternally. The payment for your sins was made in full at Calvary. All that is left to do is to accept the payment made on your behalf. All you have to do is say “Yes, I’ll take that!” You have to take it by faith. You can’t earn it. But if you ask Him, He’ll also give you the faith you need to believe.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the **gift** of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Now turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. We’re on page 1324 in the pew Bibles. I’ll read beginning with verse 20.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:20-26)

Jesus is in the process of killing death! It is the last enemy to be destroyed. It is the last enemy that will be put under Christ’s feet. And, my friends, the outcome is not in doubt!

Jesus proved that He conquered death by being raised from the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Everyone who has named Him as their personal Lord and Savior because ...

... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

I sure hope that’s you this morning. I pray that you have passed from death into life eternal. But if not, what in the world are you waiting for? Trust Jesus. Admit that you are a sinner and lay your sins at the foot of the cross. Pray to Him; ask Him to be the Lord of your life. Pray “Yes, Lord, I believe; help me with my unbelief.” Give up your rebellion, and submit to His Lordship.

Jesus has already conquered death. And yes, we still see the consequences of human rebellion all around us. Death surrounds us in this dark and darkening world. The devil is doing his best to get his licks in while he can. He has ...

... come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." (Revelation 12:12)

Christian, do not despair! The devil knows he has but a short time. Don’t you?

Let me return to Romans, chapter 8 for just a moment.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Romans 8:5-6)

If you have not accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you have no choice. You are dead in your trespasses and sins. Dead people make no decisions. You will set your minds on the things of the flesh and to be carnally minded is death.

But if you have found your life in Christ, then you do have a choice. Don't dwell on the flesh. Don't be carnally minded. Dwell on the things of the Spirit. Live according to the Spirit. If you do, death will be of no concern to you.

Death is dying. In fact, in Christ Jesus, it is as good as dead.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY." "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?" (1 Corinthians 15:51-55)