

“THE DEATH OF DEATH.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: I Corinthians 15:51-58

Prayer: Holy Father, glorify your Son in our hearts and minds and lives through the proclamation of your holy Word. Preach the truth of the Gospel to us so clearly that we are changed, transformed, conformed to the image and likeness of our risen Savior, whom we worship and adore, glorify your name and exalt your Son and feed your sheep, Amen.

The Seventh Resurrection.

If you were a random unbeliever reading through the Bible for the first time like it was any other book, there's a chance you might wonder what all the fuss was over Jesus' resurrection. I mean, its not like it was the first time someone came back from the dead. So, what's the big deal?

In the OT there are three resurrections all during the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

In I Kings 17 Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath.

Elisha, who is said to have a double portion of Elijah's spirit, raised two people.

In II Kings 4 he raised a Shunammite's son and in II Kings 13 a corpse came to life when it touched Elisha's bones.

Then in the Gospels there are three resurrections.

Jesus raised the son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7), Jairus's daughter (Matthew 9), and Lazarus (John 11).

Jesus' resurrection is the seventh resurrection recorded in Scripture. So, what's the big deal? Well it is a big deal because the others are nothing like Jesus' at all. It is one of a kind.

First, all the others were raised only for the benefit of the one person and possibly for their family. Jesus' resurrection was not just for His benefit, but for the benefit of everyone who believes in His resurrection.

Jesus' death benefits people from every tongue, tribe, people and nation. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

You can achieve the benefit of your own resurrection by believing in His. When we put our faith and trust in Christ, God unites us with Christ's death, His death becomes ours, and His resurrection becomes ours. His death is a one of a kind death.

Second, everyone else who was raised, was raised by someone else. Jesus raised Himself by His own power.

John 10:18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

Jesus is God, He has the power of life and of death, and even in death He has the power of life and death. His death is a one of a kind death.

Third, all of those others raised from the dead, died again. Their experiences were really more like a resuscitation than a resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was permanent. He rose from the dead never to die again. As we sang, we serve a risen Savior whom we know is living. The empty grave proves our Savior lives.

Hebrews 10:11-13 Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Fourth, Jesus didn't just defeat death, he destroyed death, He conquered death. He crushed the head of the serpent. Death is swallowed up. He has the keys of death and hades and He is in complete control.

Revelation 1:17-18 Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Colossians 3:14-15 canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

II Timothy 1:10 Our Savior Christ Jesus, ... abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Death is a conquered enemy, an enemy who has been stripped of his power and victory and sting. Imagine going into battle against an enemy stripped of all armor, all weapons, all power.

None of those other deaths and resurrections did what Jesus' one of a kind death and resurrection did.

Fifth, unlike all the other resurrections in Scripture, only Jesus' death removed the scorpion-sting of death which is sin.

Death is death because of sin. Sin makes death especially deadly, eternally deadly. Its power comes from the holy and righteous and perfect Law of God. Whoever breaks the law is guilty and falls under the curse of the law.

In a gathering this size I think it is safe to say every sin in the book is represented here. The sting of death is here among us and in each of us.

Money sins and financial trials and temptations. Family sins, marriage struggles, child rearing challenges, harsh or abusive words or behavior. Manipulative motives, passive-aggressive behavior, critical spirit, bitterness.

Business sins, work ethics, sloth, lying, cheating. Perverse sins, sexual temptations, pornography. Lust, pride, envy, jealous, greed, gluttony, judgmentalism, impatience, selfishness.

Have I cast the net far enough yet? Aren't we all in it? As far as the curse is found, Christ is dealing with your sin, the sting of death in your life. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ confronts and deals with every single one of them.

God's Law pronounces us legally guilty and deserving to die. God's grace in Christ pronounces us not guilty, the sting is gone, Jesus took it.

I Corinthians 15:54-57 "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

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

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

Death is the fruit of sin, the proof of sin. Resurrection is the proof of salvation, that sin's curse is broken, and death is now dead. The cycle of sin and death is broken. Jesus has brought life and immortality to light. Death is no longer the only destination.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

Jesus perfectly kept all the Law of God and fulfilled all the demands of the Law, thus being completely righteous and giving His righteousness to us, so we are counted as righteous through faith in Jesus and not through obedience to the Law.

Jesus paid our unpayable debt. Jesus completely satisfied the just wrath of God against us and our sin. No one can bring any charge against us.

Sixth, Jesus' death is one of a kind and His resurrection is one of a kind and that changes everything. Nothing can ever be the same after His resurrection.

In other words, the resurrection is not just the next story in the life of Jesus. You know, He came to earth, born in a manger, then He grew up and then became a famous preacher of the Gospel and then was unjustly sentenced to death and died on a cross and then three days later rose from the dead and then He spent some time with His friends and then ascended back into heaven where He came from. No, His resurrection is a historical and spiritual game changer.

We are a people whose reason for being comes out of an empty tomb. We are a people whose purpose in life comes from what happened 20 centuries ago in a cemetery. We are a people who make sense of this life and get our meaning for this life from an empty tomb.

Of the billions of people who have walked on this planet and then died, only once has someone come back from the dead and never died again. It was never done before and it has never since repeated. So, it makes sense that this one singular event would be a defining moment in all of human history. It makes sense that that one person should have our undivided attention.

And when we realize why He did what He did, that He did it for us, that He gave His life to save our lives, that He died so that we could have life, so that we would never have to fear death, so that we could do the very same thing He did, that is walk out of our own tombs someday and leave them empty; when we realize all that then it makes sense that we should give Him not only our undivided attention, but our undivided affection.

Therefore.

I Corinthians 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.

This is one of the many great “therefores” in Scripture.

Because Christ's work on the cross was not in vain so our life in Christ is not in vain.

“Therefore” means there is something practical that follows from this good news, from this one of a kind death and resurrection.

The Gospel changes everything and everything is changed by it. We need it every day for our sanity and stability, for our singleness and our marriage, for our parenting, for our working, for our school life, for our friendships, for all those trials and troubles and problems that haunt us. The Gospel has the power to totally transform our lives.

In fact, if our lives are not changed by the Gospel we don't know the Gospel, we don't know the grace of God freely given to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Remember the story of the man who owed a huge debt, a debt so great it was impossible to repay? It was like 30 years wages, and the man he owed it to in an incredible gesture of grace and mercy and undeserved kindness, the likes of which had never been seen before, forgave the debt, wiped it out. Can you imagine that kind of kindness and grace? Can you imagine the freedom from that kind of burden?

Then what happened? That man ran into a man who owed him \$100 dollars and he demanded immediate repayment and when the man couldn't pay, he threw him in jail.

What's wrong with that picture? What's wrong with that man? What doesn't he get? He doesn't get grace. He doesn't get the Gospel.

If we can't be gracious to a fellow human being, it means we don't know God's grace. If we knew grace, we would be gracious because Gospel grace changes you.

If we can't love someone it means we don't know the heights, depths, length and width of the love of God for us in Christ Jesus.

If we can't forgive someone their sin against us, it means we don't know God's forgiveness.

Jesus said that those who are forgiven much will love much (Luke 7:47). Christians are not people who sin less, they are people who realize the depth of their sin and the depth of their forgiveness and they hold all the more tightly to Him.

The degree to which we receive is the degree to which we give. Out of the abundance of our hearts we give.

My favorite all time movie is *Les Miserable*, the film adaptation of the classic book by the French author Victor Hugo. PBS began a new six-week mini-series last Sunday night of *Les Miserable*. I don't think Hugo was a Christian, but he wrote a story with profound spiritual depth that captures the transforming power of grace.

It's the story of an ex-convict, Jean Valjean who had been imprisoned for nineteen years hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. The nineteen years of terrible abuse by guards and convicts harden Valjean's heart, he was full of anger, hatred, bitterness and revenge. When no one else would help him, Valjean was taken into the home of a bishop and was shown great hospitality. But Valjean couldn't resist the great temptation and stole some of the bishop's silver and ran off into the night. He was arrested and tried to lie his way out of trouble by saying that the silver was a gift.

The constable took him back to the bishop and Valjean expects the worst. But what he received was not what he expected. The bishop said, "Of course this silver was my gift. But only part. You forgot the most valuable part. You forgot to take the silver candlesticks." Valjean is stunned, he knew he was heading back to prison for the rest of his life, but he receives what he never expected and had never experienced before, unbelievable grace.

Not only does he not get what he deserves, but he gets what he doesn't deserve, gets what he could never have hoped to get.

Before Valjean leaves the bishop said, “You must never forget this moment. Your soul and your life have been bought back. You are not your own. You no longer belong to evil. From now on, you belong to God.” The rest of the book is about the change that takes place in this man's life as the power of that memory of grace transforms him.

Oh, that we would all see how close to prison and death we were, imprisoned by our sin and guilt. Oh, that we would see how great a mercy we have been shown and how it changes everything. Oh, that our hearts were that transformed.

Grace will get you, grace will save you, grace will conquer you, it will change everything, it will transform you and enable you to love the unlovable, forgive those who hurt you.

Jesus said, “I have redeemed your life. Therefore go and live a redeemed life.” Live your life for the Lord who saved your life from an eternity of the most horrible kind of labor and hardness of heart.

Live a Gospel-centered, Gospel-transformed life. A life that reflects the radical magnitude of the incomprehensible grace that has been poured out on you.

Jesus Christ has conquered not just death, but your death and your sin. May that give you peace and strength and passion for living the Gospel.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.