

The Need for Christ's Death (Lord's Day 16)

Readings: John 19:28-42; Romans 6:1-14

The topic of the Lord's Day 16 is death.

Death. It's not the most pleasant of subjects...

It tends to be spoken only in hushed whispers.

We try not to discuss it.

We speak about it with euphemisms such as "passing away."

Most of us scarcely think of death; we're too young for that.

It's not until we hear of the death of a young acquaintance like Jarryd Lourenz, or that a congregation member has terminal cancer, that we really think of death.

Yet the fact of the matter is that we all will one day die, unless Christ comes back first.

In the midst of all the unknowns of life –

whether we'll go through life healthy or sick,

happy or not, married or single,

in Australia or elsewhere-

this fact is very much a fixed certainty: all of us will die.

How we die we do not know, and when we die we do not know either.

But the fact stands firm.

In the words of the Preacher: there's "a time to be born, and a time to die" (Eccl 3:2).

But back at the beginning of time death had no place.

It was not a part of God's perfect plan for his universe.

It did not exist when God sat back at the end of building his creation masterpiece and exclaimed, "It is very good!"

Death is the imposter...

gaining access to God's good earth only through the sinful rebellion of our first parents.

By their disobedience they brought down on their own heads, and on the heads of all their descendants the curse which God warned them about:

"You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Ge 2.17)

They did eat, and at that very moment the great black plague entered,

the plague that has hounded the human race ever since.

"You will surely die."

What did God mean when he said that?

What is death, in its most essential form?

For, as is obvious, the bodies of Adam and Eve did not expire at that moment when they ate of the forbidden fruit.

So what, then, is death?

In its most essential form death is *separation*.

And that deadly separation occurs in three ways:

First, there the deathly separation from our world and our fellow humanity.

In this way death DID come immediately to Adam and Eve.

Gen 3.7: *"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."*

The closeness, openness and intimacy that had been there between man and wife was gone.

It had died.

That death was seen even more clearly when Cain killed brother Adam.

We, too, experience this separation too.

For example, a son and a father are not on speaking terms, ignoring each other...
that is as good as death.

It is a form of the separation of death.

Secondly, there is the deathly separation from our body.

The moment Adam and Eve sinned their bodies began the irreversible process of ageing, the movement towards physical decay and that ultimate moment when the body would expire altogether, worn out.

The eternal soul of a person would be unnaturally ripped away from the body, with which it was meant to remain as a united whole forever.

Thirdly, and most horrible of all, is the deathly separation from our God.

This, too, was experienced by Adam and Eve.

Gen 3.9: *"But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"*

The closeness of God and humanity, the fellowship of being able to walk together through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening was shattered forever, and would - unless some miracle could occur - result in eternal separation, the horrible end called hell.

Death, in short, **fragments** what was designed to be a beautiful, united **whole** Creation. It wormed its way in and nobody and nothing could avoid its icy grip.

That is why people aren't sure where to fit death into the scheme of things.

It *doesn't* fit!

That's why it can so badly upset the lives of people it affects (for years... for ever).

It destroys and separates what was never meant to be destroyed or separated.

So people end up fumbling around with it.

They try to avoid it altogether.

People want to avoid death in their own lives.

They want to try to live forever, or at least pretend that they will live forever.

The myth portrayed in the advertising world, in the medical world, is subtly telling us that if we do the right thing we might never have to die.

-Use the right skin treatments and your skin won't wrinkle.

-Use the best colouring agents and your hair won't go grey.

-Exercise right and your muscles won't sag to your belly.

-Avoid preservatives, eat fibre, watch your cholesterol and your body will not be poisoned.

-Check with your doctor regularly, and then double check the physician's advice with that of a homeopath, a nutritional consultant, a reflexologist and chiropractor to ensure that health stays on your side.

It's to the point that we as a society seem to be ready to pay almost anything to stay youthful, to stay alive.

In the paper today...62% of women aged 18-21 say they will use some sort of cosmetic surgery in the years ahead...in an attempt to preserve youth.

Yet even as we try to do this...we recognize the futility of trying.

We all know, deep down we know, that in the end we all lose the game.

Death wins.

Now it is into *this* kind of a world, a world under the grey pallor of Genesis 3, that our Lord Jesus Christ came.

Why, congregation, did Jesus have to die?

John tells us that he cried, as he hung on the cross, "it is finished".
That's saying He'd atoned for sin, satisfied the justice of God.

If all was finished, why did the Lord Jesus not ascend directly from the cross into heaven?

Or why did the Lord God not send a heavenly chariot to collect Jesus (as He once collected Elijah) and transport Him to glory?

That would have been most impressive!!

Why, after Jesus could declare that all was finished, did He still die?!

The question is so very important simply because we all must die...
unless our Lord returns from heaven before.

We all must die – yet death is not the enemy it once was *precisely because Jesus died*.
In his death Jesus took the sting out of our death.

So we need to reflect on (guided by the Catechism):

1. The need for Christ's death,
2. The purpose of our death,
3. The blessing of past death.

1. The need for Christ's death.

Death is a foreign entity, a stranger in God's world.

Death is *God's judgment on sin*.

God's curse on our disobedience.

For this reason it was necessary that the Lord Jesus Christ *die*.

Yes, He cried out that all was finished, and that's to say that He had atoned for sin.

But there remained some follow-up work,

(like the fire brigades mop up work after a fire)

and that includes taking the sting out of death for us.

Yes, we need to die, for God is faithful to His promise of the beginning:

if you sin, you must die

But since Christ died for us, Christ has taken the curse out of death, has taken the bite out of death.

1 Cor 15: "O death, where is your sting?"

Christ has died, and the sting of death is gone,

gone because the *punishment* is taken out of death.

And die Jesus did.

Look at the evidence:

John makes the point of telling about the soldiers who "when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs" (19:33).

Notice: these unbelieving Roman soldiers were convinced that Jesus was really dead.

More, "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (vs 34).

The separation of the blood into plasma and water occurs as a result of death.

Point: Jesus was truly dead.

John tells us also of the labors of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two disciples of the Lord.

These two men took Jesus' body off the cross, wrapped it in many meters of linen strips packed with spices.

They *handled* Jesus' body... They felt for themselves that the body was cold, was dead.

So they buried the body – evidence that they were fully convinced that Jesus was dead.

Let's be honest: if Joseph and Nicodemus found any evidence of lingering life, they certainly would *not* have buried Jesus; they would instead have nursed Him, sought out a doctor (like Luke).

But they buried Him, and that's because they were convinced Jesus was dead.

It's the point of the Catechism: "His burial testified that He had really died."

He wasn't buried by a landslide, He wasn't buried by enemies willing to bury despite evidence of lingering life.

No, Jesus' friends buried Him, buried Him after they handled His body repeatedly.

They buried Him because they were absolutely certain that Jesus was dead.

No, congregation, Jesus *died*, as per God's promise in the beginning.

He died *for us*, and so took the curse out of our death,

emptied death of the penalty and the punishment that follows from the fall into sin.

That is why we can join Paul in his song of praise: "O death, where is your sting?"

That brings us to our second point:

2. *The purpose of our death.*

If Christ has taken the sting out of death for us, if Christ has taken away the penalty from death, why must we still die?

It's Q 42 of our Lord's Day.

Notice Q 42 does not ask why *people* still need to die.

Q 42 asks why "*we* still have to die."

The pronoun 'we' refers to believers, refers to those who confess with Lord's Day 1 that they belong in life and death to the Savior Jesus Christ who redeemed them with His blood.

If Christ died for believers, and if Christ has taken our curse upon Himself, "why do we still have to die?"

Does God demand payment for our sins twice, first through Christ's suffering and death, and then through ours?

No, God does not.

Rather, with His work on the cross the Lord Jesus Christ has *changed the purpose of death*.

When Jesus died he took the punishment for sin...that was the penalty.

So God no longer asks us to pay the penalty.

But we still die, as the Catechism says, because death "puts an end to sin."

You see: as long as we remain in this life, we cannot outgrow sin, cannot get past sin.

The only way past this/through this is by death.

Only death provides escape from sin.

Now here's the new purpose for death.

That's this: death puts an end to sin, death frees us from this body of sin.

Death is the entrance into eternal life, is the door through which we must pass to move from *this* room, *this* life (with its sin and brokenness) into the *next* room, the *next* life – where there is no sin, no brokenness, no tears, no pain.

Through His death the Lord Jesus Christ *has changed the purpose of death!*

This gospel gives great comfort as we face death.

I come to our last point:

3. *The blessing of past death.*

Q 43 asks about a "further benefit ... we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross."

If the death of Christ has taken the sting, or the curse out of our death we still ask, "further benefit" might there be?

Says the Catechism: "through Christ's death our old nature is crucified, put to death, and buried with Him."

That is: when Christ was crucified some 2000 years ago, He was not the only one crucified; we were crucified with Him.

When Christ died some 2000 years ago, we died also, and when He was buried we were buried also.

I don't know how to understand that, no more than I know how to understand that I fell into sin with Adam some 6 or 7000 years ago.

But this is what God says, and so I believe it.

We died with Christ when He died. That's what Paul writes in **Romans 6. Vs 5:**

It's hard to wrap our minds around this concept of dying with Christ

Why, then, does Paul mention it?

He mentions it because of the thought that readily lives in our minds, this thought: if Christ has paid for our sins so that we are saved by His grace alone, hey, let's just continue to sin for we'll be forgiven anyway.

The more we sin, the more grace we'll receive.

It's the question of vs 1: "shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

In that context Paul writes about the 'further benefit' we receive from Christ's death.

It's this: we died with Christ 2000 years ago already!

The implication of that?

When He died, we died, died to sin.

And *death puts an end to sin!*

We died with Christ, and *so it will not do live in sin.*

That's Paul's argument here. Vs 11:

And vs 12:

"What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?"

We died with Him in the past, *and that is why we may no longer give ourselves to sin*

Christ's death *touches us today*, affects our lifestyle today, makes us put sin in the past.

No, we shall not achieve perfection on that point, no more than Paul did when he despaired at his continuing brokenness.

But we *believe* we've died with Christ, and so today already we strive to live as persons who have been freed from sin.

Conclusion:

We all have to confront the enemy death...but we can do it with confidence and hope. In the death of Jesus the penalty for our sin has been paid for.

So now my death, as a believer, is a doorway from a sinful, broken, hurting world, into the glorious presence of God, where there is no sin, sickness, pain or tears.

And in his death...I died, so I no longer live for sin...but for God.