

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son

Part Fourteen - Sunday, June 26th, 2016, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1897
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO DELIVER US FROM COMING JUDGMENT, SECURE OUR PRESENCE WITH HIM IMMEDIATELY UPON DEATH AND GUARANTEE THE RESURRECTION OF OUR BODIES FROM THE GRAVE

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 - “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”

Romans 6:5 - “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Hebrews 9:27-28 - “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 - “For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

What wonderful joy and hope this should inspire in our hearts! What confidence in trial and tribulation! These words tie the certainty of *future* events to the *past* accomplishments of the cross and resurrection. Jesus had all of these future accomplishments of His death already in His mind when He spoke the words “*It is finished*” on the cross. From heaven’s perspective, these works yet to be revealed in our *future* are already *past* victories in terms of their completion.

The accomplishments of Christ’s passion we’re considering are staggering in their power and benefit. They ensure our future, and without a *future* there is no ultimate meaning to the *present*. So these two blessings of the passion define *who we are* because they define *where we are going*.

The New Testament says *three things* about our accomplished redemption through the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross *secures our presence with Christ immediately upon our death*. And *the cross of Christ secures the resurrection of our bodies from the grave when Christ Jesus comes again*. And the body of Jesus on the cross fully bears God’s judgment on all my sin. It is because of these three accomplishments of Christ’s passion that everything you do in this church service matters forever.

1) JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO SECURE OUR PRESENCE WITH HIM IMMEDIATELY UPON OUR DEATH

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 - “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that *whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*”

Make your lips say the important words of these verses carefully. Paul speaks very specifically of a cause and effect relationship. Jesus Christ died “*so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with Him.*” In other words, one of the key purposes to Christ’s passion was to cause us to know Him and be with Him, whether we are *awake* (alive and breathing here on this earth) or whether we are *asleep* (that is, our bodies are six feet under the ground in the Newmarket cemetery.)

These are truly powerful words. Our *relationship* with Jesus isn’t changed by our physical death. The fact that my body lies in the grave (*asleep*) doesn’t change Christ’s love for me, *nor* my love for Him.

“But how do you *know* this Pastor Don? How do you know we don’t just go into some kind of *soul-sleep* until Jesus comes again? How do you know that there is something *living* and *conscious* in our relationship with Jesus

immediately upon our death?”

I need to back up a bit at this point. I said earlier that redemption through the work of Christ guarantees that our relationship with Jesus isn't changed by the event of our physical death. That isn't quite true. But it isn't untrue in the sense that it is a lie. It is untrue in the sense that it doesn't do justice to the full glory of what Christ's passion accomplished.

Actually, your relationship with Jesus *is* changed immediately upon your death. But you'll only *understand* the change if you look at some wonderful texts very carefully:

2 Corinthians 5:1-4 - “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] ***For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,*** [3] **if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.** [4] **For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”**

This is Paul's description of life in these earthly bodies. They wear out. Twice Paul describes life in our physical bodies as a period of “*groaning*.” We all know we're going to die. We all know we're aging. True, there are many wonderful blessings - many pleasant and enjoyable things God does for us while we're here on earth. But we long, all of us, even those who couldn't articulate the longing, for our eternal state, clothed with resurrection bodies. In truth, this is actually *all* we truly long for, if we only knew it.

So that's the first thing to remember if you want to see the change death makes to the believer. Life in these earthly bodies right now is a time of “*groaning*.” But there's more, much more:

Philippians 1:21-24 - “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] **If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.** [23] **I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to *depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*** [24] **But to *remain in the flesh* is more necessary on your account.”**

This passage is more unique than Christians frequently realize. It's perhaps the one place in the New Testament that tells us something specific about the time *between* our funeral and the Second Coming of Jesus. The comparison Paul is making is between living on this earth “*in the flesh*” (24), and being “*with Christ*” (23) upon the moment of his death. In no place in this passage is Paul discussing the *ultimate* joy and *final* state of Christians united with Jesus at the close of time in resurrection bodies.

But, says Paul, death still brings a change - an *immediate* change. Even that temporary condition of being “*absent from the body*” is, for the Christian, a great “*gain*” over life in this world as we know it. This is not *soul-sleep* or some vague, unconscious existence. This, says Paul, will be a time of heightened enjoyment and awareness of Jesus. In other words, whatever is the *best* of your life right now in earth, it will be *better* when you die and your spirit goes to be with Christ. If it isn't better it isn't gain. And Paul says it *is* gain.

We don't know *everything* about this intermediate state. In fact, if truth be told, we don't know all that much. The Bible doesn't really dwell on this state in detail because it is only a *temporary* condition. But we *do* know that it is a time of great *gain* for the Christian. And we *do* know that this blessing was bestowed for us through the death of Christ on the cross - **1 Thessalonians 5:10** - “**....who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep *we might live with him.***”

There is a second blessing secured for us by the passion of Christ - a blessing even greater than dying and finding gain in Christ Jesus:

2) JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO SECURE OUR RESURRECTION FROM THE GRAVES IN WHICH WE WERE BURIED

There are no better words to read on a summer Sunday than these - **Revelation 1:17b-18** - “....I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

Jesus specifically talks about “**keys**” in this text. But they’re not *literal* metallic keys. They carry the idea of authority and accomplishment and access.

This explains a very profound truth. This explains how while Jesus could raise several people from the dead during His earthly ministry, they would all **die** again. I say it reverently, but even Jesus couldn’t bestow **eternal** life until **after** His conquered death through His own death (the Bible says He “**tasted death**” for every one of us) and after His own resurrection from the grave. It’s **after** He died and rose for us that He held the **keys** of death and the grave.

This is the idea Paul picks up on in our opening Romans text - **Romans 6:5** - “**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.**”

If Jesus didn’t have the keys of death then His death and resurrection are only **His** experience. But because He now holds the keys, His death and resurrection have become **our** experience too. Jesus takes us **with** Him - **all the way** with Him - and Jesus’ body didn’t stay in the grave!

This is not wishful thinking. It is not the private interpretation of a small bunch of religious fanatics. The New Testament **rings** with this wonderful truth:

1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 - “**For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.**”

1 Corinthians 6:14 - “**And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.**”

Both of these texts are great “**body**” texts. The subject isn’t just eternal life. The subject is the future life of our resurrected bodies. Paul’s logic is irresistible and heart-pounding. God can no more leave our bodies in the grave than He could have left Jesus’ body in the grave.

The sting of death has been removed in Christ’s passion. My sin, for which eternal death is the penalty, has been paid up in full in Jesus Christ. And God cannot allow an unjust sentence to hang over my head. If Jesus paid it all then eternal death is an unjust sentence for my future. And a just God won’t let it stand. This is the power of Christ’s passion.

On to the third accomplishment of Christ’s death on the cross:

3) JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO DELIVER US FROM THE FINAL JUDGMENT YET TO COME

We don’t cherish the cross of Christ as we **should** because we have not presented the love of God as it really **is**. Like the world we live in, the church has tended in recent years to treat the love of God as though it were the same as **tolerance**. And when God’s love is treated like tolerance it is neutered of its wonder and power.

The cross tells us that God’s love is not a **tolerant** love. It is much better than that. It is **holy** love. It is **sin hating**

love. And, wonder of wonders, it is **redeeming** love. The Passion of the Christ is what actually keeps us from future fiery judgment.

The Bible says judgment is **real** and it is **coming**:

Hebrews 10:26-27 - "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, [27] but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

John, the Apostle of love, writes these terrifying words about the final judgment - **Revelation 14:10-11** - "...he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

Consider also Paul's words in **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9** - "...and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...."

Apart from redemption through the death of Christ God has nothing good to offer sinners. There is no hope for anything but judgment. And this judgment isn't mean or cruel or capricious. It is **stern** but absolutely **just** and **called for**. Judgment is all a holy God can do with sin. Only a God as morally bent as ourselves could fail to judge sin.

Apart from redemption through the death of Christ these texts describe a judgment that is **unescapable**. It is absolutely certain. Until our stomachs **churn** in dread over the just prospect of such awesome future judgment our hearts will never **sing** over the deliverance still to come through the cross of Christ. Christ's cross is still working on my behalf. The grace unleashed through Christ's atonement has not yet finished its work of deliverance in my life. Much of its greatest blessing is still to unfold in powerful manifestation in my future.

So please don't soft-peddle judgment, thinking you are magnifying God's love. Such thinking is earthbound and distorted in the very worst sense. This attempted **divine make-over** tries to re-image the holy love of God with the sappy, tolerant love of fallen creatures. It is idolatry. It defaces the wonder of God's holy love with slummy graffiti. God's love is only magnified truly when we see the plan of God to **fully judge sin - all sin** - either by **bearing our judgment** in His own being on the cross or **applying the only punishment a just God can** with the eternal damnation of sinners when Jesus comes again.

Why did Jesus come and die? To forgive us our sins? Yes, but not the way a host forgives a child for spilling grape juice on the carpet. Divine forgiveness isn't mere politeness. It isn't tolerance. And it isn't even kindness. It is **deliverance** from future wrath and judgment by personal blood-shedding. It is holy justice **bearing the weight of its own sentence**.

Hebrews 9:27-28 - "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

The arresting phrase is the one that describes Jesus, Who **"...will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him...."** It's arresting because we tend to think that's what salvation is. It's all about Jesus dying **for our sins**. Being saved **from our sins** is what salvation is all about. Yet the writer of

Hebrews says Jesus is coming again *for salvation*, but *without reference* to sin.

Apparently our salvation isn't done. There is still something accomplished in Christ's Passion that awaits future manifestation. Our second text in **First Thessalonians** tell us what this future work of salvation will be:

1 Thessalonians 1:10 - **"....and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."**

Jesus' rescue mission isn't finished. True, Hebrews says He laid down His life as an *"offering for sin,"* but there's still more to be done. He's going to come again, *"not do deal with sin."* The saving work from sin is a *finished* work. But *judgment* for sin *isn't* finished. It really hasn't happened yet.

Our returning Lord is going to do something that isn't just related to my *past* sins. He's going to rescue me from the judgment of Almighty God that is coming on this whole world in the *future*. Paul says one of the things that heightens our joy and anticipation of Jesus' coming is we know He is coming to *"rescue us from the wrath to come."*