

Sing before the service: Psalm 146:1, 6

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise 2:6

Prayer

Scripture hymn 5-4:1, 2, 3, 6 (10:1, 2, 3, 6)

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 15:55-58

Scripture text: 1 Corinthians 15:55-58; Catechism Lord's Day 17

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

(1 Corinthians 15:55-58 NIV-UK)

We have all stood at an open grave at some time in our lives. We have all experienced the inevitability of death at a grave.

- It's as if the coffin in the grave is trying to tell us that we'll never again see the person who died. When somebody passes away, we bid a final farewell to him/her.

This is why Jacob could not believe that Joseph was alive.

- Years before he had accepted that Joseph was dead.
- Hence he would not believe it when his sons told him that Joseph, his son, was alive and well and serving as ruler of all Egypt.
- The disciples, likewise, could also not believe that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead.

In Mark 16 we read about Mary Magdalene who went to the disciples to tell them that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to her. According to the Scriptures:

When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. (Mark 16:11 NIV-UK)

However, the happiness of both groups of people, Jacob and the disciples, was unparalleled once they were convinced that their loved one, who they had thought was dead, was in fact alive.

The truth is that we do not die and disappear forever from all spheres of life.

- It is true that we live, despite the fact that our bodies die, because death was defeated.
- Although doctors are still trying to fight all kinds of disease, death has been defeated, and every believer has been granted eternal life.

It is actually very rare that this great truth is so often ignored or denied.

- Banner headlines in our newspapers only speak about all the evil incidents in our daily lives – rape, the killing of innocent victims, drugs, etc.
- Stories on the radio and TV and in newspapers are only about what is of importance for material wellbeing and so-called newsworthy matters.
- But about the constitution of eternal life and the new earth – that is: reconciliation and re-creation by

the grace of God – very little, if any, is said, written or broadcast!

- Newspaper stories have sensational final remarks about mutilated bodies, but nothing is said about those same people who are already continuing to live for eternity.
- Nothing is written about the people who have been saved from mutilation and suffering through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We are living in a strange world – a world that only focuses on death and all the “by-products” of death!

- The modern world is only excited by evil and by death, which they actually nurture as being very precious.
- All this, while the truth is that the Lord made provision for us to survive death and to continue to live.

It all converges in our religion: worshipping and confessing the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.

- The Lord Jesus Christ is eternal God.
- He is almighty.
- Hence He took on the human nature and lived among us.

The truth is that the Lord Jesus came to earth to face suffering and death with his human body.

- He rose from the dead and returned to life in body and soul.
- The devil in hell was filled with dismay because he had been defeated by the Lord Jesus in the only area where he thought to have been king.

The life of the Lord Jesus bears the stamp of having been attacked by the devil, and of the Lord having defeated him every time.

- Just consider what happened after the Lord was baptised.
 - The devil attacked the Lord Jesus in the desert and tried to tempt Him to sin so that his work as Messiah would be futile.
 - This would have meant a victory for the devil.
- For the purpose of this sermon, let's look at the second temptation. Luke 4:5ff describes it as follows:
The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.
(Luke 4:5-7 NIV-UK)

Satan approached the Lord Jesus with such self-confidence that he actually believed that he could conquer the Lord Jesus.

- Hence the death of Jesus Christ created quite a stir, because it led to the impossible to happen:
- For the first time in history, man – by his own power – has risen from the dead and returned to life.

God wanted to demonstrate to the people who followed Jesus that death is not final.

- In the way God let Jesus rise from the dead He will also raise from the dead all those who believe in Christ.
- In those days, same as today, a group of dishonest people tried to conceal the truth.
 - Hence they gave the guards a large sum of money, instructing them to spread the story that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body during the night.
- The truth of Jesus' resurrection was withheld from the people:
 - They were not to know that the true Saviour had conquered death for us.
 - There will always be lies trying to hide from us the truth of the life hereafter.

However, the apostle Paul went into the world and spread this sensational news. He also met with adversity

because people tried to cover up the gospel he was teaching.

- Hence he said that Jesus' victory over death was a stumbling-block to the Jews.
- This hurt them every time they heard about it because their Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus.
 - They were the people who shouted that his blood be on them and on their children.
 - The easiest way to escape from such a blunder is to either totally ignore the truth or simply hide the truth from other people.
- The gentile Greeks could also not believe it easily.
 - They listened to Paul's sermons attentively.
 - And they admitted that they had not heard anybody speaking with such wisdom about religion the way he did.
- But the moment he told them that death had been conquered because Jesus had risen from the dead, some of them sneered.
- Others said they wanted to hear him again on that subject.

For some reason people tend to be so wrapped up in death and misery – probably because it gives them the right to pity themselves.

- This is so wrong.
- We must live as conquerors over death because we have been saved from death.

The Lord Jesus removed the powers of hell and death over us like Samson broke down the gates of Gaza.

In Romans 6:8 God teaches us that He loves us.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

- This means that He does not want to leave us in the hands of Satan where we ended up as a result of the Fall.
- In his love we must already experience the power of the resurrection.
- The Lord Jesus Christ is the guarantee for our resurrection.
- The Scriptures teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead for us and through Him we rule over death. (Romans 14:9).

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. (Romans 14:9 NIV-UK)

Our life after the resurrection is already envisaged. John 14:19 is very clear about it:

Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. (John 14:19 NIV-UK)

The Lord Jesus lives forever and we will live forever.

- In a certain way it means that our life really only begins after his life. This is why Ephesians 2:4-6 says that we have already been raised up with Christ and that we are in heaven with Him.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (Ephesians 2:4-6 NIV-UK)

- God is so sure of our resurrection that our life after death is stated by Him as a fact.

When we die on this earth, it's only our bodies that die and that are buried in the earth for the time being.

- In the interim we then live with God as spiritual beings until the day God commands the earth to return our bodies.

- Then He will again unite your body and soul.

Next time you stand at a grave you know that the person being buried is in fact alive.

- The rich man saw his brothers living a sinful life, and Lazarus was with Abraham while life on earth was continuing. The brothers of the rich man were still busy committing sin. All of us are going to die, but do not regard it as the moment of final destruction and elimination. The grace of God changed death. Now it is a gate through which we have access to the hereafter. Now, believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because it is part of his salvation for us. Live to die so that you can live with God forever when your bodies are raised from the dead.

Join me in reading Catechism Lord's Day 17.

45. Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

A. First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, so that He could make us share in the righteousness which He had obtained for us by His death.[1] Second, by His power we too are raised up to a new life.[2] Third, Christ's resurrection is to us a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection.[3]

[1] Rom. 4:25; I Cor. 15:16-20; I Pet. 1:3-5. [2] Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4. [3] Rom. 8:11;

I Cor. 15:12-23; Phil. 3:20, 21.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Scripture reading 2-3:1 (32:1)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen.

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