

Rev. 20:14. Death and the Grave

by Horatius Bonar

God abhors death and will ultimately cast it into the lake of fire, but promises resurrection and eternal life to believers through Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 6:5, Song of Solomon 8:6, Isaiah 38:18, Hosea 13:14, John 11:25-26, Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:55, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:10, Revelation 20:14

Topics: "Victory over Death", "Hope of Resurrection"

Description

Horatius Bonar preaches on Revelation 20:14, emphasizing God's ultimate victory over death and the grave, which are personified as twin enemies of humanity. He explains that death and the grave, having caused immense suffering and sorrow, will be cast into the lake of fire, symbolizing God's abhorrence of these forces and His determination to abolish them forever. Bonar highlights that God shares our disdain for death, viewing it as a criminal that disrupts His creation and inflicts pain upon His people. The sermon reassures believers of the hope of resurrection and eternal life, affirming that through Christ's victory, death will be rendered powerless. Ultimately, Bonar calls for a celebration of life and the promise of resurrection, as God will redeem His people from the clutches of death.

Transcript

"And death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."--Revelation 20:14.

It is of His two chief enemies that God here speaks--'death and the grave,' or 'place of the dead' (Hades)--for such, and not hell, ought to be the rendering of the latter of the two words.

This is not the first time, nor the only place, in which they are thus classed together. There is a striking series of passages, running through all Scripture, in which they are named as allies--fellow-workers in the perpetration of one great deed of darkness from the beginning. Often are death and the grave in the lips of Job. David thus speaks of them--'In death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who shall give You thanks?' (Psalm 6:5.) Solomon thus uses them in figure--'Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave' (Song 8:6). Hezekiah thus refers to them--'The grave cannot praise You; death cannot celebrate You' (Isaiah 38:18). Isaiah thus mentions them in their connection with Messiah--'He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death' (53:9). Hosea thus proclaims their awful fellowship in evil--'I will ransom them (His people) from the owner of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be the plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction--repentance shall be hid from my eyes' (13:14). Paul thus takes up the language of the old prophets--'O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is the

victory?' (1 Corinthians 15:55.) And then, as the summing up of the whole, we have these strange words of the Apocalypse--'Death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them; and death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire.'

These last words accord strikingly with those in Hosea; yet they are not meant as a mere quotation or reference, but as an intimation of fulfillment--an announcement as to the way in which God is to execute His threat. 'O death, I will be your plague; O grave, I will be your destruction,' is the old prediction; and of this John records the awful fulfillment, 'Death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire.' This is the end of that death-power which was let loose in Paradise, and which has continued to exercise dominion upon earth through these two channels. The reign has been long and sad; it has been one of dissolution, and blight, and terror; but it ends at last! This dynasty of darkness, this double vice-regency of hell, is broken in pieces--death and the grave are cast into the lake of fire--which is the second death, the death that absorbs all other deaths, the death of deaths, the deepest death of all, the death after which there is no life, and no resurrection, and no deliverance forever.

These two enemies of God and man are here personified as two powers of evil, the one the handmaid of the other--twin demons, coming forth from the blackness of darkness, and returning to the darkness from which they sprang--servants of, or rather co-operators with, the prince of darkness, with him who has the power of death, even the devil, in carrying out the inexorable sentence, 'Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.' They are treated as two hideous criminals; who, though for a time permitted to go forth, like the Assyrian and Babylonian ravager, to execute the divine commission, are at last called to reckoning, for the havoc they have wrought, and dragged forth, as pre-eminent in crime, to receive their sentence of doom--and to be cast into the lake of fire.

DEATH has been the sword of law for ages; but when it has done its work on earth, God takes this sword, red with the blood of millions, snaps it in pieces before the universe, and casts its fragments into the flame, in the day of the great winding-up, in token that never again shall it be needed, either on earth or throughout the universe.

The GRAVE has been the chain and the prison-house of justice; but when its purpose is served, and justice has got all its own in the heaven of the saved, and the hell of the lost--God gathers up each link of the chain and flings them into the lake of fire upon the head of the great potentate of evil! He demolishes the dungeon to its foundation, and buries its ruins in a grave like that of Sodom--the lake of the everlasting burnings. Death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire!

The great truth taught us here is God's abhorrence of death, and His determination not merely to end it, but to take vengeance on it. Let us then inquire into this, and into the reasons for it.

I. God abhors death. The fact of its existence on earth by His permission, is of no proof of His non-abhorrence; else would the prevalence of sin, side by side with death, be demonstration that He does not hate it. Accustomed with death, as WE sometimes are by its frequency--HE abhors death more truly than even we do who are the subjects of his ravages. We cannot but hate death, even when we have ceased to fear it, and know that for us its sting has been extracted. We hate it, and thrust it from us; loathing its advances, and waging daily war with it--seeking by every contrivance of skill to overcome it and ward off its stroke. We hate it because of its darkness--and its coldness--and its silence. We hate it as the great "robber of our loves and joys"--who gives nothing but takes everything. It cuts so many ties; it rends so many hearts; it silences so many voices; it thins so many firesides; it comes with its dark veil, its

screen of ice, between friend and friend, between soul and soul, between parent and child, between husband and wife, between sister and brother. Of human sympathies it has none; it concerns not itself about our joys or sorrows; it spares no dear one, and restores no lost one; it is pitiless and mute; it is as powerful as it is inexorable, striking down the weak, and wrestling with the strong until they succumb and fall.

No wonder, then, that death is so unlovable to us--no, of all objects the most unlovable in itself, though occasionally acquiring some faint attractiveness, or at least losing some little of its hatefulness by its being made the termination of pain, and conflict, and weariness, and the gate into the presence of Him who is our life and joy.

After all, however, our estimate either of its attractiveness or repulsiveness would be of little significance, were it not that on this point God takes our side. His estimate of death coincides with ours. It is to Him even more unlovable than it is to us. He has set limits to its power; He has made it to His saints the very gate of heaven--for blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. He has proclaimed resurrection and incorruption. But still, with all these abatements, He hates it--nor is reconciled to it in one act or aspect. It is, in His eyes, even more than in ours, an enemy, a destroyer, a demon, a criminal, a robber. So thoroughly does He loathe it, that in order to make His displeasure known, He reserves it to the last for doom; He sets it apart for a great striking condemnation, and then casts it into the lake of fire.

But besides this final condemnation, He has given us others equally explicit. He calls it 'the king of terror;' 'the last enemy;' and thus addresses it--'O death, I will be your plague; O grave, I will be your destruction--repentance shall be hid from my eyes'--that is, never will I revoke my sentence against you (Hosea 13:14). Hardly could words be found to express more strongly God's estimate of death, and His determination to abolish it utterly and forever. For six thousand years death has been the fulfiller of His purposes, His rod for the chastisement of His saints, His scourge for clearing earth of His enemies--yet He hates it; and as soon as His ends with it are accomplished, He will show His displeasure against it by casting it into the lake of fire.

There is then abundant consolation for us in this dying world, from the thought that God sides with us in our abhorrence of death and the grave. He is the enemy of our enemies; and specially of this, the chief. When He raised His Son from the dead, He showed us that life and not death, was His purpose, both for Him and for us. Resurrection is at once our faith and our hope. In His great love He has revealed to us the coming victory over death, when He who is our life shall appear to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all those who believe. Because He rose, we shall arise. He has taught us to say, 'I know that my Redeemer lives;' and to add, 'God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave.' He has made us to hear the sure words--'Your brother shall rise again;' 'I will raise him up at the last day;' 'He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body.'

So that in covering dust with dust at the grave of a saint, we look beyond the tomb and see the glory; our eye rests not upon corruption, but upon incorruption; our fellowship is not with death, but with life. We shall arise. That which is sown in weakness shall be raised in power. The reign of death is hastening to a close, the reign of life about to commence its eternal gladness. Our true life is coming; the conqueror is on His way; He will redeem His own people from the power of the grave, and swallow up death in victory. Behold, I come quickly, He cries. We respond, Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

II. God's reasons for abhorring death. It contains nothing in itself that is lovable; nor has it done any excellent works because of which God or man might love it. Its history is one of evil, not of good; of wrong, and sadness, and terror; of breaking down, not of building up; of scattering, not of gathering; of darkness, not of light; of disease, and pain, and tossings to and fro, not of health and brightness. But God counts it specially unlovable for such reasons as the following--

(1) Death is the ally of sin--'Sin entered into the world, and death by sin' (Romans 5:12). With sin it has gone hand in hand, passing down the generations, and spreading itself round the earth. Partners in evil--sin and death have held dark fellowship together from the beginning--the one reflecting and augmenting the odiousness of other--like night and storm, each in itself terrible, but more terrible as 'companions in havoc'. God abhors death as the fellow and the offspring of sin!

(2) Death is Satan's tool--One of the most fearful of Satan's designations is, 'he who has the power of death.' Death is Satan's most satisfying work--his trustiest weapon. To inflict disease--but not to heal; to wound--but not to bind up; to kill--but not to make alive--these are the works of the devil--which God abhors, and which the Son of God came to destroy. The evil workman and his tool--the master and his servant--are alike hateful in the eyes of that God who loves not evil--but good; not death--but life.

(3) Death is the undoing of His work--'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.' Specially did he rejoice in man as His handiwork and His property, and in man's body as that material form which His Son was afterwards to assume. God did not intend creation to crumble down or evaporate. But death has seized it! Death--the poison of hell has penetrated everywhere! Man's body and man's earth are falling to pieces, undermined by some universal solvent; the beauty, and the order, and the power giving way before the evil invader! The sculptor does not love the hand that spoils his statue, nor the mother the fever that preys upon her darling--so God has no pleasure in that enemy that has been ruining the work of His hands.

(4) Death has been the source of earth's greatest pain and sorrow--Pain is the messenger of disease, and disease is the touch of death's finger--and with disease and death what an amount of sorrow has poured in upon our world! We come into contact with sorrow only in 'fragments' or 'drops', as it falls upon ourselves and our friends. We cannot estimate the accumulated grief of a year or a century, or even of one day, all over earth. There is no 'sorrow-gauge' to measure the quantity that has fallen all over our earth, since the first drop alighted. If there were such a measurement, we would be appalled at the amount of sorrow which death has inflicted on our race!

But God has measured it! He knows what the amount of human grief has been; and He abhors alike the evil and the doer of it. He does not love sorrow--He has no pleasure in pain--He is not indifferent to creation's groans--and He will yet avenge Himself, and avenge man and man's earth for all the woe which death has wrought--in the day when He destroys death, and banishes pain, and dries up tears, and delivers creation from the bondage of corruption!

(5) Death has laid hands on God's people--Though He permitted Herod, and Pilate, and Nero, and the kings of the earth, to persecute His Church, He was not thereby indifferent to the wrong--far less in sympathy with the wrong-doer. He treasures up wrath against the persecutor--He will judge and avenge the blood of His own. So will He take vengeance on death, the last enemy. He will yet vindicate His saints, and honor the 'holy dust' that has been scattered over sea and earth. Death and the grave shall be cast into the lake of fire, to make known to the universe eternally--His sense of the wrong done. Speaking of

the resurrection of His own, and His plucking the prey from the spoiler, He says, 'I will redeem them from death, I will ransom them from the power of the grave;' and then, shaking His hand against the spoiler, He proclaims His purpose of vengeance--'O death, I will be your plague! O grave, I will be your destruction! Repentance shall be hid from my eyes.' For in proportion to His love for His own, is His abhorrence of their injuries--'He who touches them, touches the apple of His eye.'

(6) Death laid hands upon His Son--Death smote the Prince of life--and the grave imprisoned Him! This was treason of the darkest king, the wrong of wrongs, perpetrated against the highest in the universe--God's incarnate Son! And shall not God avenge for this? Shall not His soul be avenged on such a destroyer--for such a crime? If the lowest of His saints shall be avenged--how much more His beloved Son? In the day when God shall judge the world, this deed of darkness shall come into remembrance; and God, in casting death into the lake of fire, shall intimate His abhorrence of death, and His displeasure against this the worst of all his deeds--the slaying of His only-begotten Son!

It is not then resurrection merely, but something more than this, that our text reveals--even God's condemnation of all that death has done. We see, too, His joy in resurrection, and His determination to prevent the recurrence, more--the possibility of the recurrence of such an evil as death. To take the sting from death was much--to abolish death was more--but it is something more still to cast death and the grave into the lake of fire! Surely as over Babylon, the prison-house of the saints, so over death and the grave, when they are thrown into the abyss--we may sing this song of triumph, 'Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you of her--for in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.'

Then shall resurrection be not merely a prospect and a hope--but an accomplished fact; and not merely an accomplished fact--but an irreversible condition of creaturehood. 'Neither shall they die any more,' is the consummation to which resurrection brings us. The inhabitant shall not say, 'I am sick.' The eye shall not be dim, and the ear shall not be dull, and the brow shall not wrinkle, nor the hair be gray, nor the limbs totter, nor the memory fail. There shall be no more curse, nor death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain; for the former things have passed away!

We know that our Redeemer lives, and because He lives, we shall live also! He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and when He appears, we shall appear with Him in glory. And He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry--and those who sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him.

We preach Jesus and the resurrection; Jesus the resurrection and the life; Jesus our life. We bring glad tidings concerning this risen One, and that finished work of which resurrection is the seal; glad tidings concerning God's free love in connection with this risen One. The knowledge of this risen One is forgiveness, and life, and glory. Oh then, what is there in our dying world like this to impart consolation and gladness? We shall not die, but live. Eternity is a life, and not a death; a life with Christ, and a life in Christ. For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall lead us to the living fountains of waters, and God Himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes!

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