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Sermon Notes

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Death the Final Enemy

1 Corinthians 15:26

I. Our Final Foe

A. Resurrection Day: A Great Celebration

B. Understand the Full Magnitude of Christ's Accomplishment

1. Feel the weight of the bondage
2. See the strength of the foe
3. Rejoice in the bounty of the plunder & spoils

C. Already/Not Yet

D. Context: 1 Corinthians 15... misunderstanding or unbelief

1. Corinthians misunderstanding doctrine of resurrection
2. Some didn't believe in resurrection at all
3. Solid block of doctrine on resurrection

- a. first (1-11): establishes the historical fact of the gospel, that Christ HAS BEEN raised before many eye-witnesses

vs. 3-6 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

- b. second (12-19): shows that resurrection is CENTRAL to Christian gospel

vs. 13-14 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

c. third (20-22): shows theological parallel between death in Adam and life in Christ

vs. 22 *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

d. fourth (23-28): shows that Christ's victory over death is not yet complete... but is going on now as history unfolds and all his enemies are gradually vanquished

vs. 25 *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*

e. fifth (24-28): shows that final destruction of death is part of God overall plan to redeem the entire universe and rid it of all evil, or all enemies

vs. 24-25 *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all [his enemies].*

f. sixth (29-34): proves that life itself would change dramatically if there is no resurrection... for we should just become worldly pleasure-seekers if there is no resurrection

vs. 32 *If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*

g. seventh (35-49): describes the mysteries of the actual mechanics of physical bodily resurrection

vs. 42-44 *The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

h. eighth (50-54): proves that every single human being MUST have this transformation of they cannot enter eternity...

vs. 50 *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God"*

i. ninth (55-57): exults in death's total defeat through Christ

vs. 55 *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

j. tenth (58): concludes with a ringing exhortation to work hard for Christ, because resurrection means that nothing we do for Christ on earth is in vain

vs. 58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

II. Death an Enemy

vs. 26 *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

A. Death Born an Enemy

1. Death's parentage: sin

James 1:15 *...sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

2. Death entered the world to destroy

Illus. Viking destruction of monasteries... nothing of value left unharmed

B. Death a Universal Enemy

1. No nation is exempt

Every tribe, language, people, nation have their own mourning rituals

2. No class of people exempt

Rich man fades away even while he goes about his business... the house of the poor also touched by death's universal reach

3. No age of people exempt

Illus. Children's hospital... see the tiny faces surrounded by state of the art equipment trying to stave off some relentless disease

Illus. Douglas MacArthur... absolutely courageous under fire; said "Old soldiers never die, they merely fade away." Wrong... they die too!

4. No amount of virtue makes someone exempt!!

Illus. It was not the first sinner Adam, nor the wicked murderer Cain who died first... rather, it was the pure and righteous Abel

C. Death a Vicious Enemy

Nahum 3:19 *Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?*

Death will not even spare a recently bereaved family of yet another tragedy

Adoniram Judson, first American missionary, working in Burma, had to leave on mission business as his beloved wife Ann as she was caring for their tiny frail daughter Maria, who was suffering from a tropical fever. Not long after, Adoniram received an envelope with a black seal. He opened it, expecting to read of little Maria's death... instead, it shocked him with the words "Mrs. Judson is no more" Shortly thereafter, frail little Maria also died. Judson decided to remarry, taking as a wife the beautiful widow and fellow missionary Sarah Boardman, and she also died.

Puritan theologian John Owen and his wife had thirteen children, and only one lived past age ten... a daughter who died at age sixteen...Death has no pity at all!!

D. Death a Mocking Enemy

1. Death mocks every earthly relationship, calling them temporary
2. Death also mocks every earthly achievement

Illus. Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story, "How much land does a man need?" Tale focused on a greedy farmer named Pahom who was never satisfied with the amount of land he owned. He kept acquiring more and more land. Finally heard that the Bashkir people across the mountains were selling huge tracts of land for \$1000 rubles. He negotiated with the chief of the Bashkirs, who said he could buy as much land as he could walk around in one day, but he had to return to the spot at which he started before sundown or he would lose his money. Pahom immediately set out and walked due east for several hours, and the further he travelled, the better the land looked to him. Finally, he realized he needed to make his first turn. He put a post in at the easternmost extremity of his land, then turned north. He walked until the sun was straight over his head and he was sweating from the effort of the hike. He wanted to rest for lunch, but he dared not, or he might lose some land or all his money by not returning back before sundown. So, he put his second marker in the ground, having completed two legs of his square. He began to realize, "I have made the sides of the square too long. I better make the third leg shorter or I will lose it all." Struggling intensely now under the heat, Pahom pressed on making the third leg of his square journey. By now, he was exhausted and the sun was dangerously low, heading toward the horizon. "I better travel straight back to the Bashkir chief immediately or I will lose all my land and my money as well. Pahom grew hotter and hotter under the weight of his cloak, coat, hat and equipment. He began throwing it off, running faster and faster in a race with the sun. Finally, he could see in the hazy distance the hill where he had begun his journey in the morning, with the Bashkirs waiting for him. He broke into a full run, because the sun was almost down. Pahom began to despair, thinking "I have been much too greedy and have ruined everything!" His heart was beating with pressure like under hammer blows, his legs felt like they belonged to someone else... his breath was fevered, and Pahom began to fear that he would die under the strain of trying to return on time.

Pahom was running as hard as his exhausted body would allow him. The Bashkir chief and all his people were laughing uproariously at his frenzied exertions to complete his circuit before the large orange ball of the sun disappeared below the horizon. Pahom made one final great effort, running up the hill and lunging for the finish line. The chief exploded in laughter, and commended Pahom: "What a fine fellow! He has gained much land!!" But Pahom had a small trickle of blood running down from his mouth, and as his servant tried to rouse him, it was clear: Pahom was dead! Pahom's servant picked up a spade and buried him in it... in the end, six feet from his head to his heels was all the Bashkir land that Pahom needed.

Moral: death stands to mock all of our accomplishments on earth... no matter how great they may be!

E. Death a Sudden Enemy

1. Death comes unannounced
2. Death comes suddenly, often with no warning
3. Death brings its vicious plundering horde into your life when you least expect it

Summary: Death was born an enemy, death plunders like an enemy, death is a universal enemy, death is a mocking enemy, death is a sudden enemy... this great, powerful foe is more than we can handle, and unless we have a savior, we shall like trampled under death's boot forever!

Jesus Christ is the death conqueror!!

III. Death an Enemy Already Destroyed

A. Christ Jesus Destroyed Death in His Miracles

Luke 7:11-15 *Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.*

Luke 8:51-55 *When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵² Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is*

not dead but asleep." ⁵³ *They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.* ⁵⁴ *But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!"* ⁵⁵ *Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat.*

John 11:38-44 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ *"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."* ⁴⁰ *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"* ⁴¹ *So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.* ⁴² *I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* ⁴³ *When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* ⁴⁴ *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.*

All of these miraculous resurrections were merely foretastes of Christ's resurrecting power. Each of these people someday died again, and sunk into the dust. But Christ's total power over death was established.

B. Christ Jesus Destroyed Death in His Teachings

John 8:51 I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

In Jesus' amazing words, He claimed to have total power over death, and even more, to be able to give that power to whoever believed in Him.

Jesus' words destroyed death!

C. Christ Jesus Destroyed Spiritual Death

1. Bible teaches that, apart from Christ, we are dead spiritually

Matthew 8:21-22 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ²² *But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Ephesians 2:1-2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live

2. Jesus came to give eternal life through simple faith in Him

John 5:24-25 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. 25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

Jesus destroyed spiritual death in all who believe in Him... we are "born again" into a new relationship with God forever!!

D. Christ Jesus Destroyed Death at the Cross

1. All other victories over death small compared to this one

Spurgeon: "These were but preliminary skirmishes and mere foreshadowings of the grand victory by which death was overthrown. The real triumph was achieved at the cross."

2. Wrath of God extinguished on the cross

True death is eternal judgment under the wrath of God. This is precisely the death Jesus came to fulfill on the cross

James 1:15 ...sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Revelation 20:14 The lake of fire is the second death.

- a. "second death" of hell extinguished
 - b. cup of God's wrath drunk to the bitter dregs
 - c. true death itself abolished forever for believers
3. Justice of God cannot demand payment twice
 - a. God will never demand from you what Christ has already paid in your place
 - b. you will stand before God in Judgment Day, blameless and unafraid

Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

E. Christ Jesus Destroyed Death at the Empty Tomb

2 Timothy 1:10 Christ Jesus ... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

1. Christ has forever changed the tomb for Christians

2. Spurgeon notes Christ's careful work in the tomb:

Spurgeon: "When our great Champion arose from His brief sleep of death and found Himself in the withdrawing room of the grave, He quietly proceeded to put off the garments of the tomb. How leisurely He proceeded! He folded up the napkin and placed it by itself, that those who lose their friends might wipe their eyes therewith; and He took off the winding sheet and laid the graveclothes by themselves that they might be there when His saints come thither, so that the chamber might be well-furnished, and the bed ready sheeted and prepared for their rest. The sepulchre is no longer an empty vault, a dreary charnel, but a chamber of rest, a dormitory furnished and prepared, hung with the drapes which Christ has Himself bequeathed. It is no more a damp, dark, dreary prison: Jesus has changed all that!!"

Charles Wesley: "Live again our glorious King! Where O death is now thy sting? Once He died our souls to save; where thy victory, boasting grave?"

F. Christ Jesus Destroyed the Fear of Death

Hebrews 2:14-15 by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

1. Death has been transformed forever

Spurgeon: "Death, it is true that thou art not yet destroyed, but our living Redeemer has so changed thee that thou art no longer death, but something other than thy name! Saints die not, now, but they are dissolved and depart. Death is the loosing of the cable that the ship may sail to the fair havens. Death is the fiery chariot in which we ascend to God: it is the gentle voice of the Great King, who cometh into His banqueting hall and saith, 'Friend, come up higher.' Behold, on eagles wings we mount, we fly, far from this land of mist and cloud, into the eternal serenity and brilliance of God's own house above. Yes, our Lord has abolished death. The sting of death is sin, and our great Substitute has taken that sting away by His great sacrifice. Stingless, death abides among the people of God, but it so little harms them that to them, 'it is not death to die.'"

2. Christ has made the tomb a doorway into paradise

3. "Flesh and blood" cannot inherit the Kingdom of God

4. So, death is the necessary step into eternity

G. Christ Daily Destroys Death for His Saints

vs. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

1. Christ not content with just one victory

2. Christ defeats death every time a child of God dies
3. For 2000 years, Christ has been defeating death in His children

Acts 7:55-59 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Therefore, many saints have testified by their faith-filled joy that death is not a crushing burden...

Spurgeon: "Every day Christ is overcoming death, for He gives His Spirit to His saints, and having that Spirit within them they confront death with songs... they face death with a calm countenance, and they fall asleep in peace. 'I will not fear thee death—why should I? You look like a dragon, but your sting is gone.' "For these saints, to die has been so different a thing from what they expected it to be, so lightsome, so joyous; they have been so unloaded of all care, have felt so relieved instead of burdened, that they have wondered whether this could be the monster they had been afraid of all their days. They find it a pin's prick, when they feared it would be a sword thrust; it is the shutting of the eye on earth, and the opening of it in heaven..."

Thomas Goodwin: "Ah! Is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!"

William Preston: "Blessed be God! Though I shall change my place, I shall not change my company!"

Charles Wesley: "I shall be satisfied with thy likeness... satisfied, satisfied!!"

Adoniram Judson: "I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."

John Pawson: "I know I am dying, but my death-bed is a bed of roses. Heaven has already begun."

William Everett: "Glory... Glory...Glory..." for the last 25 minutes of his life, until he was gone.

Every time a child of God dies like that, Christ has already won yet another victory over death.

Summary: In all these ways, Christ has already destroyed death: by his miracles, He showed His total power over death; by His teachings He proclaimed death to be conquered; by His Spirit He brought us over from spiritual death to spiritual life; by the cross, He has removed forever the true sting of death, namely, the wrath of God in judgment against us for sin; by His resurrection, He has

made the grave a mere portal into heaven for the child of God... He has arranged the sheets of our beds, and there we will rest until He raises us.

BUT YET, death still remains here, as our text clearly testifies

IV. Death an Enemy Not Yet Destroyed

vs. 26 *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Illus. At a funeral service in Winona Lake, Indiana: "We are not in the land of the living but in the land of the dying. But someday, we shall be in the land of the Living."

A. Christ's Final Enemy Still

1. "Last enemy" means it is still with us
2. Christ hates this foe, and all its wicked damage

Christ snorted with anger at the grief of Martha and Mary

Christ Wept Before Raising Lazarus

B. YET Christ Has NOT YET Destroyed Death

1. Total victory over death has NOT YET happened
2. Death still has its sway over our bodies
3. Christ COULD destroy death TODAY if He so chose
4. But He does not so choose... death will continue until the end

C. Why? Christ USES Death

Spurgeon: Christ uses death to preach wisdom to His saints day after day

1. Infinitely valuable lessons learned from death
2. Death daily conforms us to Christ's image while we live
3. Death protects us from eternity in sin-corrupted bodies

vs. 50 *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."*

D. Death the Final Foe, Not the Worst Foe

Other foes continue: world, flesh, devil.. they do far more damage than death!!

When death is defeated, the end will have truly come at last!

V. Application

vs. 26 *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

A. Death is NOT YET Destroyed: Be Faith-filled, Yet Realistic About Death

1. Death will remain a factor as long as this world endures
 - beloved spouses will continue to sink into the dust
 - cherished parents will continue to succumb to the ravages of old age
 - even precious children will be ripped from us in an untimely way
2. Let death make you wise!!

Psalm 90:12 *Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

3. Yet let death be your LAST enemy... fight it when the time comes

People often worry: "How will I handle it when death comes? Will I be as courageous?"

Spurgeon: Death is meant to be the FINAL enemy... "Brother don't dispute the appointed order, but let the last be the last. I have known a brother wanting to vanquish death long before he died. But, brother, you do not want dying grace till dying moments.... A boat will only be needful when you reach the river. Ask instead for LIVING grace, then glorify Christ thereby, and then you shall have your dying grace when dying time comes. Your enemy is going to be destroyed, but not today. There is a great host of enemies to be fought today: the world, the flesh, the devil... you must be content to let this one alone for a while. If you live well, you will die well!"

B. Time is Short: Be Diligent Until Death

vs. 58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

C. Victory is Certain: Be Triumphant Over Death

Death the Final Enemy Will Be Destroyed... Christ will reign until EVERY enemy is put under his feet
Heaven will be completely free of death:

Revelation 20:14 *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.*

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The Resurrection of Christ has made death's final destruction a guaranteed certainty. Rejoice and be glad forever!!