

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Death of Death in Jesus' Victory

He will swallow up death in victory; And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: For the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 25:8, KJV 1900)

Occasionally as we read Old Testament prophecies, we wonder. Is the prophecy fulfilled in a near event in the history of God's Old Testament people, or is it fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ? In other prophecies, we discover that New Testament teaching answers the question for us, as with this verse.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:54)

We live our lives, beginning to end, under the shadow of death. Young or old, it is never far from us. And, should we momentarily forget it, something happens to remind us, often vividly, of its dreadful presence. David gives voice to this point.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalms 23:4)

The idea of death having a shadow richly instructs us. Through much of the daylight hours, the sun is close to the horizon, either in the morning or the afternoon. During these times, anything that casts a shadow makes the point of the verse. The shadow is larger than the actual image. Often as we live, death seems ominous, far larger than its reality. Even in the face of death's shadow, David takes his comfort in the Lord, his Shepherd. "I will fear no evil." Notice the mention of both a rod and a staff. Shepherds in David's time typically carried two sticks or poles, one a large cudgel to beat down wild animals, and one the shepherd's staff with which the shepherd gently nudged sheep to stay in the fold. David finds comfort in both. He knows his Shepherd's fierce protection and His gentle grace.

David continues his point in this priceless psalm.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Psalms 23:6)

Most of the psalm emphasizes our Shepherd's care of His sheep in the here and now; green pastures,

still waters, quiet and safe places to rest. But the final verse adds to that point. David rejoices that the Lord's goodness and mercy shall follow him "...all the days of my life." The verse continues, "...and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." In this point, David stretches our minds and hope beyond the days of this life. He hopes to dwell in the Lord's house, not for a long lifetime, but "for ever." In this clause, David embraces eternity with the Lord no less than Paul embraced it in First Corinthians 15. When we leave Psalm 23 as an encouragement for this life only, we miss the most powerful point of the psalm. Our Lord's "Shepherding" care of His sheep transcends even death.

If we did not have Paul's inspired explanation (1 Corinthians 15:54), we might quibble over Isaiah's point that the Lord "...will wipe away tears from off all faces." We may view this thought from at least two perspectives. 1) The Lord's people weep over their sorrows through their pilgrimage, but the Lord never forgets them. He intervenes and wipes away their tears with the comforts of His loving grace. 2) At the Second Coming and resurrection, the Lord shall raise us in His image, thus eliminating any basis for tears that accompanied our steps during our time in this life. As I ponder my life experience, witness the experience of faithful men and women, and, more importantly, as I read Scripture, I see tears in the eyes of the most devoted and godly of believers, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews." (Acts 20:19) Our most joyful day in our pilgrimage is clouded by tears in the background. However, Scripture's consistent description of the Lord's return and raising His people from their graves leaves no ground for a single tear of grief or sorrow. By eliminating the reason for tears, the Lord in effect wipes our tears away, even before we shed them. Tears may go with us to the moment of death, but there they stop! He wipes them away, eliminates them, from that point forward forever.

"He will swallow up death in victory." How is it that the Lord swallows death? The analogy is unique; it captures our attention. The point is not that He treats death as food, but that he consumes it, destroys it—eliminates it!

The analogy adds a military flavor, "...in victory." Imagine two mortal enemies facing each other on the battlefield. Each side brings out its strongest artillery and hurls it against the opposition. Eventually one or the other side gains the upper hand and claims the victory. Isaiah reports Jesus' victory long before He came and engaged His—and our—adversary in battle.

One of—perhaps the very first—Scripture's earliest prophecies of Jesus' coming and victory appears near the beginning of Scripture.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

Interesting, God spoke these words to the serpent, the arch enemy himself. By his interference in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, the serpent intended opposition against God, likely hoping to utterly derail God's noble intent for them. A study of the Hebrew word translated "good" in the first chapter of Genesis urges more than something that is merely useful. The word includes a sense of moral good. If God's intent in the natural creation was to promote His moral character, the serpent in his opposition went after God's last and greatest creation, man, likely intending thereby to bring down everything good that God intended in the creation.

While the scenario plays itself out between the woman and the serpent, and their representative "seed," the outcome of the hostilities of the ages has a certain end. As the serpent bruises the heel of the woman's "seed," the woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head. Notice; the woman's "seed" doesn't merely go after the serpent's seed. He goes after the serpent personally, and he bruises the serpent's head. In comparison, a bruise to the heel is quite painful. Have you ever experienced plantar fasciitis? With every step, even the slightest weight on the foot is intensely painful. However, notice the contrast in the lesson. The pain of the heel is significant, but it is certainly not fatal. But the woman's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, delivers a fatal blow to the serpent's head. Crush his head, and he dies.

This passage early on reminds us that Jesus and Satan are engaged in mortal conflict, but it also assures us that the outcome is certain. Jesus gains the final and ultimate victory. "He will swallow up death in **victory**." To "swallow up" something is to utterly consume or destroy it. Consider this New Testament passage.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise 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. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

No concept of a "Spirit body" or phantom image can live up to this passage. Jesus came in literal flesh and blood just as fully—and literally—as you and I. And He came with a purpose, that, through dying, He might destroy death and the diabolical one who traffics in the power of death. But far more to the point, He came to deliver His children who live their lives in the fear of death. Only Jesus can confront and neutralize our fear of death. And, if we respectfully consider these two verses, He delivers us from the fear of death by dying Himself, and rising from the dead. Our sole hope of resurrection rests in Him and His resurrection, a primary point that Paul makes in First Corinthians 15, as well as in this passage. Take away Jesus' literal, bodily resurrection, and you cannot escape your fear of death. "...because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19b)

If Jesus has in fact swallowed up death in victory, we might ask, at what price? The contemporary view of end times over-symbolizes various Scriptures to paint a gory, bloody image of vast numbers of children of God dying in that final battle. However, if we follow Scripture, we discover an edifying fact. Based on Revelation 19:14, the armies that follow Jesus in this final battle wear linen clothes. Linen is the wardrobe of priests in Scripture, not soldiers. Further examination of the Scriptures dealing with that final battle describes the bloodshed as coming from Jesus' enemies, not His saints. The redeemed, dressed in linen priestly clothes, are present to witness Jesus' victory. He alone engages the battle. Not only does He in the end win the battle, but He "...swallows up death in victory." The victory is decisive and complete. In fact, He alone won the battle by His own death and resurrection. The adversary is vanquished, and Jesus conquers with all of His beloved children safely sheltered in His care.

I love the words of Isaac Watts on this topic.

His own soft hand shall wipe the tear
From ev'ry weeping eye
And pains and groans, and griefs and tears
And death itself shall die.

Isaac Watts

We never experience deliverance from our fear of death apart from our Lord and His abiding—His timeless—care over His own. What comfort! We face death constantly in this life. At the Lord's return, we shall witness the death of death as we experience the final, full, and glorious deliverance that our Lord secured for us through His death, resurrection, and glorious ascension. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor