

# How Did Jesus Christ Destroy the Power of Death?

By Rev. D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.

**Heb 2:14 ...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;**

We have read that Christ destroyed him who had the power of death; that one being the devil. Prior to the death of Jesus Christ, Satan had what the Bible refers to as *the power of death*. In what sense did Satan have the power of death? What did Jesus Christ do to break that power?

## ***The Covenant of Works***

For one thing, Satan had the power of death in the proposition that faced mortal man under the Old Covenant. All that man knew (prior to the resurrection, the regeneration and the recreation) was the old world, the old life of Adam, the limitations of mortality, and the abilities and prospects of humanism. Early on in the experience of the human race, natural life disappointed man, failed man and let him down.

In the Old Testament we hear the ancient men of the faith crying out against life as they knew it. **“Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been...”** (Gen 47:9), said Jacob when Pharaoh asked about his life. **“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble,”** (Job 14:1) said Job, and **“man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”** (Job 5:7)

Solomon, according to the Bible and to God’s own evaluation, was the wisest man that ever lived. In my own life one of the greatest turning points came when I finally got around to facing up to and listening to the message of Solomon. Solomon wrote a little book called the Ecclesiastes, which means *the words of the preacher*. Solomon was not a preacher in the ordinary sense. He had no congregation, he did not hold meetings every Sabbath and give sermons. Solomon meant that he had one great message to tell to the world; a message to which men would do well to listen to. If you studied the life of Solomon you

would come to the conclusion that as a humanist, and as mortality goes, this was indeed correct. Solomon was the richest man that ever lived, in material things. He had wealth that staggers the imagination. Solomon was a great patron of the arts, a great architect, a great warrior, a great ladies man. We don't want to leave out that Solomon was also a great philosopher and a great religionist. He built the fabled temple. He was a man who loved religious things and loved at least to talk about God and His greatness.

This is the man who said, "I have one great message to preach and I want you to listen to it: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?'" (Eccl 1:2-3) Everything is empty; everything is meaningless; everything is a mirage; everything is a lie; nothing brings any satisfaction; nothing does a man any good in the final analysis." That was Solomon's evaluation of life.

Remember that this was not a bitter, frustrated and unfulfilled man. This was a man who had been there, seen it all, and done it all. Solomon said of himself: "I withheld from my heart no joy. I had the power to do it, I had the money to do it, I had the kingdom to do it, and if I wanted to, I did it." So prestigious was the kingdom of Solomon that kings of the world actually fought for the privilege of making themselves servants to Solomon in order to come and sit at his table.

So when you listen to Solomon, you are not listening to a little man who would have liked to have done it, but was not able to; you are listening to the most successful humanist that ever lived.

This is that Solomon who said in fact that life is so meaningless that it is less than a zero. It is worse than nothing. So negative is life that the man who has died is better off than the one who is alive, and the one who has never been born and never had to go through it at all is better off than both of them.

All of this is by way of showing that the proposition of life under the Old Testament had nothing to offer. And men — holy men, great men, wise men — knew it. They were out there grubbing for it, fighting for it, pushing like hogs at the trough in order to try to get it away from the other guy; and all the while they

knew that it would do them no good even if they succeeded. They were going to grow old. They were going to lose their youth; their zeal; their drive; their enthusiasm. They were going to grow cynical. The things of youth were going to fail to thrill them anymore, and eventually they were going to die.

That fear was in man and still is in man who does not know the New Creation. It is the fear of death. And because that knowledge was there and because man under the Old Testament was an existentialist and nothing more (he went only by his experiences and what he could see and know by the senses), he was intimidated. Satan could intimidate him. He could harass him. Satan could cause man to feel like a failure. Man under the Old Testament was cynical about the proposition of life and because he was, he feared it. He was skeptical about his own inabilities, he was resigned to failure. This is what Job said when his trials came upon him: **“For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.”** (Job 3:25) Just like man today who experiences disappointment and failure, Job said, “I knew it; I knew it was too good to be true.” Man, he has learned to accept failure. He is resigned to it. Death has terror over natural man.

When natural man thinks of death, he thinks of the unknown and he is afraid. At memorial services that I have conducted through the years, it was easy for me to spot the people who are not close to God, who are not right with God, or who do not know God. You can see the fear in their eyes as they look in that coffin and see that dead person laying there. Death is never more real to them than it is at that moment and they are afraid. Man’s greatest fear is of the unknown.

There was no other way to look at it before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, there are other possibilities. Many have not taken advantage of this hope that has been brought to us, but in any event it is there for us. Before the cross and the resurrection they were not there. Satan had the power of death over man. It is too bad that many non-Christian people today who are not Justified still live in the fear of death, even though it is not necessary. And it is more unfortunate still that many Christian people who are Justified, but are

not Sanctified still, live their lives in the same way. They are still motivated by the things of the Adamic world. They are still trying to get the old things, still trying to achieve success in the false the world, and still living in that frustration and fear that inevitably comes to the man who is of the old creation only.

### ***The Impotence of Religion***

Many of God's Children think that religion is the answer. But remember this, never doubt it for a moment: religion that is humanistic in nature is just as much a failure as anything else in the fallen creation.

### ***The Broken Bonds of the Fear of Death***

Christ removed the bondage that man was in because of the fear of death. How did He do it? He did it first of all by refusing the proposition and exposing the lie. Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Satan said to Jesus, "Man, you cannot go on living with this gnawing hunger wracking your being. Man has to have food. Command these stones to be made bread. You've got to have bread."

### ***The Tree of Life***

Jesus replied by telling Satan what was written in the Word of God. This was not the word that come from the experiences of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but the Word that was revealed from heaven by God. "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone." What did Jesus say to the devil? He said the proposition was a lie. Man's greatest need is not for bread.

### ***The Cares of the World and the Deceitfulness of Riches***

Mortal man, thinking in the natural mind, does not know this. He has to make a living. He must have things. But Jesus knew that this is not man's first and greatest need. That is a part of the lie coming from the old proposition and out of the fallen world. Sure, our heavenly father knows that we need some of these things. But to be intimidated by material needs, to allow the character to be distorted and warped, to allow ourselves to be pulled away from our beliefs and convictions because of the fear of not being able to make a living is false. Jesus proved it was false. He proved it by refusing to bow to that kind of pressure. And Jesus said, "Let me tell you something very important. A man's

life does not consist in the abundance of things that he has.” That is part of the lie of the old world. Oh yes, we are in this world, we must make a living and we are going to make it by the sweat of our faces. But it is a lie to suppose that this is so important that we can let it distort our character and drive wedges between us and God. It is a lie that Jesus exposed. Jesus showed the ability to overcome all these pressures that came from the old world and humanism, through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost Jesus gave that power to us.

### ***He That is Dead is Freed From Sin***

Jesus took away the bondage and the fear of death by teaching the desirability of death as a means to a better life. This is not just about death to the mortal that brings us physically into the presence of God. It is teaching the desirability of death to the old nature, the pride, the selfishness, the rebellion, the false and temporal goals that men strive for as a means of achievement. Jesus said it is false. Die to those things, and death (which is an end to the humanist because it takes from him everything he holds dear) becomes a beginning to God’s men. Except a kernel of wheat fall into the ground and die, Jesus said, it abides alone, but if it dies it brings forth much fruit. Death, which is an experience through which all mortals will go, can be used to the advantage of those who will die to the old and be resurrected and be born into the new. We can deliberately bring on this death of the old nature in order to have the new nature. In this context, death is no longer an enemy, but a friend. When we understand that, and when we see what the resurrection of Jesus Christ really means, death loses its terror. And when we lose the fear of death, it no longer has power over us to rule us. Jesus took away the fear of death by showing the reality of the hope. He demonstrated it in the resurrection.

### ***Justification Puts the Lie to Death***

Jesus showed that there is no bondage in death, and nothing to fear because in resurrection there is new life for the spirit when it is reunited with God through the new birth.

### ***Sanctification Puts the Lie to Death***

There is new life for the soul. The Will of God for redeemed man in the Kingdom of God gives one a purpose that death cannot take away from him, mortal man cannot take away from him, governments cannot take, and in fact nothing can take.

### ***My Kingdom is No Longer Of This World***

In one of the most misunderstood, mistaught and resented passages in the Bible, Jesus told Pilate His servants did not fight to deliver Him from the injustice of what was taking place because “My Kingdom is no longer of this world.” The Jews and the Romans could take away his mortal life, but they could not take away the life that God had given Him.

Men can steal what rusts and corrodes and corrupts in this world, but they cannot take from us the true riches that do not grow old and outdated and that never pass away.

Jesus gave new meaning to life — life on the eternal plain that nothing that is mortal can touch or can take from us. And Jesus Christ, through His own physical resurrection, showed that there is new life for the body. When we put these bodies in the grave, it is only a resting place. There is a resurrection day coming when the graves will be opened and the dead will come out of them. As we see the resurrected Christ in the book of Revelation, we see the reward. He has gone to His reward. **“Well done!”** And we see then what we are taught as children — that we lose somewhere along the line — coming on to assert itself with firm reality. Right will triumph in the end! Death cannot destroy righteousness! All death can destroy is the unrighteousness, the unwholesome, the false ambitions — the old sin-cursed body — the evil things that are going to perish anyway.

### ***The Last Enemy***

Right will triumph. It will triumph, not because of humanistic platitudes in morality plays where the good guy always triumphs in the end, but because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The destruction of death is the ultimate triumph of right.

