

HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH FOREVER; THE LORD GOD WILL WIPE AWAY TEARS FROM ALL FACES, AND THE REPROACH OF HIS PEOPLE HE WILL TAKE AWAY FROM ALL THE EARTH.

Funerals are troublesome events. Every time you go to a funeral, you hear all those wonderful Bible passages about how Jesus has brought life and immortality to light, swallowing up death forever; about how Jesus is the resurrection and life, and whoever believes in Him will never die.

To be perfectly honest, sometimes those words ring hollow because, in case you hadn't noticed, there is a dead body in a box in the front of the church. Its hard to miss and even harder to ignore. But it makes you wonder -- how can we speak of death being swallowed up, when there is that evidence, that stark reminder, that death has swallowed up our loved one, our friend, our neighbor, right here, right now?

When one asks a question like that, you are bound to get a very theological answer something like this: Death, is as Isaiah describes it, "the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations." Death is common to all people because the cause of death is sin, and death comes to all because all sin. Not just in one way, but in three ways.

First, there is spiritual death. We do not know God and we cannot do His will. We are by our very natures, blind, dead, and enemies of God. And because we are dead ins in, we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in the Lord Jesus Christ or come to Him.

Next is physical death. That takes place when we breath our last and our eternal soul leaves our mortal body.

And if you should be in a state of spiritual death when physical death comes to you, you will suffer the third death, eternal death, in the fires of hell, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where there is eternal separation from God.

What we rejoice in today is that God has called our departed loved one and friend out of spiritual death in spiritual life, out of eternal death into eternal life, and He did it this way: On the mountain called Calvary, God swallowed up death by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus took the very thing that caused death, our sin, to the cross where He bled, suffered, and died for us. His suffering and His death upon that cross has paid for all your sins. With sins forgiven, the consequence of sin -- mainly death -- has been undone. Our Lord then gives you that victory over death by means of His Word, Baptism, and the feast of Jesus' Body and Blood. Incorporated into that victory, you say along with all the saints of God, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting (1 Cor 15)?"

When you hear an answer like that, you can get thinking to yourself, "Well, ok, two out of three ain't bad." You think that because you know the deceased had faith in Jesus and that Jesus has taken their soul to be with Him in the joys of heaven, but there's that body in the box, lying there dead. There is still that physical death that troubles us.

My Dear Friends in Christ, I don't mean to be rude, silly, disrespectful: I especially do not mean to offend you, my point is that at death or a funeral, we can get troubled. And, we can especially fall victim to the lies of Satan. We hear about death being swallowed up, but there's a dead body before our very eyes. We can understand how the covering and veil of spiritual death has been swallowed up. That happened when the deceased

was baptized into Christ and given new life in Jesus. And, its easy to see how eternal death is removed – we know the soul of the deceased has gone to live with Jesus in heaven forever. The trouble for us comes because physical death stings and hurts, and there is that dead body lying there in a box.

Isn't physical death the reason Isaiah calls death "the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations"? Sure it is. In and through faith Jesus, you can escape spiritual death. Through your Baptism into Christ, you have spiritual life. And in and through Jesus, His death and resurrection, you have eternal life.

But, physical death is still there. And, it swallows people up. And when death swallows our loved one up physically, it is accompanied by griefs and a great many tears, and that grief and those tears don't end the day of the funeral; they can last for days, months, and years. Ask anyone who has suffered the death of a loved one.

Do you understand my point? How can we talk about death being swallowed up, when physical death swallows us all?

Isaiah teaches us that we can be comforted and cheered that death – spiritual, eternal, and physical death – is swallowed up. Isaiah says this,

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

With those words, Isaiah is teaching us that there is a "now" and "not yet" aspect to death. In the now of today, as Christians, we believe Jesus has swallowed up death -- spiritual, physical, and eternal death. He swallowed all of them up when He took your sins to Calvary's cross, died

for you, and rose again on the 3rd day. He did indeed swallow up death. And now, He gives you that great victory over spiritual death, over eternal death, and even over physical death. It's just that with physical death, there is a "not yet" aspect to it. It is not yet, today, completely and totally swallowed away. That's coming. That is coming on the day Jesus returns in all of His glory.

On that day, Jesus will come to completely remove that covering and lift that veil that is over all of us. On that day, Jesus will come in all of His glory to usher in a day when no one will ever die again. On that day, all those bodies that have died, before whose caskets we have stood, over whom we have grieved and wept, will rise again. On that great day, the same bodies that have died will be made alive and rise, our souls being reunited with our bodies, and together, body and soul, we will enjoy being with Jesus forever and ever, without end, never subject to death again. On that day, the covering and veil of physical death will be completely and totally swallowed up – gone forever.

Do you see how we can talk this way in the Christian faith? Do you see how we can say death is swallowed up even there is a dead body in the church and we visit the graves of our loved ones? We can say that because our Lord, by His suffering, death, and resurrection for you, has completely swallowed up death. He has lifted the cover and veil of spiritual and eternal death and, on that last great day that is coming, He will lift the cover and veil that is physical death.

Death has been swallowed up, so that we can say with Isaiah,

It will be said on that day (the day Jesus returns),
"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation,"

because He has swallowed up death for you.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.