

Victory over Death

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The following thoughts were suggested consequent upon hearing of the death of several of the Lord's people in the same week.

Death is a very solemn matter; its inroads are universal, and it affects mankind irrespective of age, culture, nationality or position. It is said to have "passed upon *all* men," the result of all having sinned (Romans 5: 12). Satan has used its power on men "who, through fear of death, were *all their lifetime* subject to bondage," (Hebrews 2: 15).

The first mention in the Scriptures of the actual word itself sets forth the bitterness and sorrow connected with it; Hagar exclaims "Let me not see the death of the child," (Genesis 21: 16). A little later Abraham desired "that I may bury my dead *out of my sight*", (Genesis 23).

We do well to face its solemnity; indeed a servant of the Lord, now with Christ, once said that "it was right that the *flesh* should shrink from death." Perhaps the most solemn thought connected with it is that it involves separation from God Himself.

If this were all that could be said, how hopeless the position would be; but, thank God, death does *not* have the last word. let us look again at the Scripture in Hebrews 2 which has been already quoted in part, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood (a condition subject to death) He also Himself took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and *deliver them*, who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage," (vv. 14-15). It should be clearly pointed out that the word "partakers" as applying to each one of us, involves that we were in that condition as our common lot; whereas the words "took part," which refer to Christ, have the force that He came into a condition of things which were outside of Himself personally; He was ever the Holy sinless One.

Again we read those precious words, "our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished (or, annulled) death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," (2 Timothy 1: 10).

He Satan's power laid low;
Made sin, sin's reign o'erthrew;
Bow'd to the grave, destroy'd it so,
And death by dying slew.

Listen to His own triumphant words, "I and He that liveth, and became dead; and, behold, I am *alive for evermore*, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death," (Rev. 1: 18). ("Of death and of Hades," New Trans.).

The power over death which was inherent in our Lord Jesus Christ was manifested in His lifetime down here; He was "*marked out Son of God in power*, according to the Spirit of holiness, by resurrection of the dead," (Romans 1: 4, New Trans.).

As this blessed man commenced His ministry amongst men the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "To them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up," (Matthew 4: 16), "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men," (John 1: 4).

In Mark 5, the shadow of death had fallen upon the household of Jairus; his daughter had died, and in the wake of death was tumult and wailing. But the last word was with the Son of God, the Prince of life. Putting to silence every other voice, he proclaims that, *in His presence*, death has lost its terror, and is but sleep. How beautiful are His words, "Talitha Cumi." "Talitha" carries the thought of the "freshness of youth;" who but the Son of God could break the dread power of death and bring in the freshness of youth? "Straightway the damsel arose, and walked." We are considering at the moment the actual happenings in the Lord's blessed movements, but if we think of the doctrinal import of this verse, how blessed it is to see those who are "walking in newness of life" as the result of the victory of Christ!

In Luke 7, we see again the dreadful havoc which death makes; "there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." It happened at the *gate* of Nain, which means "pleasant." How outwardly fair the cities of men are; but this chapter tells us solemnly of the principles which dominate those cities. "A woman in the city, which was a *sinner*"; "a *dead* man carried out." Thus man's broken responsibility and its dire results are manifest, and the dreadful toll of sin and death is beyond the administration of men to halt. Such power belongs to the Son of God alone, and in compassionate feeling towards the broken-hearted mother, He speaks a word of mighty power which causes death to yield its victim. What an answer to the principles of sin and death which are seen in the chapter is thus manifested! "And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak." What did he say?-we are not told. In Isaiah 38, we read of Hezekiah who was sick unto death, and who said, "I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years." As he cried to God the answer came, "I have heard thy prayer . . . and I will deliver thee." And as delivered from death Hezekiah breaks forth into those beautiful expressions, "The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee; . . . the living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day."

In Ephesians 2, we are said to be "dead in trespasses and sins," verse 2; but the chapter goes on to speak of the movements of God in mercy and in love, in grace and in kindness, in quickening power. As the result of this we have "access by one Spirit to the Father," and we can say in truth,

"We live of Thee, we've heard Thy quickening voice
Speaking of love beyond all human thought,
Thy Father's love, in which we now rejoice,
As those in spirit to Thy Father brought."

The icy chill of death is melted in the warmth of divine love, and the proud claims of the grave are silenced by the quickening voice of Christ, and we have been made vocal in our response of praise to Him and to His God.

In John 11, we see the havoc death has brought into the circle of human affections, a circle which had known the sweetness and the preciousness of the love of Christ Himself, (verse 5). How closely this affects us! Could not the Lord have ordered otherwise? Perhaps we have often thought thus. Both Mary and Martha *knew* that He could have spared them this sorrow, "Lord if THOU hadst been here my brother had not died" is the language of each broken heart. The Jews, as touched by the manifestation of the Lord's love, evidenced in His tears, also said, "Could not this Man . . . have caused that even this man should not have died?" Had this happened, how much those sisters would have missed; what impressions of the glory of Christ they would have lost. They would not have known the preciousness of His tears of compassion (v.25); the might and authority of that "loud voice" (v. 43); the knowledge of *Himself* as "the resurrection, and the life," (v. 35); the vision of the glory of God (v. 40); and the sweetness of companionship and communion with Him in a scene beyond death, where their

glad hearts could respond to Him, and to Him alone, in an atmosphere of holy worship, filling the house "with the odour of the ointment," (John 12: 3).

There is a wonderful moment coming when a vast company of saints will be seen completely triumphant over death, a day "when death is swallowed up in victory," and the challenging note will ring out, "O death, *where* is thy sting? O grave, *where* is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which *giveth us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ," (1 Corinthians 15: 55-57).

Again we read those lovely words "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be *no more death*". All that death has brought in its wake shall be banished too, "neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," (Revelation 21: 4).

As we await that blessed day let us remember with joy the present portion of our loved ones; those who have trusted Christ as Saviour and Lord and have gone into death; they are those "which sleep in Jesus;" they are "dead in Christ;" and they, together with us "which are alive and remain shall be caught up . . . in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord," (1 Thessalonians 4: 14-17).

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."