

Luke 7:11–17: ¹¹Soon afterward [Jesus] went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹²As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. ¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” ¹⁴Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” ¹⁵And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” ¹⁷And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Jesus Has Power Over Death and Death

Introduction

No, it’s not a typo! Today’s sermon is titled, Jesus Has Power Over Death and Death. You probably thought when you read the bulletin, “Doesn’t he mean sin and death, or death and the grave?” But I’m trying to make a point: There are two deaths that afflict us—temporal and eternal. Temporal death is the first death, the death of the body. And eternal death is the second death, everlasting damnation with the devil and his demons in hell. Our Lord and Savior has power over both temporal and eternal death.

As fellow-believers, I hope you’re saying, “Of course He does!” Now, while there are many of us who believe in Jesus as God’s Son and the One who saves us from sin, death and the devil, fewer and fewer “Christians” believe in the existence of hell, which means they also reject the notion of a second, eternal death.

Hell and eternal death is a topic that National Geographic recently covered. Now, I don’t know what hell has to do with geography, but in a May article titled, “The Campaign to Eliminate Hell,” National Geographic “explored” hell—or rather, the doctrine of hell.

The article opened with these words: “Hell isn’t as popular as it used to be. Over the last 20 years, the number of Americans who believe in the fiery down under has dropped from 71 percent to 58 percent. Heaven, by contrast, fares much better and, among Christians, remains an almost universally accepted concept.”

As you would expect in an age when sentimentality trumps the truth, more and more “Christians” are becoming uncomfortable with the concept that God will condemn anyone to an eternal death in hell. Such is the thinking of Mark Galli, the editor of Christianity Today, who told National Geographic, “If it was left up to me, I would probably eliminate hell from our vocabulary because it does present seemingly insurmountable problems. But Jesus does talk about it as a reality and he doesn’t seem to have any doubts about it.”

So, rather than go the route of universal salvation—that God will save everyone—National Geographic “discovered” that many of today’s prominent theologians are endorsing “an alternative doctrine,” known as ‘annihilationism’ or ‘conditional immortality,’ which holds that, after death, sinners simply cease to exist, while those who are saved enjoy eternal life under God’s grace. However, the article states, “Traditionalists are pushing back at this doctrine, which they view as heresy born out of misguided sentimentality. But, annihilationists believe they have already made significant inroads within the evangelical community. One scholar predicts that, “even within conservative evangelical circles, the annihilation view of hell will be the dominant view in 10 or 15 years.”

You know what bothers me about all this? If Jesus was wrong about hell, either He was mistaken—and how could He be the Son of God if He made mistakes; or, He was a liar—deliberately misleading or manipulating the people. But we know He always spoke the truth.

Death and hell are truly scary subjects—and they should be. The last enemy is death. We have an instinct to survive—to fight against death with all of our might. But death and hell would really be scary subjects if there were no escape. While National Geographic focuses on the doctrine of hell and eternal death, it conveniently forgets the doctrine of Christ. God is just—He is righteous in His judgment against sinners—death and eternal suffering are what we deserve because of our sinful rebellion against God. But God is also gracious. The Doctrine of Christ proclaims that God Himself became a human being, that He suffered and died on the cross to suffer the punishment for sin, and that He rose again, defeating the power of death.

AS GOD’S SON, JESUS HAS POWER OVER TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL DEATH,
WHICH MEANS HE HAS THE POWER TO TURN YOUR MOURNING INTO ETERNAL
REJOICING.

I. Power over temporal death—temporal rejoicing.

In John chapter 11, Jesus told Martha—near the grave of her brother, Lazarus—“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” In those words, Jesus proclaims His power over temporal death. And then He turns mourning into rejoicing by raising Lazarus from the dead.

And we see this in our Gospel reading. Jesus and His company approach the village of Nain. Proceeding out of the village is a funeral procession. The people are in mourning over the death of a widow’s son. But this is a double tragedy. Not only is she a widow, without the physical support of her husband, she has now lost the physical support of her son. What is she to do in a culture where women didn’t work outside the home? Not only is she in mourning, she also faces financial ruin.

Jesus approaches the company of mourners and has compassion on the widow. He says, “Do not weep.” You and I might say that to comfort a hurting soul, but Jesus means it, because He has the power to end weeping. He touched the casket and said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man rose and began to speak.

When Jesus raised this man, and the daughter of Jairus, and Lazarus, weeping was turned to rejoicing. But even though Jesus has restored physical life to them, they all certainly died again, and their loved ones would have mourned them once again.

Today, mourning the loss of loved ones is a part of life. No matter how hard we try, none of us can escape this bitter sting of death—temporal death is a fact of life—for such is the wages of sin. But Jesus gives you hope in the face of death and the grave.

II. Power over eternal death—eternal rejoicing

But what of hell and eternal death? No matter what modern theologians want to think or believe, God’s Word clearly teaches the existence of hell and eternal death for sinners. You can find this teaching throughout Holy Scripture. For example, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus teaches that God created hell to be the abode of the devil and his demons (Mat. 25:41). The demons that Jesus cast out of people knew about hell and they certainly didn’t want to go back to that place (Lk. 8:31). In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the soul of the rich man is tormented in hell. And Jesus also teaches in Matthew’s Gospel that those who reject God’s grace in the person of Christ would join the devil and his angels in the same eternal fire, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mat. 25:30, 41).

Now I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t want criminals to decide their own punishment, right? Imagine if some guy killed his wife in a jealous rage and the jury finds him

guilty and the judge sentences him to life in prison. But he tells the judge that instead of life in prison, he'll just pay a ten dollar fine.

But that's what these guys in that National Geographic article—who believe in “annihilationism” or “conditional immortality”—are telling God: “You know what, God, eternal death and damnation is excessive—we'll just take not existing as the final punishment for sin.” That isn't how our legal system works, and that isn't how our just God works. He determines the judgment for the guilty sinner—not the guilty sinner!

Now, if God were truly a ruthless and vindictive judge, there would be no escape from His condemnation. But in fact, God desires that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. In fact, God is gracious and full of compassion—even for those who hate Him. God gave the world the gift of Jesus—His only-begotten Son—to be sin in the place of sinners. And upon Christ God placed His righteous wrath and condemnation for all sin. There on the cross, the wrath of God was satisfied by God—and God's justice was served—so you could know the grace of God.

To save you from the sin that condemns for eternity in hell, God gives you His Son. Jesus also told Martha, “And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Those who believe in Jesus may face temporal death, but they will never face eternal death. As the apostle Paul declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1–2).

Jesus' own resurrection is proof that He has the power over death and eternal death. He died once and rose again—and He will never die again. And all who are in Christ die once, but never again.

This is the gift of your Baptism. You died with Christ and rose with Him to newness of life. In Christ Jesus, God has raised you from the spiritual deadness that leads to eternal death, so that even though you are laid to rest in the grave, on the Last Day Jesus will say to you, “I say to you, arise,” and you will rise to everlasting life.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul writes in First Thessalonians, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1Thes. 4:13–18).

Going back to the National Geographic article, if we get rid of hell and eternal death, it makes sense that we should get rid of sin, too. That’s what one of the responders to the article said: “I think the theological concept of sin should also be eliminated.” If that’s the case, then we can get rid of the doctrine of grace—if there’s no sin, there’s no need for a grace and forgiveness—there’s no need for Jesus.

But this doesn’t change reality—people still die—that’s what sin does. And physical death—which brings mourning in this life of flesh—is only a precursor to the eternal death that brings eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell. But you have Jesus. And for all who are in

Christ Jesus, all mourning will be turned into eternal rejoicing as Jesus raises you from the dead on the Last Day, and God Himself wipes away all your tears!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.