

He Abolished Death

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[0 : 00] Thank you, God, for making the way into eternity with you. We're at your right hand. There are pleasures forevermore. Thank you, Lord. And now, God, as we open your word, please open our hearts.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You can be seated, and we'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry. If you want to open your Bibles to the book of 2 Timothy, chapter 1, we're going to read verses 8 through 10, but we'll be in verse 10, primarily this morning, 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verses 8 through 10.

We've been talking about Paul's efforts to literally encourage Timothy. We use the word encourage to mean all sorts of things, but at its most literal, it simply means to give someone the courage they need to do what God has called them to do.

And that is the sense of encourage that we see Paul taking as he writes this little letter to Timothy. Last week, we saw two ingredients to a recipe for courage, namely reliance on the Holy Spirit and a rehearsing of the key truths related to the sovereignty of God.

But today, we will see Paul adding a third ingredient, namely the removal of the fear of death, if you didn't pick up on the theme in our singing.

[1 : 33] Thinking about this idea of not being afraid to die, I was thinking about old Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar demanded that all in the land kneel down and worship his image, and they refused.

And Nebuchadnezzar said to these young men, are you really willing to endure this fiery furnace? And in Daniel 3, verse 16, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. There's a courage to know, knowing that God will take care of them, whether they go through the fiery furnace or not.

And in a very real sense, death stands before every human being as a kind of universal fiery furnace. It is where we will all wind up unless the Lord returns.

[2 : 53] And that's what Paul is addressing in verses 8 through 10, in particular, verse 10. So let's look at that, 2 Timothy 1, verse 8.

Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me as prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Verse 10 will be our home base this morning. And which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Now, the first thing I want to draw your attention to is something that I've mentioned before. And that is just to remind you that every time we see the appearance of the word Lord in the New Testament referring to Jesus, that that is an explicitly political act.

Because there was already one who was referred to as Lord in that culture, and that was Caesar. But I want to add on to that thought this morning and give you a bit of new information I don't think we've discussed.

[4 : 18] And that is that not only is the title Lord reserved exclusively for Caesar in the Roman world, but so was the title Savior. Now, this is important for us because we're looking at verse 10,

and it says, And I want to think about that for a minute.

There is a gate entering into the city of Ephesus, the city where Timothy is pastoring, the city to which the letter from Paul is being addressed.

And Paul's letter likely went through this very gate. And on that gate, it proclaims Caesar as Lord and Savior of the world.

There's another inscription, another ancient inscription. I believe this one's also in the city of Ephesus. It says this. This is the English translation from the Greek.

Since the providence that has divinely ordered our existence, has applied her energy and zeal, and has brought to life the most perfect good in Augustus, who she filled with virtues for the benefit of mankind, bestowing him upon us and our descendants as Savior.

[5 : 39] He who put an end to war and will order peace, Caesar, who by his epiphany, exceeded the hopes of those who prophesied good tidings.

That's the word for gospel. Good tidings there, euangelion. Caesar's gospel is that Caesar is Lord. He's a gift from the heavens.

And not only is he Lord, he's also Savior. And why is he Savior? Because he has delivered his people from their enemies.

N.T. Wright concludes, that Augustus had done, in the Roman mind, the sort of thing that only gods can do. Rome had power to sweep aside all opposition, the power, in consequence, to create an extraordinary new world order.

Rome claimed to have brought justice to the world. The accession of the emperor and also his birthday could therefore be hailed as euangelion.

[6 : 46] Good news. So we know that, as we've talked about before, on Sunday morning together, that every time you see Paul say Jesus is Lord, that's a decisively, explicitly political act.

But now we also add the idea that even referring to Jesus as Savior was stepping on the toes of Caesar. Why was Caesar considered a Savior?

Because he had delivered his people from their enemies and given them peace. Now, that seems to be the sense that Paul is using when he refers to Jesus as Savior in verse 10.

You see that? And which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Do you understand what I'm getting at? That if Caesar was Savior because he defeated Rome's enemies, how much more so is Jesus Savior because he has defeated death? That seems to be the sense that Paul is using when he refers to Jesus as a Savior here.

[8 : 02] Not simply some kind of personal guru or personal forgiver, but a cosmic force for peace through the use of power.

A cosmic force for peace through the use of power. In verse 10, we see this word abolished. And it's the Greek word *katareo* used referring to Christ four times in the New Testament.

This word referring to Christ is used four times in the New Testament. And each time, this word *katareo* refers to the use of power to establish peace.

The use of power to establish peace. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, there's a little section about the man of lawlessness. And that he will appear.

And he'll be quite frightening to the believers at the time. He'll be breathing out threats. He'll have no regard for God. No fear of God. He will be a threatening, vicious type person.

[9 : 06] And then the word *katareo* appears in verse 8 where it says, When the lawless one will be revealed, the Lord Jesus will kill him with his breath and bring him to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

Bring to nothing is the word *katareo*. It's the word that we see abolish in 2 Timothy. So this frightful man will appear, Jesus will appear, and bring him to nothing.

In Ephesians 2, this word *katareo* for abolished or neutralized or bring to nothing is used to describe Jesus' destruction of the ordinances that divided Jew and Greek.

So the first verse, the Thessalonians verse, we've got peace because Jesus *katareos* the man of lawlessness. In Ephesians 2, we have peace because Jesus *katareos* the ordinances that divided Jews and Greeks.

And so now there's peace and harmony and shalom. And the last two instances of this word when referring to Jesus have something to do with death. Hebrews 2.14.

[10:20] Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things. That through death, he might destroy, katereo, the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

So we've got four instances. One of them is, Jesus will bring to nothing the man of lawlessness. Well, that's cool. The second one, Jesus has abolished the ordinances, making it possible for the whole world to be unified in Christ.

That's cool. But I'm especially stoked about this death one. You know, that one seems extra cool to me. That Jesus has abolished death.

That's what Paul says. And he is our savior. Our savior because he has brought us peace through his power and making an end to the enemies which most fundamentally torment mankind.

You know, to go through this sermon this morning, we're going to have to think about things we don't like to think about. We're going to have to think about death. We're going to have to think about sin.

[11:39] We don't like to think about death. When we look at older centuries, preaching in past centuries, we see far more teaching on the subject of death.

But you know what? Death wasn't any more common then than it is today. It's a one for one, guys. But there was far more teaching on it.

And in some sense, it's backwards because back then, death itself was far more visible. It was far less sanitized. It was far less sequestered and kept separate from the rest of our lives.

Lots of people would see lots of people die throughout their lifetime. So in some respect, we have it backwards. We should be talking about death more now than ever. Why?

Well, because we've sequestered it. We've sanitized it. We've put it aside. But it itself, death itself, is not constantly preaching to us like it had for centuries.

[12:41] And we talk about it less now. Just absolutely backwards. So we really need to talk about it more because it's not talking to us as much as it used to in past centuries.

It used to be kind of a constant sermon that you would hear many times through the year that your life is short and that you will die.

So we don't like talking about it. But in many respects, we don't see the glory of God unless we do talk about it. There's a very interesting principle that carries throughout all of life.

And that is, is that if you want real, genuine comfort, you have to do uncomfortable things. This is true of raising your children.

If you want to have the comfort of children who are kind and good for you when you're older, you've got to go through the discomfort of consistency and discipline when they're younger. This is true of everything.

[13:41] If you want real comfort, you have to do uncomfortable things. Long time ago, we went through the book of Proverbs. This is just screaming off the page everywhere. Well, friends, let me be clear here.

Some of the greatest gospel comforts you can have only come when you think about uncomfortable things. Some of the greatest gospel comforts you can have, some of the most glorious truths about Jesus, some of the brightest lights in the Bible come when you go into the dark places and realize a couple things at least.

One, I am a sinner. I don't like to think about my sin. But when I do, and when I face it head on, and I stop making excuses, and I own what I actually am, tremendous comfort and glory waits on the other side.

Likewise, I don't like thinking about the fact that I will soon die. But there again, if I will just endure the discomfort of thinking soberly about this fact, tremendous comfort is offered to me as a consequence of doing the hard intellectual work to think the things I don't want to think.

So we've got to do that this morning. And you've got to fight all of these little goblins in your interior that will literally, without you even realizing why, distract you.

[15:09] There will be a time for all of eternity when you will have this sermon to reflect on and what you did with it. The truth is, is you have nothing to fear with going to the dark places, as long as the Lord Jesus is with you.

And it is actually, perhaps, your resistance to thinking of the most uncomfortable things that withholds from you the most profound comforts. So we need to think about this.

We need to think about death. The great glory is bestowed on Jesus as Savior for his abolishment of death. We've got to think about death to understand that great glory. So let's go through, let's start with, say, three universals concerning death.

The first one, everybody dies. Death is the most universal of experiences. There are very few problems that are shared equally by all human beings.

Social economic strata, gender, ethnicity, culture, time period. A lot of things separate us. We really are a pretty diverse group, humans.

[16 : 25] But there's one thing that we all have absolutely in common. The day will come when we will not wake up.

The day will come when we will pass from this life into the next. The second thing that's universal concerning death is that it often surprises us. Three million people die in the U.S. each year, and the CDC states that accidents are the third leading cause of death in the United States.

Heart disease is number one, and not deemed an accident, of course, but does lead to also a great number of surprise deaths. I couldn't find a number that gives us the total number of surprise deaths that occur out of the three million each year.

But let's just say that a lot of people die with little to no warning. So if your pride is giving you some kind of delusional pride that says you'll have time later, I just want you to know that that's literally something you made up.

There's no evidence that that's the case. You're actually presuming on the God who has given you every heartbeat heretofore to give you more to do what you have been delaying doing now.

[17 : 49] The other thing to think about, and this is something I want to share just to someone who has been with people as they've died, even for those people who do not die by surprise, there is, in truth, a pretty significant diminishment of mental clarity that just hits one so that you may die by surprise insofar as you're aware, but your relatives are with you for, let's say, a month, let's say longer, but your capacity to hear the gospel and respond to it, that's certainly not guaranteed.

A lot of times when people die, they've checked out mentally long before they've checked out physically. So the first point, everybody's going to die. The second point, death often takes people by surprise.

Jonathan Edwards said, however strong, hale, and healthy men may be, there is none strong enough to resist death. Death will conquer them as easily as other men.

However great they may be in the world, they must die. Kings and emperors, czars and sultans must bow down before death, must give place to the king of terrors.

King of terrors from the book of Job. Job refers to death as the king of terrors. He says in this poetic way of describing the unexpected, he is torn from the tent in which he has trusted and brought before the king of terrors.

[19 : 31] He is torn from the tent in which he has trusted and brought before the king of terrors.

Why is death the king of terrors? Well, because third point that's universal, death is a one-way door to divine judgment. Death is a one-way door to divine judgment.

Hebrews 9.27 says, It is appointed for man to die once, and then comes the judgment. It is appointed for man to die once, and then comes the judgment.

Friends, I would not rely on the rumors, and that's all they are, that speak to the contrary of this verse. This is what God has said in his word, and now you know.

It is appointed for man to die once, and then the judgment. There are indeed some theologically technical questions about the timing of God's judgment on individuals.

[20 : 33] We don't need to get into that because the main point is simply this. Though far as you have any choice, death is a one-way door, and you will stand before the judgment seat of God.

Except for those who are alive during Christ's return, every human being on earth will have the exact same three things that I've said. One, death will come.

It will come quicker than you expect it to, and it's a one-way door. Now, the next thing we need to acknowledge that is also uncomfortable is simply this.

Those who die without Christ will go to hell. Those who die without Christ will go to hell. We have talked about what all people have in common, but now we must talk about the difference.

And that is that those who have died without Christ will go to hell. Thomas Boston wrote, When the wicked die, they are driven out of this world, where they sinned, into the other world, where they must be judged.

[21 : 40] When the wicked die, they are driven out of this world, where they sinned, into the other world, where they must be judged. So what is hell? Let's just ask the Bible.

What is hell? Well, Packer, J.I. Packer, an extraordinarily meek man, extraordinarily humble man, an extraordinarily godly man, not prone to hyperbole, prone rather to precision and careful speech, wrote a good thing about hell.

And, you know, he's all these things, and I'm none of those things, so I really want to lean on Packer to talk about this incredibly sober reality.

He writes, The sentimental secularism of modern Western culture, with its exalted optimism about human nature and its shrunken idea about God and its skepticism as to whether personal morality really matters, in other words, its decay of conscience, makes it hard for the Christian to take the reality of hell seriously.

The revelation of hell in Scripture assumes a depth of insight into divine holiness and human demonic sinfulness that most of us do not have. However, the doctrine of hell appears in the New Testament as a Christian essential, and we are called to try to understand it as Jesus and his apostles did.

[23 : 14] The New Testament views hell, Gehenna, as Jesus calls it, the place of incineration as the final abode of those consigned to eternal punishment at the last judgment.

It is thought of as a place of fire and darkness and weeping and grinding of teeth, of destruction and of torment. In other words, of total distress and misery.

If, as it seems, these terms are symbolic rather than literal, fire and darkness will be mutually exclusive in literal terms, we may be sure that the reality, which is beyond our imagining, exceeds the symbol in its dreadfulness.

New Testament teaching about hell is meant to appall us and strike us dumb with horror assuring us that as heaven will be better than we could dream, so hell will be worse than we can conceive. Such are the issues of eternity, which now need to be realistically faced. Scripture envisages hell as unending.

[24 : 25] Speculation about a second chance after death or personal annihilation of the godly at some stage have no biblical warrant. Scripture sees hell as self-chosen.

Those in hell will realize that they sentenced themselves to it by loving darkness rather than light, choosing not to have their creator as their lord, preferring self-indulgent sin to self-denying righteousness, and if they encountered the gospel, rejecting Jesus rather than coming to him. General revelation confronts all mankind with this issue, and from this standpoint, hell appears as God's gesture of respect to human choice.

In fact, Michael read from Psalm 37 this morning and talks about the gnashing of teeth, and we hear Jesus talk about hell as a weeping and gnashing of teeth, but do you know that gnashing of teeth in the Old Testament isn't some sort of a regretful action, it's an angry one.

Hell will be full of spiteful people who continue in their spitefulness. General revelation confronts all mankind with this issue, and from this standpoint, hell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice.

[25 : 53] All receive what they actually chose either to be with God forever worshiping him or without God forever worshiping themselves. Those who are in hell will know not only that their doings, not only that for their doings they deserve it, but also that in their hearts they chose it.

What we're doing, just as a reminder, is we're trying to understand why it's so amazing and such good news that Jesus abolished death and what that means, of course.

We'll get to that. What we can say so far is this. Everyone dies. Many people die before they expect to die. It's a one-way door to judgment, and those who die without Christ go to this, to hell.

What about those who die in Christ? Well, those who die in Christ will go to be with him forever.

That's the fifth point.

As Thomas Boston said, when the wicked die, they are driven out of this world, and he was laying a lot of weight on this word driven. He really had in vision, to some respect, a reluctant departure.

[27 : 07] God driving a man from this life who does not want to die. But the Bible tells us that when the righteous die, they are escorted.

They are carried. They are ushered from this life to the next life. Years ago, we lived really close to downtown Belleville, the main street, and they had parades all the time.

And there were some parades that had sort of the float of honor. You know, it was Santa on the Christmas parade. You know, the very last float, so to speak. And friends, I don't really think I'm imagining too much when I suggest that when you in Christ die, there is a parade.

There is a celebration. You are not driven out of this life. You are carried out of this life. You are carried out of this life. Friends, if you know ancient history, you would know that royalty doesn't walk.

They get carried into the triumphal procession. And when God the Father says to the believer, well done, my good and faithful servant, he says that to you as a kind of underling, a vice regent, a prince or princess.

[28 : 21] To think that the unbeliever is driven out into darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. The believer is carried up in a triumphal procession before the Lord.

Here's Puritan John Flavel's description of heaven. He writes, no sooner is the dividing stroke given by death, but they shall find themselves in the arms of angels, mounting them through the upper regions and in a few moments far above all expectable heavens.

They pass from the arms of mourning friends into the welcome arms of officious and benevolent angels from the sight and converses of men to the sight of God.

Christ in the general assembly of blessed and sinless spirits. Farewell, vain world, with all the mixed and imperfect comforts of it and welcome the more sweet, suitable, and satisfying company of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Holy angels and perfected saints from the bondage of corruption to perfect liberty and everlasting freedom. From all fears, doubtings, and questionings of our condition and anxious thoughts of our title to Christ to the clearest, fullest, and most satisfying assurance from all burdens of affliction inward and outward under which we have groaned all our days to everlasting rest and ease.

[29 : 59] Oh, what a blessed change to the righteous this must be. Packer continues, Scripture teaches us to form our notion of the life of heaven by A, extrapolating from our less than perfect relationship with God that we have now and with other Christians that we have now.

B, eliminating from our idea of life any kind of concept of pain, evil, conflict, and distress. It will all be gone. And C, enriching our imaginings of that happy future by adding in every conception of excellence and God-given enjoyment that we know.

I mean, the term, I suppose, would be reversal of fortune, but what a pitiful term to describe the change that Christ has brought from hell to heaven.

Reversal of fortune, rags to riches, however you would describe it, it is insufficient to capture the glory of the change that occurs not by our own works, not by our own earnings, but simply by the grace that Jesus Christ extended to us.

Whatever you would say about this change, it is the most marvelous and glorious change of all time. And that's what Jesus did. In abolishing death, he did something utterly goes beyond our ability to talk about it.

[31 : 43] You will sometimes hear that the Jews missed Jesus' messiahship because they were looking for a military hero and he wasn't that.

Wrong. He was a military hero. He is a military hero. He is the strong man who abolished death. He has defeated the enemies and brought a kind of peace to us that exceeds any other human experience.

I was reminded this week of a quote from George Orwell who once said, we sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to do violence on those who would harm us. when the time comes, dear Christian, whether it is expected or unexpected, if you are in Christ, you may close your eyes and sleep soundly in peace.

[32 : 51] You may sleep soundly on your deathbeds because the strong man, Jesus Christ, has removed the sting of death for you. It is as if God walked into that hospice or that nursing home or over that crashed car and put a banner on the day of your death, put a banner over that tragic scene saying, O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory? As we've said at the beginning, this whole book of 2 Timothy is about giving us courage.

And as John Flavel writes on this verse, 2 Timothy 1.10, if our souls be immortal, certainly our enemies are not so formidable as we are apt by our sinful fears to represent them.

One incredibly important ingredient for courage, for building courage, is to look at death and say, upgrade, graduation day, advancement, or as Paul says, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

God is to be to be! God is to be to be to be able to be able to! be to be to be to be to be sure that you are on the right side of death.

[34 : 38] if anyone here thinks that I have embraced scare tactics with this talk, I just want to let you know that you're thinking that because you're afraid.

But I haven't embraced scare tactics any more than if I told you that if you jumped off of a mountain, gravity would have its effect. I have given you facts. And if you're afraid, you're as a consequence of me sharing those facts, that's not me, that's not Christianity, that's not an attempt to manipulate, this is simply you've just read the brochure that's describing how this life works.

You will die. You don't have any choice over how quickly. It will probably come quicker than you think it will. Death is a one-way door into eternal judgment.

If you've not placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you will go to hell. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you will go to heaven. And as we are preparing to partake in the Lord's table, one way that you can discern which side of death you are on is to understand this.

Jesus says in introducing the table, he says, this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, he took the cup after supper and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[36 : 20] Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. Now, I think the way to discern, one way to discern what side of death you're on is to ask simply this.

Why did Jesus have to offer his body up to be crucified? And why did Jesus have to spill his blood, die?

Why? Now, the Christian knows the answer to that question. The Christian knows, not simply abstractly or theoretically or from a theological point of intelligence, but the Christian knows the answer to that question.

And the Christian would say, Jesus had to die because I had piled up such a massive record of sin debt against God, a debt I could never repay.

Jesus had to die in order to secure with his perfect righteousness my forgiveness. When the Christian hears, this is my body which is for you, and this is my blood which is poured out for you, the Christian knows, that's my only plan.

[37 : 36] When the Christian is on his or her deathbed, this very fact presented to us today on this table will be the difference maker. This very fact will be the thing that affects the way in which they pass from this life to next.

This is what they will be thinking of. So what about you? Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? is his death your hope?

Do you believe that there was no other way and that Jesus had to buy you out of this incredible slavery to which you submitted your own self?

Do you believe that this is your only hope? Well, if so, Jesus as your only hope is all the hope you need on your deathbed, friends. And there really isn't a lot more you could hope in at that point.

If so, why don't you come and partake of this table today and celebrate the fact that for you, whenever it is that you do pass, the Lord will send a couple angels down there to hang a banner over that painful scene.

[38 : 49] And that banner says, O death, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting? To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Precious in the eyes of the Lord are the death of his saints.

Why don't you come and partake of this table? But if you don't know Christ, if you are unpersuaded by the gospel message, well, I would let you know not to take of this table because this table is essentially the individual saying, I need what Jesus has offered.

And at this stage, you don't believe that you do need what Jesus has offered. And that's fine. That's your choice. But what would it hurt you if you listened to this sermon again?

What would it hurt you? Seems prudent to me. If you're not persuaded today, it seems prudent to me to take another chance, take another swing at it and say, well, let me make sure I'm right and I really think I'm right.

What would it, what harm would it cause to think a little longer on these uncomfortable things? I would say not a lot. Seems pretty smart to me. Seems like a good idea.

[40 : 02] So for those of you who are in Christ, I encourage you to come and partake of this table. And if during this sermon, the Lord awakens your heart and said, hey, we've got a problem. This isn't going well for you.

Well, friends, all you have to do while everyone's walking up here is just close your eyes and call out to the Lord and say, I don't want to have any other plan but this, that you died for my sins, secured my forgiveness, and have made a way for death to be completely a different thing for me than it would have been without you.

So let's pray for one another and then come. Oh, Father God, we confess we have absolutely no capacity to see the truth, to say the truth, to believe the truth apart from you.

And so we pray, God, that your spirit would give us grace to connect to these vital truths and that that would lead ultimately to rejoicing.

Lord, if there's anyone here who doesn't, doesn't know where they will go when they die, Lord, help them to hear the gospel which has been proclaimed and help them to be honest with even someone in this church today to say, I don't really know.

[41 : 18] I'm not sure. Lord, may your peace that passes all understanding rest upon them as they hear the good news. We thank you, Lord, for what you've done.

It's really such a strain to come up with words to describe the glory of it. But maybe right now we just should taste and see that the Lord is good.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.