

“[I]t is important to remember that the One who pronounced the curse of death is God Himself. He did this not only as the punishment for our sin but also as the way in which He would save us from sin. *Death is instituted in view of the cross.* Instead of simply destroying man, God establishes death as the way of redeeming and restoring man through Jesus. The Lord turns this enemy of ours against itself and uses it as His instrument of salvation.

“God speaks the curse of death in order that He might destroy the devil’s work through the death of His Son (1John 3:8). Since Jesus shared in our flesh and blood, His cross and resurrection crushed the devil, who had enslaved us in fear (Heb. 2:14-15). We are free. The curse is broken. Life is restored. Jesus lives!

“Only in Christ can death be seen as a good thing, for He died our death for us: ‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?’ (Rom 6:3). That means that Jesus’ atoning death counts for us! Death does not get the last word over our bodies. ‘For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. (6:5)’”<sup>i</sup> Let us sing about this broken curse by using Hymn #348. Please arise.

The Lord is risen! [C: **He is risen indeed!**]

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one Stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, He takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. // For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.

Lord God, Your Son, the One who appeared as the Weaker One was truly the Stronger One, has overcome even sin, death and the devil for us. Lead us to abide in Him steadfastly until the end. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, who was made alive in the tomb, descended into hell, and then rose victorious forever, dear fellow redeemed:

How weak Jesus seemed to be – lying lifeless and limp in the tomb with the wounds of one flogged and crucified. The “*strong one*” stood guard in the tomb watching, perhaps occasionally poking and prodding, noticing no breathing, but also no *rigor mortis* setting in. This “*Weak One’s*” promise to rise again had not yet taken place.

Again, the “*strong one’s*” strongest weapon against the human race seemed to be working well. Death had come and the “*strong man’s*” kingdom and all he ruled appeared safely unchallenged.

But now life filled that weak looking body and He had the audacity to enter the *palace of darkness and dared to speak to all the souls there imprisoned. The “Stronger One”* destroys the armor of death, so that all who believe in the “*Stronger One*” no longer need to fear this unarmed foe. Let us then consider on this happy morning the time **When the “Weaker” One Turned Out to Be the Stronger by Far!**

### I

Jesus’ warning in our text from Luke was not meant for the “*strong man*”, i.e., the devil, but for you and me and all believers. As sinners we like to imagine ourselves on the winning side, and who better to follow than the “*strong man*”? Satan’s strength is found in his threat held over us all, namely death. His armor seems impenetrable, since we all must concede we will one day die.

So sinners apart from Christ basically choose two approaches in the face of this daunting threat:

1. Admitting that death seems inevitable, a person may think he can negotiate its terms, trusting that he can behave himself well enough to avoid the eternal part of that threat of death. But remember Jesus taught that we have to be perfect, or another way of putting it – holier than the holiest person you know: “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

2. The other approach is to think that death has no eternal consequences (*as the world was breathlessly reporting the Pope said this past week*) and one concedes this life is all there is and so follows the mantra – *eat, drink and be merry*. You might remember Jesus’ parable of the rich fool who having a bumper crop concluded this: “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

My fellow believers in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, do you find yourself at times thinking in one of these two ways in regard to death and what follows? If so, contemplate our texts this great resurrection morning that the devil has been disarmed, death has been overcome by the Christ for you and all people.

You are not in hell hearing this news in condemnation. Those spirits who heard this proclaimed to them in hell by the living Lord Jesus were not hearing it so that they might have a second chance, but merely to hear as a testimony to the truth which in this life they

refused to believe. Jesus stood before them in His body bearing the marks of one crucified, but who now lives. Paul writing to the Colossians put it this way: “[God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ]”. This is like the ancient custom of stripping defeated armies of their weapons and armor and parading them in a triumphal procession. But this was not done in boastful arrogance by our Lord, but as confirmation of what could not be seen and doubted by them in this life.

## II

You are not in hell cut off from the Lord and His Word but in the very place where Jesus has promised to be present in His life-giving Word and Sacrament. You are not kicking yourself spiritually because the truth of Christ’s defeat of death condemns you. Rather this good news about the defeat of death calls you to believe and be saved from it and in truth actually gives you life here and now.

There were also many souls in heaven at the time of Jesus’ descent into hell. They had believed the promise from God that His Christ would disarm the *“strong one”* making the direst weapon against the human race, death, impotent for all eternity. But while the souls in heaven had believed in the power of the coming Christ, they had lived in this broken life without the blessings you and I now enjoy. Jesus spoke of this once to His disciples: “many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” Therefore Jesus declared: “Blessed are your eyes, for they see and your ears for they hear.”

So it is the same for you today, my fellow believers in the risen Christ. You now see and you now hear what great things God has done for you in His Son. You see the gracious life-giving water poured out and the bread and wine joined together with Christ’s body given and blood shed. You hear the proclamation that this Jesus, your Substitute, who died in your place has been made alive and rose from the grave to give you life.

Peter would have us think of all those in Noah’s day who ignored, even mocked his 100 years of preaching about the coming Christ as he went about building the ark. Truly those spirits heard the proclamation from Jesus as He descended into the Palace of the Prince of Darkness. But a newcomer to hell was also now present, namely Judas Iscariot. He had the opportunity to see and hear the things, which the prophets could not. But there, shortly after this son of perdition’s spirit arrived in that everlasting place of torment, he

heard the Lord Jesus declare victory through the cross and the grave, a victory intended even for Jesus' betrayer.

By far Christ Jesus is the "Stronger One" as we read: "God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The weapon of mass destruction, which the devil had in his arsenal has lost its power through the living and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Strangely this was declared to the spirits in hell and they could no longer deny it, even though it did them no good at that point. But the early risers at the tomb, those who would get to see the risen Christ in person that day and for the next forty days were filled with doubt and did not understand the significance for themselves that Jesus now lives. It would take them until fifty days after Easter when the Holy Spirit would enlighten them to see what you see today and to hear what you hear today. The "Weaker One" on the cross and in the grave turned out to be the "Stronger One" by far! All of hell shuddered at the news. The Lord is risen! **[C: He is risen indeed!]** Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> The Lutheran Witness, June/July 2017, Vol. 136, No. 6 "You're Already Dead" by the Rev. Aaron Koch, p. 5