



Jesus' Victory Over Death

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Text: Verse 10b

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My plan is to preach two sermons on this passage today as we focus on and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The reason that I chose this passage is because of those wonderful words of verse 10 which say that Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” That is what Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection. That is what we celebrate as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus abolished death. This is the good news. The good news has many implications for our lives in the here and now as well as our future beyond the here and now. And the rest of this paragraph spells out a number of those implications. There is plenty in this paragraph for us to think about as we worship the Lord with a focus on the resurrection of Jesus and its meaning for us.

This morning we will focus on the idea that Jesus, “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” We will look at that in the light of the larger biblical context and this afternoon we will focus more narrowly on the connections that Paul makes in the rest of this paragraph to that glorious truth of Jesus victory over death.

This letter is addressed to Timothy. Timothy was a pastor of the church in Ephesus. Both of the letters to Timothy were written to encourage and instruct Timothy in his work as a pastor. God has included these letters in his word to encourage and instruct pastors for all time, but also to encourage and instruct all Christians for all time because it is important for all Christians to understand what God calls their leaders to do.

But these letters are also important because there is a great deal of instruction in them concerning the gospel and the Christian life and the

way in which the church is to function. All of the letters of the New Testament were written to specific people or specific churches to deal with specific issues, but God has included them in his word so that Christians throughout the rest of history could hear the word of the Lord to them in them. And so it is with this letter to Timothy. It was originally written for a specific purpose, but because God has included it in the New Testament, it is the word of God to us as well.

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter and he was expecting to be executed in the near future. It is a farewell letter to Timothy by his mentor who knew that his days on earth were coming to an end. And so a section like the one we are going to look at, gives us some of the apostle's thought as he faced his death. And as such it is relevant to us because we also face death – perhaps not imminently, but certainly. And the glory of the gospel – the glory of what Jesus has accomplished for us – is that it gives us hope in the face of the reality of death.

We all live in the shadow of death. That is an unescapable aspect of life. 100 percent of people die. And that casts a shadow over our lives. Life is precious. Unless we are severely depressed, we do whatever we can to prolong our lives. There are things about life that are more precious than words can express – particularly our relationships with our loved ones and others in our lives which give our lives joy and satisfaction. And surrounded by the important people in our lives, we have goals to work towards and many joys and pleasures. Life is exceedingly rich and valuable even if it is sometimes difficult and painful.

But life as we know it on this earth is temporary. It comes to an end. Either suddenly or gradually we die. And there is something that is haunting and disturbing about this. There is something unnatural about it. It is almost unthinkable that something so precious as life can end, but it does, and we live in the light of that troubling reality.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. The resurrection of Jesus is the first event that is the fruit of Jesus' victory over death. The resurrection of Jesus means that Jesus has abolished death.

But what exactly does that mean that Jesus has abolished death? Death is still a reality in our world. We know that every person who is precious to us will one day die and that we ourselves will one day die. How can Paul say that Jesus has abolished death when death is still so much of a reality?

The beginning of the answer is in the words that follow Paul's assertion that Jesus has abolished death. He says that Jesus has "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The gospel is about life and immortality. The gospel is about eternal life. That is one of the great emphases of John's gospel.

There is the best known verse in the Bible, John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." People who believe in Jesus "have eternal life" and they will never perish. In John 11 in connection with the raising of Lazarus from the grave, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

So when Paul speaks about Jesus abolishing death and bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel, part of what he means is that the gospel speaks of life beyond the grave. The word "immortality" refers to eternal life. Someone who is immortal never dies. That is what the gospel promises to those who believe in Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus will live forever. But we must take a few other ideas into account to get at the biblical teaching.

When Paul says that Jesus abolished death, he clearly does not mean that believers are delivered from death in every sense. He himself was expecting to die soon. In 4:6 of this same letter he says, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." He is referring to his own coming death. Every other Christian in the world has died or will die. And yet we continue to believe that Jesus has abolished death.

The key is that the eternal life that those who believe in Jesus receive is both a present reality and a promise concerning the future. Jesus in his saying about himself being the resurrection and the life says, both that

though believers die they will live and that believers will never die. There is a sense in which believers never die. When you believe you are given a life that will last forever. When your body dies, your life will continue in the presence of God, but in the future, beyond that, God will raise your body from the dead. Eternal life is both a present reality and a future reality in a fuller sense.

We must remember the relationship between sin and death. Romans 5:12 says that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...” We are born dead in sin because of the fall of Adam into sin. The penalty of sin is death. Jesus took that penalty upon himself. He died the death that we deserve to die and once he had paid the penalty for our sins, he rose from the dead because the penalty of death had been paid. And so believers receive forgiveness and with forgiveness comes life.

It is very important to understand the relationship between sin and death and forgiveness and life in connection with the gospel and the significance of the resurrection of Christ. Sin and death go together in the Bible. Paul writes in Romans 6:23 that “wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Jesus rose from the dead after he had paid the penalty for sin. Sin and death go together, and righteousness and life go together. Jesus by his life and death obtained righteousness for us and so he rose from the dead. And when we are united to him in faith we rise from the dead as well because our sins are forgiven, and we are made righteous in his sight.

This is part of the picture when we think of the resurrection and particularly this morning, Paul’s words that Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” All of this flows from the fact that Jesus, by his life and his death, conquered sin. He conquered sin by living a perfect life himself and he conquered sin by paying its penalty and he conquered sin by freeing his people from both the penalty and the power of sin. And the result of that is life – eternal life – the same life that brought Jesus from the dead – and that life begins the moment someone is regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand that the life that we celebrate in connection with the resurrection of Christ – the conquering of death – is

both a future hope and a present reality. The life that we have in Christ is a present reality if we are truly his. It changes our relationship to sin. Sin and death go together. Life and righteousness go together. One of the ways that we can tell if we truly take part in the resurrection life of Christ is if we are no longer dead in sin. The life of Christ means being alive to God. Paul deals with this in detail in Romans 6 where he says to Christians that they “must consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

The resurrection of Christ is about hope for the future – it is about eternal life. But that hope is inseparably related to being made alive to God in the here and now so that we have learned and are learning to hate sin and to love righteousness and holiness. Life is loving God with all our hearts. Life is learning the profound truth that service and sacrifice for other people for Jesus sake is the way to fullness of life. It is as we participate in and live out the life of Christ in our lives that we also have a well-grounded hope concerning eternal life.

What a blessing that hope is! Physical death is not the end. Death does not have the final word. There is a glorious future beyond this life. Life in the here and now is temporary and that is painful, but there is a glorious future beyond this life – a glorious future in the presence of God – a glorious future in resurrected bodies – a glorious future of living for the glory of God without sin and therefore experiencing the fullness of joy. We live in the shadow of physical death, but that shadow is pierced by the light of the glory of eternal life so that we live in hope of being with Christ which is far better than any blessedness that we experience in the here and now. We live in hope because “our Savior Christ Jesus, [has] abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Now this truth – this hope – must have a profound impact on the way that we look at our lives in the here and now. The hope of eternal life, must transform the way that we look at this life. We must embrace the reality that this life is temporary. But further, we must determine our priorities in the light of this truth that there is a glorious future for believers beyond this life.

One of the ways that the worldview of the world differs from the worldview of the Bible is the world is focused on this life alone. This life is all that there is so - get what you can out of this life. And we must confess that that resonates with our sinful nature. It comes naturally to us because of our sinful tendencies to prioritize the things of this life in a way that does not take the longer eternal perspective into account. It's easy and tempting to focus all our attention or most of our attention on the joys and pleasures and satisfactions of this life without relating them to the perspective of eternal life.

There is a subtlety here because the joys and pleasures and satisfactions of this life can, by God's grace, be enjoyed in the light of eternity in a proper way. Our life in this world is God's idea and a huge part of the life that belongs to salvation is the life of work and family and this worldly activities and goals and satisfactions. But we must remember that Jesus tells us not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, but rather to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

What that basically means is that we prioritize our relationship with God in the way that we engage in our this-worldly life. We can focus on our this worldly-life in a way that ignores God or in a way that keeps God on the periphery of our lives, or we can focus on our this worldly-life in a such way that God is at the center. This is what Jesus did perfectly. He engaged in this life as the perfect human being. He ate and drank and worked and enjoyed relationships, but in, under and through it all his relationship with his Father was the priority. In John 8:29 Jesus said concerning his relationship with his Father, "I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

For us prioritizing our relationship with God as we engage in the nitty-gritty of this life means prioritizing our relationship with the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It means loving and seeking to please this triune God in all that we do. And a part of that is longing to be closer to the Father and to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit than it is possible to be in this life. In John 17:24 Jesus prayed to his Father, "Father, I desire that they also may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." This is one of the things that Jesus desires: that his people be with him

where he is to see his glory. And so living the life of this-worldly affairs in a way that is pleasing to Jesus includes a longing to be with Jesus and to behold his glory. Paul expresses this in Philippians 1:23, when he spoke of his “desire to depart and be with Christ....”

All this to say that the hope of the resurrection is meant to create in us a peculiar attitude towards our this-worldly life. It certainly is not meant to cause us to despise this life and consider it insignificant. But it is meant to view this life in the light of the hope that is before us. This life is wonderful and rich and something to be treasured in a spirit of thanksgiving and relatedness to God. But the future is better. Receiving the resurrection life of Christ in the here and now will, without fail, create in us desires and longings that can only be fully satisfied in the life to come.

If we have received eternal life which is the resurrection life of Jesus, we are dead to sin and alive to God as we have seen. That means that we have been given hearts that love God and that desire to please God. That means that we have been given godly desires and longings. The fruit of participating in the resurrection of Christ is that we desire to worship God and to please God and enjoy God, but as long as we are in this life, we will only be able to do that imperfectly because of remaining sin. And so we will desire and long to be rid of that remaining sin so that we can enter into the fullness of worshipping and pleasing and enjoying God.

And so the hope that we celebrate when we think about the resurrection of Christ and the fact that he “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” is a hope that changes the way that we look at this life. The resurrection life of Christ is in us now already and creates in us desires and longings that this world cannot completely satisfy. The hope of the resurrection is not just that we will have a pleasant existence in the next life. It is not just that we will escape extinction at death. The hope of the resurrection is for full enjoyment of the eternal life that we begin to experience during this life. It is for the satisfaction of the desires for God and intimacy with him that are awakened the moment we receive the new life in Christ.

What this means is that there is only real hope for those who experience the transformation that the life of Christ begins in the here and now. The hope of the resurrection is not something that can be enjoyed by an unregenerate person. The hope of eternal life is not the natural desire that most people have to escape death. It is not more of the same of this life. It is to enter into the fullness of life which is the enjoyment of worshipping and serving God. What that means is that if there is not something of that now already, we are not partakers of the eternal life that that we celebrate when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the defeat of death that he accomplished.

That is an important part of the message of Easter. It is an important part of the message that Jesus has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” The life that we celebrate is being alive to God and dead to sin. The hope of eternal life is a radically God-centered hope. It is not the kind of thing that has any attraction to someone whose heart has not been renewed. If it were possible for an unsaved person to be in the new heavens and the new earth, he would hate it because it’s all about God. Remember what Jesus said in John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Remember what Jesus said a little later on in the same prayer, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory....”

If you do not delight in the glory of Christ now, you would hate the new heavens and earth, even if you could get there because eternal life is about loving and serving and worshipping and enjoying God. This is what we must understand about the hope of the resurrection, the hope of eternal life. It is ultimately a hope for God. It is what David expressed in Psalm 27:4 when he said, “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.”

This is something that we should think about as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and his victory over death. The death that Jesus won the victory over is separation from God. The life that resulted from

Jesus' victory over life is life as it was meant to be lived – life that is focused on enjoying and pleasing and worshipping God. And so if we share in the true resurrection hope, we will have the beginning, at least, of that God-focused life that we will enjoy in perfection when we receive the fullness of life when Jesus returns.

This is the gospel. This is the good news. But part of that good news is that it is designed for sinners. You may be listening to this and be troubled because the desires for God and pleasing him are still so weak. When you compare your desires for God with your desires for the good things of this life, you may wonder if you are even saved. And it is true that if you know nothing of desires for God and pleasing him, you should not expect that you have a secure hope for eternity. In those who have eternal life there is at least a beginning of a hunger and thirst for righteousness and a love for God.

But the glory of the gospel is that it is a gospel for sinners. Jesus said that he did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. In John 6:37 he said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall never cast out." In Matthew 12:20 we are told, "[A] bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench."

Thankfully the hope of the resurrection is not just for those who have a strong and well-founded assurance of salvation. It is for all who trust in Jesus and rest in his mercy and grace. If that is the case there will be some fruit – there will be some desires for the kinds of things that salvation promises and all of that is centered on enjoying God and pleasing God.

That is life. Eternal life is not just about living forever. It is about the abolishing of death which involves the victory over sin which results in true life which is life with God and in God and for God and Jesus Christ his Son through the living-giving work of the Holy Spirit.

What this all means is living in the here and now with this focus and this priority. We begin to enjoy now already what we will know in perfection in the time to come. But what a glorious thing it is that we can live in the light of the hope of the resurrection. Death is a terrible thing. This

life is temporary. We came into this world with nothing and we will leave this life with nothing. If that were all that could be said, then life would be meaningless.

But Jesus rose from the dead and we participate in that life already now and we look forward to the resurrection of the body and eternal life in the presence of God. We have a wonderful future. And we are to live in the light of that future knowing that “the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

The resurrection of Jesus and the hope that it conveys is part of the forward-looking orientation of the biblical message. There is a lot about this life that is wholesome and wonderful for God’s people, but it is not the ultimate and it is not our hope. The hope is for what is to come. Hebrews 13:14, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

Jesus has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” This truth orients us to the future. May the Lord use his word to nurture our hope and to shape the way that we live in the here and now, not despising his good gifts, but at the same time looking through them and past them to the ultimate good gift of all – the fulfillment of our salvation – sinless life forever, in the presence of God.