

MARCH 31, 1991

VICTORY OVER DEATH

Nobody likes to talk about death. Nobody! It is a depressing subject and we don't like to be depressed. Yet death has been inevitable for every human being throughout the history of mankind with the notable exceptions of Elijah and Enoch. We have come to more-or-less accept death as something that is going to happen and have classified it as part of the natural order of things. We tend to think that death is more tragic for a younger person than for an older person, more tragic for the rich and famous than for the poor and unknown. To most, regardless of age or station in life, death is an enemy and for those few that, in death, find some relief from suffering, it is not the alternative of choice if people could really have their way. Ultimately, we all want to find some way to defeat the enemy of life, some way to have victory over death.

The best solutions to problems are not always the most straight forward ones. Take the problem of rusting steel, for example. It would be nice if some way we could change the laws of chemistry and declare rust to be no more. This is not likely to happen. We can protect the steel by paint and put off the inevitable, but once that protection is penetrated, then the rust still occurs. A better solution would be to make the steel so that the rusting process would not have any influence on it. Could we transform the steel some way? You've heard of stainless steel, I'm sure. Now if we could just do something like that with our lives -- make a substitution of a "stainless steel life" for the "ordinary steel life," then death would not have any influence on it. This is what the gospel is about. God has made it possible for us to have a new life, a life that is not subject to death. We, who are Christians, have that life in us now and one day we will experience a transformation of our physical bodies that we have and these will become spiritual bodies. This is what the resurrection is all about.

Some of the Christians at the church in Corinth had been claiming that the resurrection of the dead was nothing more than the experience of being born again of the Spirit of God and that no bodily resurrection would happen. There are many people today that do not believe that there will be a resurrection when Jesus Christ returns. These same ones don't believe that Jesus is going to return. In fact, many don't even believe that God is. Nevertheless, Paul needed to correct the error of such teaching and we see that in our study.

I CORINTHIANS 15:12-19 The consequences of believing that there will be no resurrection of the dead for believers (those that are in Christ) is that if there is no resurrection, then Jesus did not rise from death. If Jesus did not rise from death, then the gospel message is empty and the faith that people have placed in that message is also empty. If our faith has no power, then we are still in our sins and all that have put their trust in Christ that have already died have perished. Not only that, we also will

perish because we have no means by which to be saved. Paul could not accept the consequence of such belief. Those that were claiming that a physical resurrection would not take place did not believe all the consequences of the acceptance of such a belief. They would not accept the consequences of those that put their trust in Christ as having perished in their belief, or that faith has no power in our lives, or that we are still in our sins after we have accepted the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

If the hope that we have in Christ is only something that helps us have a good outlook on life -- sort of like "positive thinking" -- and there is no more to it than that, then we are to be pitied because we are the most miserable of all people.

I CORINTHIANS 15:20-22 Here is the affirmation of the faith that every Christian must have: "Christ IS risen from the dead!" Since He has risen, then we too shall rise. It was by the sin of Adam that the curse of sin and death (the soul that sins shall die) passed upon all mankind, and just as Adam died, all that are of Adam must die. In the same way, by the obedience of Jesus the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (the blessing of life eternal) passed upon all that will believe, and just as Jesus was raised from death, so also will we be resurrected.

I CORINTHIANS 15:53-57 Paul is giving us the means by which death will be defeated. We will change that which is corruptible for that which is incorruptible. We will change that which is mortal for that which is immortal. Then death will be defeated. The physical bodies that we now have are of the nature as that of Adam and these will be replaced with spiritual bodies that are of the same kind as that of the resurrected Christ.

Almost, as if Paul is taunting death and the grave, he ask "where is your power to hurt" and "where is there any ability to win?" In the resurrection, there will be no power of sin and those that are resurrected will live under the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That is a glorious hope and this hope will influence our lives in the present.

I CORINTHIANS 15:58 So many times Christians become discouraged when things don't go the way that they had anticipated. It is easy to forget that God is in control and that victory belongs to God -- He wins and we win, too, because we are in Him. Knowing this, we keep on course, not moving away from what God has called us to do. Why? because whatever the task that we do for God, it will be of benefit somehow, someday. It will not be in vain, empty, or without power.