

Weekly Newsletter: 15th August 2022

Reflection: Death Has Lost Its Sting

By Joe Barnard

Nobody likes to think about death. Death is taboo in our culture in the anthropological sense of the term. In polite society, it's ill-mannered – one might say borderline obscene – to speak about anything related to death unless absolutely necessary. Thus we use euphemisms whenever possible. In our culture, people don't 'die'; they 'pass away'. They don't 'get buried'; they 'go to a better place'. We moderns skirt around the issues of death as carefully as our Victorian ancestors skirted around the topics of sex and sexuality.

As Christians, we need to avoid being prudish regarding death. Although there is no reason to fixate on the topic, now and again, we need to think soberly about the reality of death since it is the final and, for some, greatest trial of faith. In past days, Christians used to talk about 'dying well'. There is some merit in this thought. Death is something we must all be prepared to face. Yet, how do we do this? One critical step is making sure that we understand how Jesus' death was both similar and different to what we will experience at the end of our lives.

Similarities and Differences

Let's start with the similarity. Now death is a surprisingly difficult thing to define. One current medical definition is the following: 'Irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain'. If we accept this definition, we can say that Christ died in the medical sense of the term. His circulatory system and nervous system ceased to function after he committed his spirit to the Father. As they took him from the cross, his body was not a living body, but a corpse. He was no more alive than the dirt that clung to his flesh.

In this sense, Christ's death is the same as what every human being will experience. He died at Calvary a full and complete biological death.

Moving on, we can now ask the other question: 'How was Jesus' death different from ours? A helpful way to think about this difference is to take up Paul's language of death having a 'sting' (1 Cor. 15:55). The key difference between Christ's death and ours is that his death was not a 'stingless' death. He did not just face the reality of a biological death, but also that of a spiritual death.

Throughout the Scriptures we see a distinction between physical death and spiritual death. In Genesis, spiritual death is represented by being exiled from the special presence of God. In the Psalms, spiritual death is symbolized by being handed over to one's enemies and facing the shame and terrors of their cruelty.

Jesus himself describes spiritual death in terms of being cast out to a place of outer darkness where there is much weeping and gnashing of teeth. The core ingredient of every picture is the same, *God-forsakenness*. To die spiritually is to be cut off from the life, light, love, and joy, which is communion with God. This curse – to use the language of covenant – is the sting of death.

It's important to understand that, at the cross, Jesus drank the full cup of a spiritual death. It was due to the sheer horror of this judgment that Christ agonized in the garden and gave the cry of dereliction while suffering. Yet, nestled within the terror of this unique event is the seed of the greatest of all good news. In experiencing the pain of spiritual death, Jesus took away the great sting of death for all of his people. Because he drank the full cup of God's wrath, we can rest assured that there is no condemnation left for us. Although in God's wisdom we must still face a biological death, we will never – not in this life or in all of eternity – need to face a spiritual death. For us, death is not a portal to outer darkness, but a passage that leads into the luminous presence of God.

Holding Hands with Christ in Our Final Moments

But there is one last thing to say. There is a great comfort that comes from knowing that Jesus experienced both a biological death and a spiritual death. For many of us, the process of dying is itself a source of ongoing fear. Even though we know that the curse of death has been removed, we still feel waves of dread as we consider the pain and loneliness that often accompany dying. In such moments of fear, we need to remember something. Jesus knows what it is to die – not just spiritually – but physically. He has felt the pain; he has experienced the loneliness; and like no other, he can lead us through the passage of death because he himself has personally been there at Calvary. This, too, can be a comfort as we imagine our last moments. To use the language of one of Richard Baxter's hymns, as we reflect on the end of this life, we need to remember that 'Christ leads me through no darker rooms/Than he went through before'. Thus, Christians, in fact, are not alone in death. Christ himself holds our hands as we step out of this mortal existence and into the courts of heaven above.

Prayer meeting – this Wednesday

We are looking forward to Gavin Dickson from SASRA coming to the prayer meeting. He'll update us about the work that SASRA are involved in at the Tattoo and how we can be praying for them. Contact Liz if you would like the Zoom codes and don't already receive them.



The prayer bulletin will take a different format this week. We're collating a 'Back to School with God Prayer Letter' which will focus on the children and young people returning to school and those in our church family who work in education. **Please note that these details are for sharing within our church family and not for wider distribution, thank you.**

Welcome to Holyrood!

It's wonderful to see new faces at church on Sunday mornings. On Sunday 11th and Sunday 18th September, Joe will be holding a short session after the morning service in the hall downstairs to welcome any newcomers and provide them with information about the church. Please share this information with anyone you know who has recently started attending.

Montgomery Street Park



The Park Committee have organised for a mural to be painted on the substation in the park by artists from Colony of Artists and Vue, Ltd. This will take place on Saturday 3rd September. Please speak to Liz if you would be able to help serve tea and coffee in the park that day to the artists and passers-by.

A member of the Montgomery Street Park Committee has also nominated the park as the UK's Favourite Park 2022. You can vote for the park [here](#) and voting closes this Thursday (18th August).

Scripture Union Big Celebration – this Saturday

SU are excited to be back in person for the Big Celebration 2022! It will take place on Saturday 20th August from 10.30am to 9.30pm at Lendrick Muir. There's something for all ages but please book beforehand [here](#). Moira is driving up on Saturday so please speak to her if you would like a lift.

Act Like Men, Hope Church Bingham – Wednesday 24th August

Joe is speaking at a city wide event 'Act Like Men' on Wednesday 24th August from 7pm until 8.45pm. All men in the church family are invited to attend and the aim of the conference is to 'encourage each other to live for King Jesus in Edinburgh and beyond.'

There will be music from 20schemes Music and a book stall run by the Faith Mission.



Edinburgh Korean Grace Church – Picnic in the Park – Sunday 28th August

It is great to have the Korean Church using our building on Sunday afternoons. On Sunday 28th August we are hoping (weather permitting!) to have a picnic and time of fellowship with the Korean Church over in the park after our morning service. The Korean Church are planning to join us for our morning service that Sunday. Please keep the date free and come along with your picnic!

Sunday 4th September – Jon Gemmell preaching

Joe is speaking at a men's weekend from Friday 2nd until Sunday 4th September in Pitlochry. We're very grateful to Jon Gemmell for preaching on Sunday 4th when Joe's away.

There will be no communion on 4th September as a number of the elders will be away at the men's weekend. Our next communion service will be on Sunday 2nd October.

Church Barbecue – Saturday 10th September

Save the date! We'll be having our annual church barbecue on Saturday 10th September at the Newlands Centre in Romanno Bridge, Peeblesshire, EH46 7BZ

Thank You – Summer Sunday Club

A massive thank you to all those who have given their time this summer to serve leading the Summer Sunday Club. It's been great to have the kids work continue over the summer months – thank you to all those who made it possible. Sunday Club with Aileen, Jean, Andy and Aaron now resumes!

Origin Scotland – Symphonic Praise, Saturday 24th September



'In Symphonic Praise we both perform and join with the congregation in singing some of the greatest hymns ever written. It will be led by the Origin choir and orchestra, guest soloists and will feature brand new arrangements of great hymns, written specially for this night.'

When? Saturday 24 September, 7.30pm

Where? St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh

Ticket price? Voluntary donation

Booking? Please book your tickets online [here](#)

Return to the Hiding Place – 24th to 27th August

Searchlight Theatre Company have produced 'a wonderful new reimagining of Corrie Ten Boom's biographical tale of forgiveness and reconciliation in the shadows of WW2.' It's part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and is on at Palmerston Place Church from Wednesday 24th until Saturday 27th August. For more information and to book, click [here](#).

Church Calendar

For your prayers and info –

- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting on Zoom at 7pm with Gavin Dickson from SASRA.
- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching. Please contact Liz by 12 noon on Thursday if you would like a socially distant seat.
 - Equip at 6pm led by Joe Barnard.



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