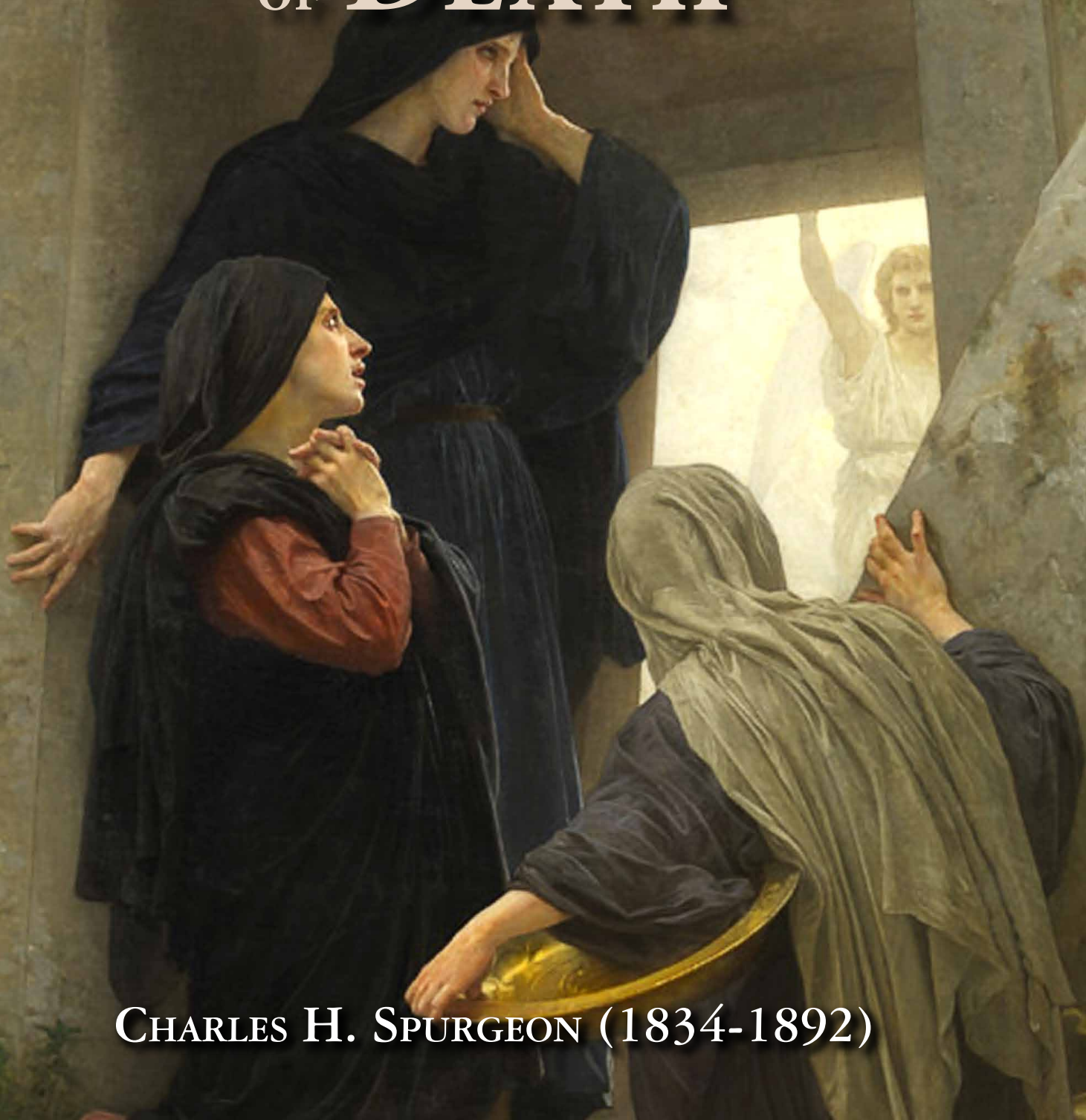


CHRIST THE DESTROYER OF DEATH



CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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CHRIST THE DESTROYER OF DEATH

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—1 Corinthians 15:26

During four previous Sabbaths we have been following our Lord and Master through His great achievements: we have seen Him as the end of the Law, as the Conqueror of Satan, as the Overcomer of the world, as the Creator of all things new, and now we behold Him as the Destroyer of death. In this and in all His other glorious deeds let us worship Him with all our hearts.

May the Spirit of God lead us into the full meaning of this, which is one of the Redeemer’s grandest characters.

How wonderfully is our Lord Jesus *one with man!* For when the psalmist David had considered the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, he said, “Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psa 8:4). He was speaking of Christ. You would have thought he was thinking of man in his humblest estate, and that he was wondering that God should be pleased to honour so frail a being as the poor fallen son of Adam. You would never have dreamed that the glorious Gospel lay hid within those words of grateful adoration. Yet in the course of that meditation David went on to say, “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet” (v. 6). Now, had it not been for the interpretation of the Holy Spirit, we should still have considered that he was speaking of men in general, and of man’s natural dominion over the brute creation, but behold while that is true, there is another and a far more important truth concealed within it; for David, as a prophet, was all the while chiefly speaking of the Man of men, the model Man, the second Adam, the Head of the new race of men. It was of Jesus, the Son of man, as honoured of the Father, that the psalmist sang, “He hath put all things under his feet.” Strange, was it not, that when he spake of man he must of necessity speak also of our Lord? And yet, when we consider the thing, it is but natural and according to truth, and only remarkable to us because in our minds we too often consider Jesus and man as far removed, and too little regard Him as truly one with man.

Now, see how the apostle infers from the psalm the necessity of the resurrection; for if all things must be put under the feet of the man Christ Jesus, then every form of evil must be conquered by Him, and death among the rest. “He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (1Co 1:5). It must be so, and therefore death itself must ultimately be overcome. Thus out of that simple sentence in the psalm, which we should have read far otherwise without the light of the Holy Spirit, the apostle gathereth the doctrine of the resurrection. The Holy Spirit taught His servant Paul how by a subtle chemistry he could distill from simple words a precious fragrant essence, which the

common reader never suspected to be there. Texts have their secret drawers, their box within a box, their hidden souls which lie asleep till He who placed them on their secret couches awakens them that they may speak to the hearts of His chosen. Could you ever have guessed resurrection from the eighth Psalm? No, nor could you have believed, had it not been told you, that there is fire in the flint, oil in the rock, and bread in the earth we tread upon. Man's books have usually far less in them than we expect, but the Book of the Lord is full of surprises; it is a mass of light, a mountain of priceless revelations. We little know what yet lies hidden within the Scriptures. We know the form of sound words as the Lord has taught it to us, and by it we will abide, but there are inner store-houses into which we have not peered; chambers of revelation lit up with bright lamps, perhaps too bright for our eyes at this present. If Paul, when the Spirit of God rested upon him, could see so much in the songs of David, the day may come when we also shall see still more in the epistles of Paul, and wonder at ourselves that we did not understand better the things which the Holy Ghost has so freely spoken to us by the apostle. May we at this time be enabled to look deep and far, and behold the sublime glories of our risen Lord.

To the text itself then: *death is an enemy; death is an enemy to be destroyed; death is an enemy to be destroyed last*—"the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

I. Death an Enemy

Death is an enemy. It was so born, even as Haman the Agagite was the enemy of Israel by his descent. Death is the child of our direst foe, for "sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death" (Jam 1:15). "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom 5:12). Now, that which is distinctly the fruit of transgression cannot be other than an enemy of man. Death was introduced into the world on that gloomy day which saw our fall, and he that had the power of it is our arch enemy and betrayer, the devil: from both of which facts we must regard it as the manifest enemy of man. Death is an alien in this world; it did not enter into the original design of the unfallen creation, but its intrusion mars and spoils the whole. It is no part of the Great Shepherd's flock, but it is a wolf which cometh to kill and to destroy.

Geology tells us that there was death among the various forms of life from the first ages of the globe's history, even when as yet the world was not fitted up as the dwelling of man. This I can believe and still regard death as the result of sin. If it can be proved that there is such an organic unity between man and the lower animals that they would not have died if Adam had not sinned, then I see in those deaths before Adam the antecedent consequences of a sin which was then uncommitted. If by the merits of Jesus there was salvation before He had offered His atoning sacrifice, I do not find it hard to conceive that the foreseen demerits of sin may have cast the shadow of death over the long ages which came before man's transgression.

Of that we know little, nor is it important that we should; but certain is it that as far as this present creation is concerned, death is not God's invited guest, but an intruder whose presence mars the feast. Man in his folly welcomed Satan and sin when they forced their way into the high festival of Paradise, but he never welcomed death; even his blind eyes could see in that skeleton form a cruel foe. As the lion to the herds of the

plain, as the scythe to the flowers of the field, as the wind to the sere¹ leaves of the forest, such is death to the sons of men. They fear it by an inward instinct because their conscience tells them that it is the child of their sin.

Death is well called an enemy for *it does an enemy's work* toward us. For what purpose doth an enemy come but to root up, and to pull down, and to destroy? Death tears in pieces the comely handiwork of God, the fabric of the human body, so marvelously wrought by the fingers of divine skill. Casting this rich embroidery into the grave among the armies of the worm, to its fierce soldiery death divideth “to every one a prey of divers colours, of divers colours of needlework”; and they ruthlessly rend in pieces the spoil. This building of our manhood is a house fair to look upon, but death the destroyer darkens its windows, shakes its pillars, closes its doors, and causes the sound of the grinding to cease. Then the daughters of music are brought low, and the strong men bow themselves. This Vandal spares no work of life, however full of wisdom, or beauty, for it looseth the silver cord and breaketh the golden bowl. Lo, at the fountain the costly pitcher is utterly broken down, and at the cistern the well-wrought wheel is dashed in pieces. Death is a fierce invader of the realms of life, and where it comes it fells every good tree, stops all wells of water, and mars every good piece of land with stones. See you a man when death has wrought his will upon him—what a ruin he is! How is his beauty turned to ashes, and his comeliness to corruption. Surely an enemy hath done this.

Look, my brethren at the course of death throughout all ages and in all lands. What field is there without its grave? What city without its cemetery? Whither can we go to find no sepulchres? As the sandy shore is covered with the upcastings of the worm, so art thou, O earth, covered with those grass-grown hillocks beneath which sleep the departed generations of men. And thou, O sea, even thou, art not without thy dead! As if the earth were all too full of corpses and they jostled each other in their crowded sepulchres, even into thy caverns, O mighty main,² the bodies of the dead are cast. Thy waves must become defiled with the carcasses of men, and on thy floor must lie the bones of the slain! Our enemy, death, has marched as it were with sword and fire ravaging the human race. Neither Goth, nor Hun, nor Tartar could have slain so universally all that breathed, for death has suffered none to escape. Everywhere it has withered household joys and created sorrow and sighing; in all lands where the sun is seen it hath blinded men's eyes with weeping. The tear of the bereaved, the wail of the widow, and the moan of the orphan—these have been death's war music, and he has found therein a song of victory.

The greatest conquerors have only been death's slaughtermen, journeymen butchers working in his shambles.³ War is nothing better than death holding carnival, and devouring his prey a little more in haste than in his common wont.⁴

¹ **sere** – dried up; withered.

² **main** – the high, or open sea; ocean.

³ **shambles** – a butcher's stall or shop.

⁴ **wont** – customary manner.

Death has done the work of an enemy to those of us who have as yet escaped his arrows. Those who have lately stood around a new-made grave and buried half their hearts can tell you what an enemy death is. It takes the friend from our side, and the child from our bosom; neither does it care for our crying. He has fallen who was the pillar of the household; she has been snatched away who was the brightness of the hearth. The little one is torn out of its mother's bosom though its loss almost breaks her heartstrings, and the blooming youth is taken from his father's side though the parent's fondest hopes are thereby crushed. Death has no pity for the young and no mercy for the old; he pays no regard to the good or to the beautiful. His scythe cuts down sweet flowers and noxious weeds with equal readiness. He cometh into our garden, trampleth down our lilies and scattereth our roses on the ground; yea, and even the most modest flowers, planted in the corner and hiding their beauty beneath the leaves that they may blush unseen, death spieth out even these, and cares nothing for their fragrance, but withers them with his burning breath. He is thine enemy indeed, thou fatherless child, left for the pitiless storm of a cruel world to beat upon, with none to shelter thee. He is thine enemy, O widow, for the light of thy life is gone, and the desire of thine eyes has been removed with a stroke. He is thine enemy, husband, for thy house is desolate and thy little children cry for their mother of whom death has robbed thee.

He is the enemy of us all, for what head of a family among us has not had to say to him, "Me thou hast bereaved again and again!" Especially is death an enemy to the living when he invades God's house and causes the prophet and the priest to be numbered with the dead. The Church mourns when her most useful ministers are smitten down, when the watchful eye is closed in darkness, and the instructive tongue is mute. Yet how often does death thus war against us! The earnest, the active, the indefatigable⁵ are taken away. Those mightiest in prayer, those most affectionate in heart, those most exemplary in life, those are cut down in the midst of their labours, leaving behind them a Church which needs them more than tongue can tell. If the Lord does but threaten to permit death to seize a beloved pastor, the souls of his people are full of grief, and they view death as their worst foe, while they plead with the Lord and entreat Him to bid their minister live.

Even *those who die* may well count death to be their enemy. I mean not now that they have risen to their seats, and as disembodied spirits, behold the King in His beauty, but aforesaid while death was approaching them. He seemed to their trembling flesh to be a foe, for it is not in nature, except in moments of extreme pain or aberration of mind, or of excessive expectation of glory, for us to be in love with death. It was wise of our Creator so to constitute us that the soul loves the body and the body loves the soul, and they desire to dwell together as long as they may, else had there been no care for self-preservation, and suicide would have destroyed the race.

⁵ **indefatigable** – untiring.

*For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,⁶
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin?⁷*

It is a first law of our nature that skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life, and thus we are nerved to struggle for existence, and to avoid that which would destroy us. This useful instinct renders death an enemy, but it also aids in keeping us from that crime of all crimes, the most sure of damnation if a man commit it willfully and in his sound mind—I mean the crime of self-murder.

When death cometh even to the good man he cometh as an enemy, for he is attended by such terrible heralds and grim outriders as do greatly scare us.

*Fever with brow of fire;
Consumption wan; palsy, half-warmed with life,
And half a clay-cold lump; joint-torturing gout,
And ever-gnawing rheum; convulsion wild;
Swol'n dropsy; panting asthma; apoplex
Full gorged.*

None of these add to the aspect of death a particle of beauty. He comes with pains and griefs; he comes with sighs and tears. Clouds and darkness are round about him; an atmosphere laden with dust oppresses those whom he approaches, and a cold wind chills them even to the marrow. He rides on the pale horse, and where his steed sets its foot the land becomes a desert. By the footfall of that terrible steed the worm is awakened to gnaw the slain. When we forget other grand truths and only remember these dreadful things, death is the king of terrors to us. Hearts are sickened and reins are loosened, because of him.

But, indeed, he is an enemy, for what comes he to do to our body? I know he doeth that which ultimately leadeth to its betterness, but still it is that which in itself, and for the present, is not joyous, but grievous. He comes to take the light from our eyes, the hearing from the ears, the speech from the tongue, the activity from the hand, and the thought from the brain. He comes to transform a living man into a mass of putrefaction—to degrade the beloved form of brother and friend to such a condition of corruption that affection itself cries out, “Bury my dead out of my sight” (Gen 23:8). Death, thou child of sin, Christ hath transformed thee marvelously, but in thyself thou art an enemy before whom flesh and blood tremble, for they know that thou art the murderer of all of woman-born, whose thirst for human prey the blood of nations cannot slake.

If you think for a few moments of this enemy, you will observe some of his points of character. He is the *common* foe of all God's people, and the enemy of all men; for however some have been persuaded that they should not die, yet is there no discharge in this war. And if in this conscription a man escapes the ballot many and many a year till his

⁶ **contumely** – haughty and contemptuous rudeness.

⁷ **bodkin** – a dagger or stiletto.

grey beard seems to defy the winter's hardest frost, yet must the man of iron yield at last. It is appointed unto all men once to die. The strongest man has no elixir of eternal life wherewith to renew his youth amid the decays of age, nor has the wealthiest prince a price wherewith to bribe destruction. To the grave must thou descend, O crowned monarch, for sceptres and shovels are akin. To the sepulchre must thou go down, O mighty man of valour, for sword and spade are of like metal. The prince is brother to the worm, and must dwell in the same house. Of our whole race it is true, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19).

Death is also a *subtle* foe, lurking everywhere, even in the most harmless things. Who can tell where death has not prepared his ambuscades?⁸ He meets us both at home and abroad; at the table he assails men in their food, and at the fountain he poisons their drink. He waylayeth us in the streets, and he seizeth us in our beds; he rideth on the storm at sea, and he walks with us when we are on our way upon the solid land. Whither can we fly to escape from thee, O death, for from the summit of the Alps men have fallen to their graves, and in the deep places of the earth where the miner goeth down to find the precious ore, there hast thou sacrificed many a hecatomb⁹ of precious lives. Death is a subtle foe, and with noiseless footfalls follows close at our heels when least we think of him.

He is an enemy whom *none of us will be able to avoid*, take what by-paths we may, nor can we escape from him when our hour is come. Into this fowler's nets, like the birds, we shall all fly; in his great seine must all the fishes of the great sea of life be taken when their day is come. As surely as sets the sun, or as the midnight stars at length descend beneath the horizon, or as the waves sink back into the sea, or as the bubble bursts, so must we all early or late come to our end, and disappear from earth to be known no more among the living.

Sudden too, full often, are the assaults of this enemy.

*Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
And stars to set—but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!*

Such things have happened as for men to die without an instant's notice; with a psalm upon their lips they have passed away, or engaged in the daily business they have been summoned to give in their account. We have heard of one who, when the morning paper brought him news that a friend in business had died, was drawing on his boots to go to his counting-house, and observed with a laugh that as far as he was concerned, he was so busy he had no time to die. Yet, ere the words were finished, he fell forward and was a corpse. Sudden deaths are not so uncommon as to be marvels if we dwell in the centre of a large circle of mankind. Thus is death a foe not to be despised or trifled with.

⁸ **ambuscades** – ambushes.

⁹ **hecatomb** – large-scale sacrifice or slaughter.

Let us remember all his characteristics, and we shall not be inclined to think lightly of the grim enemy whom our glorious Redeemer has destroyed.

II. An Enemy to be Destroyed

Secondly, let us remember that death is *an enemy to be destroyed*. Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ has already wrought a great victory upon death so that He has delivered us from lifelong bondage through its fear. He has not yet *destroyed death*, but He has gone very near to it, for we are told that He has “abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2Ti 1:10). This surely must come very near to having destroyed death altogether.

In the first place, our Lord has subdued death in the very worst sense by having delivered His people from spiritual death. “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Once you had no divine life whatever, but the death of original depravity remained upon you, and so you were dead to all divine and spiritual things. But now, beloved, the Spirit of God, even He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, has raised you up into newness of life, and you have become new creatures in Christ Jesus. In this sense death has been subdued.

Our Lord in His lifetime also conquered death by restoring certain individuals to life. There were three memorable cases in which at His bidding the last enemy resigned his prey. Our Lord went into the ruler’s house, and saw the little girl who had lately fallen asleep in death, around whom they wept and lamented. He heard their scornful laughter when He said, “She is not dead, but sleepeth” (Mat 9:24), and He put them all out and said to her “Maid, arise” (Luk 8:54). Then was the spoiler spoiled, and the dungeon door set open. He stopped the funeral procession at the gates of Nain, whence they were carrying forth a young man, “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow...And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise” (Luk 7:12, 14). When that young man sat up and our Lord delivered him to his mother, then again was the prey taken from the mighty. Chief of all, when Lazarus had laid in the grave so long that his sister said, “Lord, by this time he stinketh” (Joh 11:39), when, in obedience to the word “Lazarus, come forth” (v. 43), forth came the raised one with his grave clothes still about him, but yet really quickened—then was death seen to be subservient to the Son of man. “Loose him, and let him go” (v. 44), said the conquering Christ, and death’s bonds were removed, for the lawful captive was delivered. When, at the Redeemer’s resurrection, many of the saints arose and came out of their graves into the holy city, then was the crucified Lord proclaimed to be victorious over death and the grave.

Still, brethren, these were but preliminary skirmishes and mere foreshadowings of the grand victory by which death was overthrown. The real triumph was achieved upon the Cross—

*He hell in hell laid low;
Made sin, He sin o’erthrew:
Bow’d to the grave, destroy’d it so,
And death, by dying slew.*

When Christ died, He suffered the penalty of death on the behalf of all His people. And therefore no believer now dies by way of punishment for sin, since we cannot dream that a righteous God would twice exact the penalty for one offence. Death since Jesus died is not a penal infliction upon the children of God: as such He has abolished it, and it can never be enforced. Why die the saints then? Why, because their bodies must be changed ere they can enter heaven. "Flesh and blood" as they are "cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1Co 15:50). A divine change must take place upon the body before it will be fit for incorruption and glory; and death and the grave are, as it were, the refining pot and the furnace by means of which the body is made ready for its future bliss. Death, it is true 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 bark may freely 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, go up higher" (Luk 14:10). Behold, on eagle's 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."

Further, Christ vanquished death and thoroughly overcame him when He rose. What a temptation one has to paint a picture of the resurrection, but I will not be led aside to attempt more than a few touches. When our great Champion awoke 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 then He took off the winding sheet and laid the grave clothes 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,¹⁰ but a chamber of rest, a dormitory furnished and prepared, hung with the arras¹¹ which Christ Himself has bequeathed. It is now no more a damp, dark, dreary prison; Jesus has changed all that.

*'Tis now a cell where angels use
To come and go with heavenly news.*

The angel from heaven rolled away the stone from our Lord's sepulchre and let in the fresh air and light again upon our Lord, and He stepped out more than a conqueror. Death had fled. The grave had capitulated.

*Lives again our glorious King!
"Where, O death, is now thy sting?"*

¹⁰ **charnel** – a room where corpses or bones are deposited.

¹¹ **arras** – a wall hanging, particularly of tapestry.

*Once He died our souls to save;
"Where's thy victory, boasting grave?"*

Well, brethren, as surely as Christ rose so did He guarantee as an absolute certainty the resurrection of all His saints into a glorious life for their bodies, the life of their souls never having paused even for a moment. In this He conquered death; and since that memorable victory, every day Christ is overcoming death, for He gives His Spirit to His saints. And having that Spirit within them they meet the last enemy without alarm; often they confront him with songs, perhaps more frequently they face him with calm countenance, and fall asleep with peace. I will not fear thee, death, why should I? Thou lookest like a dragon, but thy sting is gone. Thy teeth are broken, oh, old lion; wherefore should I fear thee? I know thou art no more able to destroy me, but thou art sent as a messenger to conduct me to the golden gate wherein I shall enter and see my Saviour's unveiled face forever. Expiring saints have often said that their last beds have been the best they have ever slept upon. Many of them have enquired, "Tell me, my soul, can this be death?"

To die has been so different a thing from what they expected it to be, so lightsome, and 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 so afraid of all their days. They find it a pin's prick, whereas they feared it would prove a sword thrust. It is the shutting of the eye on earth and the opening of it in heaven, whereas they thought it would have been a stretching upon the rack, or a dreary passage through a dismal region of gloom and dread. Beloved, our exalted Lord has overcome death in all these ways.

But now, observe, that this is not the text; the text speaks of something yet to be done. The last enemy that *shall be* destroyed is death, so that death in the sense meant by the text is not destroyed yet. He is to be destroyed, and how will that be?

Well, I take it death will be destroyed in the sense first, that at the coming of Christ, *those who are alive and remain shall not see death*. They shall be changed; there must be a change even to the living before they can inherit eternal life, but they shall not actually die. Do not envy them, for they will have no preference beyond those that sleep; rather do I think theirs to be the inferior lot of the two in some respects. But they will not know death. The multitude of the Lord's own who will be alive at His coming will pass into the glory without needing to die. Thus death, as far as they are concerned, will be destroyed.

But the sleeping ones, the myriad who have left their flesh and bones to moulder back to earth—death shall be destroyed even as to them, for when the trumpet sounds they shall rise from the tomb. *The resurrection is the destruction of death*. We never taught, nor believed, nor thought that every particle of every body that was put into the grave would come to its fellow, and that the absolutely identical material would rise. But we do say that the identical body will be raised, and that as surely as there cometh out of the ground the seed that was put into it—though in very different guise, for it cometh not forth as a seed but as a flower—so surely shall the same body rise again. The same

material is not necessary, but there shall come out of the grave, ay, come out of the earth, if it never saw a grave, or come out of the sea if devoured by monsters—that self-same body for true identity which was inhabited by the soul while here below. Was it not so with our Lord? Even so shall it be with His own people, and then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1Co 15:54-55).

There will be this feature in our Lord’s victory, that death will be fully destroyed because *those who rise will not be one whit the worse for having died*. I believe concerning those new bodies that there will be no trace upon them of the feebleness of old age, none of the marks of long and wearying sickness, none of the scars of martyrdom. Death shall not have left his mark upon them at all, except it be some glory mark which shall be to their honour, like the scars in the flesh of the Well-beloved, which are His chief beauty even now in the eyes of those for whom His hands and feet were pierced. In this sense death shall be destroyed because he shall have done no damage to the saints at all; the very trace of decay shall have been swept away from the redeemed.

And then, finally, there shall, after this trumpet of the Lord, be no *more death*, neither sorrow, nor crying, for the former things have passed away. “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him” (Rom 6:9); and so also the quickened ones, His own redeemed—they too shall die no more. Oh dreadful, dreadful supposition, that they should ever have to undergo temptation or pain, or death a second time. It cannot be. “Because I live,” says Christ, “ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19). Yet the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul having been given up by some, certain of them have felt obliged to give up, with the eternity of future punishment, the eternity of future bliss. And assuredly as far as some great proof texts are concerned, they stand or fall together. “These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mat 25:46); if the one state be short so must the other be: whatever the adjective means in the one case it means in the other. To us the word means endless duration in both cases, and we look forward to a bliss which shall never know end or duration. Then in the tearless, sorrowless, graveless country, death shall be utterly destroyed.

III. Death to be Destroyed Last

And now last of all, and the word “last” sounds fitly in this case, death is to be destroyed *last*. Because he came in last he must go out last. Death was not the first of our foes; first came the devil, then sin, then death. Death is not the worst of enemies; death is an enemy, but he is so much to be preferred to our other adversaries. It were better to die a thousand times than to sin. To be tried by death is nothing compared with being tempted by the devil. The mere physical pains connected with dissolution are comparative trifles compared with the hideous grief which is caused by sin and the burden which a sense of guilt causes to the soul. No, death is but a secondary mischief compared with the defilement of sin. Let the great enemies go down first. Smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered; let sin, and Satan, the lord of all these evils, be smitten first, and death may well be left to the last.

Notice, that death is the last enemy to each individual Christian and the last to be destroyed. Well now, if the Word of God says it is the last, I want to remind you of a little piece of practical wisdom—leave him to be the last. Brother, do not dispute the appointed order, but let the last be 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. What would be the good of dying grace while you are yet alive? A boat will only be needful when you reach a river. Ask for living grace, and glorify Christ thereby, and then you shall have 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, and you may be content to let this one alone for awhile. This enemy will be destroyed, but of the times and the seasons we are in ignorance; our wisdom is to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ as the duty of every day requires. Take your trials as they come, brother! As the enemies march up slay them, rank upon rank, but if you fail in the name of God to smite the front ranks, and say “No, I am only afraid of the rear rank,” then you are playing the fool. Leave the final shock of arms till the last adversary advances, and meanwhile hold you your place in the conflict. God will in due time help you to overcome your last enemy, but meanwhile see to it that you overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. If you live well you will die well. That same covenant in which the Lord Jesus gave you life contains also the grant of death, for “All things are yours; Whether... life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1Co 3:21-23).

Why is death left to the last? Well, I think it is because Christ can make much use of him. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, because death is of great service before he is destroyed. Oh, what lessons some of us have learned from death! “Our dying friends come o’er us like a cloud to damp our brainless ardours,” to make us feel that these poor fleeting toys are not worth living for. That as others pass away so must we also be gone, and thus they help to make us set loose by this world, and urge us to take wing and mount towards the world to come. There are, perhaps, no sermons like the deaths which have happened in our households; the departure of our beloved friends have been to us solemn discourses of divine wisdom, which our heart could not help hearing. So Christ has spared death to make him a preacher to His saints.

And you know, brethren, that if there had been no death, the saints of God would not have had the opportunity to exhibit the highest ardour of their love. Where has love to Christ triumphed most? Why, in the death of the martyrs at the stake and on the rack. O Christ, Thou never hadst such garlands woven for thee by human hands as they have brought thee, who have come up to heaven from the forests of persecution, having waded through streams of blood. By death for Christ the saints have glorified Him most.

So is it in their measure with saints who die from ordinary deaths; they would have had no such test for faith and work for patience as they now have if there had been no death. Part of the reason of the continuance of this dispensation is that the Christ of God may be glorified; but if believers never died, the supreme consummation of faith’s victory must have been unknown. Brethren, if I may die as I have seen some of our Church

members die, I court the grand occasion. I would not wish to escape death by some by-road if I may sing as they sang. If I may have such hosannas and hallelujahs beaming in my very eyes as I have seen as well as heard from them, it were a blessed thing to die. Yes, as a supreme test of love and faith, death is well respited¹² awhile to let the saints glorify their Master.

Besides, brethren, without death we should not be so conformed to Christ as we shall be if we fall asleep in Him. If there could be any jealousies in heaven among the saints, I think that any saint who does not die, but is changed when Christ comes, could almost meet me and you, who probably will die, and say “My brother, there is one thing I have missed. I never lay in the grave; I never had the chill hand of death laid on me, and so in that I was not conformed to my Lord. But *you* know what it is to have fellowship with Him, even in His death.” Did I not well say that they that were alive and remain should have no preference over them that are asleep? I think the preference if anything shall belong to us who sleep in Jesus, and wake up in His likeness.

Death, dear friends, is not yet destroyed, because he brings the saints home. He does but come to them and whisper his message, and in a moment they are supremely blessed.

*Have done with sin and care and woe,
And with the Saviour rest.*

And so death is not destroyed yet, for he answers useful purposes.

But, beloved, he is going to be destroyed. He is the last enemy of the Church collectively. The Church as a body has had a mass of foes to contend with, but after the resurrection we shall say, “This is the last enemy. Not another foe is left.” Eternity shall roll on in ceaseless bliss. There may be changes, bringing new delights; perhaps in the eternity to come there may be eras and ages of yet more amazing bliss, and still more superlative ecstasy; but there shall be

*No rude alarm of raging foes,
No cares to break the last repose.*

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, and if the last be slain there can be no future foe. The battle is fought and the victory is won forever. And who hath won it? Who but the Lamb that sitteth on the throne, to Whom let us all ascribe honour, and glory, and majesty, and power, and dominion, and might, forever and ever. The Lord help us in our solemn adoration. Amen.



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¹² **respited** – given a reprieve.