

Good news! On this mountain, Mt. Zion, the holy Kingdom of God found on earth and in heaven, death dies forever-more! Isaiah announced it seven centuries before the first Easter Day. "[T]he LORD of hosts 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; ... for the LORD has spoken."

In these days of the pandemic we are receiving daily local, national and world-wide death counts. Most of us have seen the images of body bags or sheets draped over corpses. They are images of seeming finality. Christians know better. When our Lord Jesus rose from His three-day borrowed grave, He tore open a hole through that universal shroud of death. Luther commented on Isaiah's words by saying: *"Christ destroys death. As a plague consumes the body little by little, so Christ is the pestilence of our death and of our old Adam."*<sup>1</sup>

Death is swallowed up in victory! Christ lives as the Pestilence of your death, the pall of death was first pierced on Easter morning and will be removed permanently for you on the day of resurrection, rise now to sing of this gloriously victorious Pestilence of death the risen Lord Jesus, COVID – 19 has nothing on Him! Hymn #348.

Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's Works, Vol. 16, p. 197.

therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap." So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
 Bid my anxious fears subside;  
 Death of death, and hell's destruction,  
 Land me safe on Canaan's side.  
 Songs of praises, songs of praises  
 I will ever give to Thee, I will ever give to Thee.  
 Amen. (ELH #262, v. 3)

In Christ Jesus, your crucified and risen Lord, who conquered your death earned by your sin, and is now leading you through this dead-end wilderness to His life unending heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

After being in that strange land of Egypt for over 400 years, much of it as slaves and after being delivered only to rebel against their Deliverer and wander in the wilderness for 40 years, the Children of Israel enter the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob over 500 years previous. What God brought about for them in our text is a type of what the risen Christ Jesus has accomplished for us on this the Day of His glorious resurrection. So let us consider how it is that **God Safely Brings His Israel Into Joy from Sadness.**

## I

"[Joshua] and all the people of Israel came to the Jordan, and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of **three days** the officers went through the camp and commanded the people ... 'Do not come near [the ark of the covenant], in order **that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.**'" Why a three day wait? Why did they not get to cross the Jordan immediately? It was spring. The river was swollen to its wider banks.

Three days of staring at the surging waters before they are led across on dry ground, would be an effective way to underscore the Lord's mighty work of enabling these two-million plus people to cross. Also they have never passed this way before, so they had time to reflect.

We could ask the same about the three days of Jesus' death and burial. Why not have Jesus immediately rise to live after breathing His last breath? Why wait for three days? Unbelievers over the years have posited variations of what is called the "*swoon theory*" claiming that Jesus never really died but was given drugs to put Him out until regaining consciousness, or Pilate had His body removed before death while He fell into unconsciousness. No, there were witnesses who saw and heard His last breath, saw His side pierced, and His body entombed. His followers would then have those three days to reflect not only upon their Lord's death, but even their own, a way they never passed before, but their Lord now had. The "*third day*" was no doubt a common refrain that likely ran through their heads if not found on their lips. Jesus forewarned about His crucifixion, death and burial, but also promised to rise on the third day!

In our Gospel lesson from Mark, we read that after being told by the angel that Jesus had risen, the women "went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Matthew also adds this: "they departed quickly from the tomb with fear AND **great joy**, and ran to tell His disciples." God through the announcement of His angel brings these believing women from the tomb originally thought to be a place of sadness with spices in hand, into that place of joy trembling, yet repeating "it is the *third day!*" They eagerly left to bring this grand news to Jesus' disciples. Their hastening from the tomb of former sadness was interrupted by their risen Lord who said to them: "Greetings!" They came to Him fell at His feet, clutching them in faithful joyous worship, thinking "*its the third day! He is risen indeed!*"

## II

When Israel passed over Jordan's bed, the ark was to be kept at a distance from them. Not just a six-foot distance as we hear much about these days, but over a half a mile. What would they see? They saw the ark, the place where God's merciful seat was to be found by them, knowing that the Lord was present **for** them, not **against** them. They also saw the magnificent miracle of the water flowing south being stopped, with dry ground before them. It stopped instantly as the priests' feet carrying the ark touched the water.

They were leaving the long arduous journey of sadness. So many of Israel had died during those 40 years. No one 60 and older, except Joshua and Caleb, were still living. Not even Moses lived to enter upon this new life in the promise land. The elderly today are especially vulnerable to the mortality of COVID-19, but the 40-year wandering was more devastating to that age group than even today.

Leaving such demoralizing death and destruction behind, Israel now entered the promise land with the promise that all the opposing inhabitants in their land would be driven out before them. What joy and relief came over the people when the waters began flowing once again. Reading on in Joshua we are told: "all the kings beyond the Jordan" heard about this great miracle and "their hearts melted" within them, obviously they were filled with fear of the God of Israel and what would become of them.

Jesus crossed over from death to life. This has great meaning for you His people today. He promised His people the night before He was crucified "because I live, you also will live." Jesus took on your enemies: your sin, your death and the devil himself. Since He willingly allowed His Father to name Him "*Sinner*" in your place, the One condemned receiving your full payment of eternal death, when He rose from the dead the kingdom of Satan no longer had anything to bring against you. You stand holy before God. Satan's weapon from the beginning, death, is now defeated by your risen Lord Jesus.

The section where this promise is found begins with these familiar words of Jesus: "Let not your hearts be troubled. ... In My Father's house are many rooms. ... I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also." Just as the Lord brought Israel from the wilderness wandering in a sense aimlessly into the promise land with purpose, so He brings you from this broken place with death lurking about causing fear and sadness into everlasting joy with all your enemies defeated forever. The Plague of death, the Death of death, is risen! Risen indeed! Amen