

The sting of death removed (Quality: Good)

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[0 : 00] With the help of the Lord, we will speak again once more from the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 15 and verse 55.

Verse 55 in the first epistle to the Corinthians in the 15th chapter.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting?

Human nature will not vanish such a text as this. We should rather listen to something more of common, appropriate, suitable to human thought.

This is one of the outstanding features of the Word of God that it brings us to face the truth. And to face the facts not only of life, but also of death, and not only of death, but also of the resurrection, of which we have been speaking recently.

[1 : 42] But here, as we spoke this morning, is the note of real triumph in the Apostles' summing up of the marvelous reality of the resurrection, the removal of the sting, and by whom it was removed, and what that sting is, and the people from whom it is not removed.

Those that die without hope, knowledge of Christ, who live and die in a formal profession of his name, but have no real acquaintance with the remedy for the sting.

So that he goes on to give thanks in verse 57 to God, which giveth us the victory.

He does the same in the 7th of Romans, where having spoken of himself, his total inability to do that which is right, the sight of God, and to declare of himself, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death, I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And this was his hope. This was the sum and substance of his decorations and his preaching to others.

[3 : 49] So that those that believed, by God-given faith, received this truth to their souls' eternal prosperity.

that that receiving needed to be permanent. For he tells of those who were even weeping, he says, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Many walk, of whom I have told you before, and tell you again, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

It seems hardly credible that this should be so. That there could be such a spirit in us. I say us, because we are all involved in this deceptive work, calm or nature.

It seems hardly possible that there could be those who should walk in a profession and look outwardly as if all was well and they were very close followers of the Lamb.

[5 : 26] Yet, within, they would be the cause of the Apostles' weeping.

we have one or two records of him weeping. And, you know that God's servants do have to weep over you, don't you?

And, weep some bitter tears for your spiritual welfare.

think not it is a matter of standing or sitting in a pulpit. Far from that we must give an account.

And that account must be verified. And it is this that constitutes the burden of the minister.

[6 : 37] of the Lord. Therefore, when he declares in this verse, triumphantly, O death, where is thy sting? He is speaking of the finished, completed work of Christ.

That work whereby, as I said this morning, sin was imputed to the Lord Jesus. that wonderful gospel truth that the sins of the Lord's people, known unto him from the foundation of the world, foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, glorified, the years and without their knowledge, without their asking, before they were born, their sins were laid upon Christ.

And they are brought in life to face this tremendous truth. this is how God works. And this is his design.

Our prophets of old declared the same. It was by imputation that the sins of the millions of saved souls, many of whom now are safely gathered home in heaven, and many of whom are yet to come, and many of whom are yet in their deadness and darkness, and in the world and lost, without hope and without God, many yet to be brought to this gracious knowledge that their sins were laid upon Christ.

And therefore, by his substitutionary work, they were pardoned. Visibly, before the eyes of men in the days of Christ's crucifixion, historically, before our eyes, by the holy record, that he was made sin.

[9 : 21] for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

This was the extraction of the sting, a divine matter, so that if you should be resting upon your own merit, or fancied goodness, or a false religious foundation, if you should be thinking for one moment that you can merit eternal bliss, think again.

will your sinful actions, with all the best intentions in the world, stand comparison with the mighty work of the Lord Jesus, who suffered the agonizing suffering, salvation, as we have recorded in the Garden of Gethsemane, where this divine transaction took place.

Belief in this is therefore essential to salvation, and God given faith, and there is no other that is real, will be bound to bring this into your life.

And in course of time, make it firm ground beneath your feet, so that you will read the short account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane with wonder, and I may add with love.

[11 : 39] But now we come to the second triumphant call, O grave, where is thy victory?

The grave, normally, translated shield, means the place of the dead, throughout the scripture, the place of the dead.

It has always been, throughout the scripture, the custom to bury one's dead.

Today, we have the awful substitute of cremation, where defiant man hastens the decomposing of the human frame to such a limited space as an hour, and where, not only so, but we believe many, secretly, entertain the thought that they have escaped and bypassed the resurrection, forgetting that they were made of the dust, whether that be dust or ashes.

the grave is not an entertaining subject, naturally, and with much concern, it's just laid on my mind to speak to you from, but I don't apologise, but dare.

[13 : 37] I would be flying in the face of the Lord's commander, were I to say to you, I'm sorry, but I've got a mournful subject, the grave.

Now, most of us have stood beside the open grave. grave. It certainly is, as the scripture calls it, the place of the dead.

It looks exactly what it is, the end, and yet, in his gracious argument preceding these words, we find that he says, and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but a bare grain.

It may chance of wheat, or of some other grain, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed, his own body.

There's no need for me to mention the marvels of creation, and every seed, its own body.

[15 : 13] I could remind you of the parallel that the apostle uses, that as we sow, we reap.

corruption. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

Exactly the same thing as he soweth. He that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap everlasting life.

exactly the same seed as he soweth. But here he confines himself to what he calls bare grain, B-A-R-E.

you know how naked a seed is, isn't it? And yet you don't look upon it with disdain.

[16 : 23] You buy a packet of seeds, you don't tip them in your hand and look at them with contempt and say, well, they're no good.

what's the use of these? They're just bare. The farmer doesn't look at his sack of wheat that he proposes to sow and say, well, what is the good of that?

He proceeds to sow it. It's bare. Not a spark of life in it that he can seed.

Why does he sow it then? Why do you sow your seeds? Because you know that there is a life in them.

And why do you choose a certain kind of seed? seed? With the utmost assurance that it will produce exactly what you want.

[17 : 43] And why are these seeds so variable in their appearance? others? Why can the eye of the multiculturalist discern the naked and bare seed as it lies in his hand or on the table in front of it?

Why? because he knows their nature. So with the marvels of creation and nature, we have the apostle using this term of the sowing of the bare grain.

and that means, my dear friends, of the laying of your body and mind in the grave.

I hope not the fire in the grave. So that what scene could you think of?

More depression sad than this scene of the burial of a body.

[19 : 14] But you will say it all depends. It all depends to be well laid in the grave as a believer whose works to follow them.

one who lived in faith and who died in faith to them and to theirs. This is not a scene of sorrow.

We sorrow not as those without hope, do we? Far from it. tears are and yet tears are fully justified.

Jesus wept. Tears are fully justified. The grave has a somber voice at this scene of death, of death, emptiness, sorrow, bereavement, loss, is sanctified by this glorious truth.

There's a victory over it. victory over it. What is that victory? Let me take you back again to your garden.

[20 : 48] You've sowed your seed. In a week or ten days, you look along those rows, and you expect to see something.

Should we say to you, poor foolish creature, you sowed those naked and bare seeds, and do you expect that they're going to appear again?

what's folly? Nothing of the kind. He that goeth forth bearing precious seed and weeping shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his seeds with him.

In those eastern countries, especially in time of famine, where the sowing time came round, it was often necessary for the sower to part with his last seeds and weep as he sowed them.

Weep over this thought, would it be a good harvest? yield harvest? Would they yield thirtyfold?

[22 : 29] Would they keep his family another year? He went forth weeping, parting with his precious seed that he could use now for a few more weeks.

would it yield? Could it tell? But says the word of God, doubtless, doubtless, he shall come again with rejoicing, bringing his seeds with him.

so with this fair grain and you looking along your rows in the garden and this inbred knowledge in you that ought to be moving now, so with the glorious gospel, that which thou sowest as the apostle is sown in dishonor, it is raised, mark the word, in glory.

Glory. And so it is, isn't it? If I may go back to the humble seedbed again, it's glory in your eyes when you see the crop coming up, when the farmer looks across his field and sees the shadow of greenery just appearing, it's glorious in his eyes, life, prospect, death.

In this, the matter is extended far higher. It is sown a natural body.

[24 : 46] It is raised a spiritual body. Now here a figure must be left alone because no one has any knowledge of a spiritual body except what we are told of the body of the Lord Jesus after his resurrection.

It is raised a spiritual body. Oh, grave, where is thy victory? It seemed as if you'd gained the day and everything was in your favour and that which was planted therein was finished forever.

Oh, grave, what a challenge, what a divine challenge. will it be applicable to us?

Will this be our prospect? Shall we look to this great day a hope beyond the grave?

It all comes back to the resurrection. and in that telling account of which we spoke a few weeks ago with regard to Martha and Mary, the sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God.

[26 : 36] Therefore, Lazarus is raised before the very eyes of the people and we see that it was for the glory of God.

It may have been and undoubtedly was for the comfort of Martha and Mary in a much lesser degree but in the eyes and experience of the Lord Jesus it was the manifestation of the glory of God.

I thank thee, O God, that thou hast heard me. The grave, therefore, has yet to follow or be followed by a victory.

it. Now, leaving the apostles' figures so ably used, we come to his explanation.

The sting of death is sin. It's what I said this morning. Everyone isn't stunned.

[28 : 01] not everyone is convicted of their sin.

And who is it that has the work of conviction and can accomplish it?

The Holy Spirit. Jesus said in the 14th of John, and when he's come, he shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

Not everyone in the world, as is solemnly obvious, destroying any argument as to universal salvation, that he shall convince of sin, so that the sting of death is sin.

But the strength of sin is the law. Now, this holy law of God is applicable to all mankind.

[29 : 42] That which God has commanded, briefly summed up in the Ten Commandments, I say briefly, such a short list really, that law.

Can you look at one of these, and like the rich young man, man? Jesus said to him, thou knowest the commandments, and he said, all these have I kept from my youth up.

Perfection, yet lackest thou one thing, said Jesus. James declares that he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all.

For there is none righteous, no, not one, is the declaration of the Apostle Paul. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The gospel has rung through the world in these towns, or rather the law has, so that there is no hope of any loophole of escape or special conditions of preference for any.

[31 : 36] the outstanding point is this, that the law is tremendously strong. We don't realise it.

We know there is a law. We may run close to the fringe of it.

we may park our car and say yes, certain time and I must move it, and we overstep that time by five minutes, and we find a parking ticket there.

What can we say? What can we say? the child tells mother an untruth and mother proves this to be an untruth, what can the child say?

The law is inflexible. So is the holy Lord God absolutely inflexible.

[33 : 03] It must be honoured in every demand. And in the person and life of Jesus Christ it has been.

That is the purpose of his thirty years in the humble Capernaum where he magnified the law honoured it in every degree.

Again, how blessed a truth I found this in my illness as clear water, clear as crystal, flowing over that mountain, the blessed work of the Lord Jesus in honouring the law, fulfilling it in every path, not for himself.

This is where the victory comes in because although the strength of sin is the law, if that law has been honourably fulfilled by another on your behalf, here are the windings of God's eternal purpose, how clear you are of any guilt whatever.

You have no excuse to offer, excuses are lame, but what you have to plead is what Christ has done, and what he has done, he has done to the utmost perfection on the part of this mighty host of saved and ransomed sinners.

[35 : 28] If you could meditate upon what this means, and as you look at the world today, and the increasing flow of diabolical wickedness, and blasphemy, and the downward trend almost everywhere, of mankind, in his downward run into eternal perdition, what wonders of grace, that any one of this number should be stopped in their mad career, and who's to say they won't be?

The door of mercy is not closed, hope is not given up, the gospel is still to be preached, the vilest of sinners is still to be reached, oppressed, and those that are enshrouded in a form of religion and profession, and know not the sting, and have not been led to see the power of the law and its application to them, their eyes can be opened.

Therefore the apostle rejoices in this, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is of course the whole sum of the gospel. This is the firm ground to come to the end of your life.

By divine faith and grace you are taught these things in life and come to the end of your pilgrimage resting upon the finished work of Christ, his atonement, his removing of sin, guilt from your conscience and life, I say, what a place of happiness.

[37 : 56] But what a prospect to look forward to. But he suddenly breaks off.

And this is a beautiful verse, the last, which I must speak of. God, therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

for as much as we know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

This is where I stand tonight. I may never know the success of my labour as regards 1977, but of late my life has been overcome with the tributes I have received from God's people of my labours over the past years, so much so that I have not had tears enough to shed, nor a heart with enough strings to praise him.

But this verse, very precious to me, when I was exercised about the ministry in my early days, I was brought to a point about it.

[40 : 13] There was one godly member of the church at Bournemouth, who I much esteemed, and she said to me, I am peculiarly exercised about you.

I said nothing, but several years afterward, she lay on a dying bed, and I did long to know to know what this peculiar exercise was.

And I thought to myself, she's not going to live, the secret will die with her, I'll ask her, and I did.

And I said this, do you remember saying to me some years ago that you were peculiarly exercised about me?

Of course I do, she said. I said, do you mind telling me what it was, why that one day you'll be a minister?

[41 : 34] She didn't die, the Lord restored her to health, and she wept when she got better, to come back, as she said, to this world of sin.

But when she did die, some time after came to me through the post a little package, which was her hymn book.

And in the fly leaf of it was written this, Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

For as much as ye know, your labour is not in vain in the Lord. what I have just related to you happened over forty years ago.

What have I lived to see? And these eternal truths, though the subject may be sombre to your natural ear, the Lord help you to receive vital truth, that to the believer it is a triumph to die.

[43 : 11] O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.