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VICTORY OVER DEATH

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Victory over Death

Have you noticed that whenever the media report on something whether it is a war, a natural disaster and most recently the pandemic they always mention the number of deaths? In the pandemic the measurement, in the main, was the number of deaths and how that related to the success or failure is what was going on to the minimise the effect on lives. The number of cases was quoted too of course. However, there was rarely any mention of those who recovered, but every day the death toll was published which is not only deemed to be the most news worthy but is also so depressing and fear creating. In natural disasters or accidents, a train or a plane crash for example, the number of survivors is rarely mentioned, it is the number of those who have died and the time when survivors are mentioned is to say that there were none; in other words, everyone died. Death really seems to be the enemy and has to be kept a close eye on, as if it is our chief concern.

Yes, death dominates so much of human thinking even when we are actually alive and yet while we live our lives we are conscious of death, and it probably spoils our living when we should be free and enjoying life. We realise one day our lives will all come to an end and whenever we hear of deaths in the media it reinforces that realisation in our minds. Death is, of course, a huge tragedy, our wonderfully designed bodies, they are just too marvellous to have just evolved, stop functioning. The wonderful person, we usually think at that stage they were wonderful even if they were not, is no longer there and we are no longer able to communicate with them and they with us. Their life has gone, they are no longer able to do anything and all that is left is a body and, we hope, happy memories. That person perhaps so vital to our lives has gone and gone for ever and we realise that it will happen to us too someday. Yes, death is a tragedy and there seems no way in which it can be defeated. Perhaps that is why it is used as a measure in disasters, "There have been so many deaths", as however hard humans try we can't find a way to conquer the death we fear. We see death as inevitable and remorseless in the way it comes upon us.

Because of this, lots of traditions and religions in the world, whose job, we would hope, is to give some sort of hope, form a culture around death to try and

Him for forgiveness He removes the sin. He removes the strength of death from us. He takes us together with Him through His death into His resurrection and into eternal life, the sin which has such strength having been removed and death no longer having power over us. *"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works,* ***yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death****, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight"* Is the quotation from Paul the apostle's letter to the Colossians. We are brought back to God, we are reconciled and everything in us that meant eternal death is removed, we are given eternal life instead. We were so concerned for souls earlier, the real person, the real you and me that lives within our bodies. It is called a living soul in the Bible. What happens to that soul, is it lost for ever? or is there a place for it after our bodies die and the soul leaves the body. The real you your soul, any soul, when we believe on the Lord Jesus will not see death. We will be with Him. We can read of the first Christian martyr Stephen who as he dies says "I see Jesus". He saw Jesus welcoming him, not death but everlasting life. Our souls are welcomed into the presence of God. Remember "At His right hand there are pleasures for evermore". We are in Jesus resurrection now and what applied to Him applies to us. **Pleasures for evermore. Life everlasting**

Our natural bodies die, of course they will. That is sad, it is very sad when loved ones die. It is very sad when any life is lost, humans are wonderful creations. We fully understand why death is reported, as death is so important; it is the end of a human being.

But there is a way, there is a victory, there is the way to eternal life, so our soul lives on; it lives with Jesus. Paul the apostle helps us gain. *"To be with Christ is far better"* This is the victory over death for everyone who believes on Jesus Christ the first person resurrected from the dead. He was the pioneer, the first one to go through death but we follow Him and in Him go through to eternal life too. *"Because I live you will live also".*

What about our bodies? When Jesus returns, (He can because He is alive) the Bible has a huge amount to say about that too, He will give us new bodies resurrection bodies and raise us up to be with Him. We will be like Him, so resurrection is **complete,** death totally defeated and all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ have **VICTORY OVER DEATH.**

have given their lives to Jesus Christ with such an assurance of eternal life.
That is why the first disciples preached resurrection. It was so new to them, so different. They had seen Jesus alive from the dead, they saw the victory over death and wanted everyone to know, receive and rejoice.
So how did Jesus do it, how did He achieve this victory? He became a human being, the Son of God, a human being on the earth. The victory, to be real, had to be achieved by a real human being dying and rising again. He did not do what humans do and discard God and do His own thing. He did the opposite and did everything that pleased His Father in heaven. He even gave His life to a cruel death, to such a death that meant He could rise again. There was no sin in Him, as we have seen the strength of death is sin. Yes, No sin, it seems amazing when we look at the behaviour of everyone around us, even our own lives and realise that Jesus was never selfish. So, with no sin death could not hold Him. When Jesus laid down His own life, at the commandment of His Father, there was no sin. He was in total obedience. He was able to take up that life again and did so. Jesus' Father came and raised our Lord Jesus from that death. This is the quotation from the King James Bible of the verses on John's gospel. "*Therefore, doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father".*
You may say well that is fine for Jesus He had the victory, I can just about accept that but, what about me? How does Jesus resurrection achieve victory over death for me?
In Gods' plan, Jesus died in our place. **He died for us.** We were all joined spiritually with Him in His death and therefore in His resurrection**.** It is like, very simply, we rode on His back through death and went where we were not able to go ourselves. More accurately, Jesus took us, in Himself, through death and into resurrection and into eternal life. He took us through death and, as death could not hold Him, it cannot hold us either when we go through it protected by Him. Jesus said, "**He who believes in me has passed from death to life**". When we believe on the Lord Jesus and His work for us and we confess our sins to Him, the sin is removed. God laid on Jesus all our sin, so when we believe on

alleviate the anguish people feel when their loved ones depart this world. We have flowers at grave sides, often huge numbers when a nation seems to pour out its grief. There are memorial services when the lives lived are remembered and valued and is around how this world can remember and try and be positive, but it does not bring the person back Some religions and cultures look for some sort of 'afterlife'. There seems to be that in born human instinct that there must be something after life on earth. Our loved one, who we have just lost and for us when death comes, we are surely more than just the body which no longer moves and breaths. There is so much character, so much talent and ability in a human being surely that has not all gone too? There must be something afterwards where we live on, not in our bodies, but somewhere else. There must be a place for the soul, the real person who is no longer in their body but surely must live on.
So, yes the cultures and religions try and provide an idea of an afterlife, even though the concepts they conceive may be a little far-fetched. What we really need is something or better someone, with a real hope that provides a real answer and provides victory over death. We don't, as a verse in the New Testament says to us, want to live all our lives here in a spiritual slavery due to the fear of death.
That fear is very real; look how much health and safety requirements have increased over the years, especially in the developed world. I am old enough to remember cars without seat belts and minimal security at airports. So much is done by humans to prevent death coming, we don't mind of course but it just shows the state of mind the world is in and of course it all costs money. Some people have made a lot of money out of making us afraid and then putting in protection to keep us safe. In England we have slogans like 'save lives' or 'so many lives have been saved' when what has happened in reality is that death had been delayed, the lives have not been saved for ever. In the UK as we have moved away from a Christian Bible believing culture and faith in the God of the Bible thus removing Christian hope more fear has come and therefore more and more striving to protect our mortal lives at all costs. We need victory over death, over perhaps our worst enemy, an enemy which has such a hold over us; what we need is real freedom.
The Judeo-Christian culture has much to say in both the Old and New Testament about life after death. There are lots of verses in the Old Tes-

tament which refer to a 'Saviour' (one word used for all the descriptions to make this more straightforward) coming and that, to quote one verse (Psalm 16), **"Death could not hold Him".** There was no victory, no triumph for death. We are told that Jesus, He is called the 'Saviour of the world' came to give us 'eternal life'. To provide for human beings a life which goes on after this one has come to an end. That is an amazing concept to grasp especially when we are surrounded by concerns and news about death. Our thinking becomes dominated by the thought that there is no answer to death, it cannot be defeated. 'Eternal life' is the promise Jesus made, and He is the one who 'death could not hold' and for whom 'at the right hand of God there are pleasures for **evermore'.** . For there to be pleasures for evermore and to experience them, Jesus who died must be alive. We find evermore, eternal, everlasting, immortal and so on are words the Bible used when society uses death, temporal, mortal, terminal, fatal, life expectancy and so on. God has a very different vocabulary.

For there to be victory over death there has to be something afterwards, something eternal and everlasting which provides something immortal for us as mortal human beings. We are 'held in death' were as Jesus, we read, 'could not be held by death'. The Bible tells us that the '**strength of death is sin**'. Sin is not a popular concept these days, it is meant to be old fashioned, from a bygone era. We are told "We understand things so much better in the modern times". "It is just human nature". Humans turning away from God and doing our own thing is not recognised as sin by the world. In many ways God is no longer recognised as existing; that is even worse, so humans do what they want without any conscience of wrong doing before an Almighty God. But humans still all die, so our discarding of God does not work, it does not solve our problem, it does not bring us victory. Death is our enemy and still has a strong grip on human lives; it is 'the last enemy to be destroyed', so the Bible tells us. People still die and we know *that from within our own friends and family as well as on the media.* Humans on our own, discarding God, don't seem to be able to defeat this enemy.

There is victory, we have mentioned death not being able to hold Jesus (Jesus Christ the Lord). If it could not hold Him, He must be stronger than death and therefore stronger than sin. Can that be true? As we have said the Old Testament makes lots of promises about resurrection; death not being able to hold people. When we read it closely we are told, in the simplest terms (read Isaiah 53 for example) of one person who died and then does things afterwards. For that to be true that one person, His name is Jesus, **must** have come back to life. It is the only way He could do things after dying. So, we have resurrection, a 'coming back to life again' and it all is related to this special person, this saviour, who is identified in the New Testament as Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In Isaiah He is the servant, the one on whom God put the sins of the whole world. He is a real person from a real place, in a real time with a real mother and family. This is the one who promised that He had come to give us everlasting life. Life after this life, a life which goes on for ever.

So, is it true, how can we be sure of this victory over death? Jesus was crucified on a cross and died for all there to see, historical fact. The Romans put a spear in His side, to make sure, and out came blood and water; He really died, He died of a broken heart. His disciples and it is well documented too, said that they saw Him alive after His death. They struggled to believe, it seemed impossible. They were sad, they were in mourning. It was the last thing they expected. Jesus had told them He would rise from the dead but in the gospels they admit they did not believe or understand until after Jesus had risen from the dead. They were faced with the facts; Jesus was alive and thy had no choice but to accept truth. Luke in His gospel talks of many infallible (not failing) proofs of this resurrection. So, Jesus alive from the dead? Yes! Also, apart from the historical evidence from the eyewitnesses at the time, Christians down the last 2000 years will tell you that Jesus is alive. Jesus has come to them and changed their lives and inside they have the assurance of the eternal life which Jesus promised. The Christians all know **the same** Jesus Christ the one who is raised from the dead. He has come to them, and they testify of knowing Jesus as Lord and Saviour. It is quite remarkable that all have the same basic testimony. So over so many centuries all saying that the Jesus of Nazareth who died alive and has made Himself known to each of them. That is some impressive evidence of the victory over death and provides those who