

Acts 2:23–24 (NIV)

“This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

Understanding the Agony (or Pains) of Death

The phrase “agony of death” (or “pains of death” in other translations such as the KJV) refers to the torment and finality of death particularly a death without hope of resurrection or eternal life. In the biblical worldview, death is not merely physical cessation but spiritual separation from God. The Greek word used here, *ōdinas* (ὠδῖνας), can also be translated as “birth pains” or intense anguish, suggesting deep suffering associated with death (see Romans 8:22).

Before the resurrection of Jesus Christ, death was a terrifying reality for humanity. As Paul says in Romans 5:12 (NIV):

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”

Humanity was under the curse of death, both physically and spiritually. All who died before Christ were subject to corruption (decay) and separation from the presence of God. This included the righteous, who waited in the realm of the dead sometimes referred to as Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek) a holding place awaiting redemption (Luke 16:22-23).

Christ's Victory Over Death

But Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, broke the power of death. Though He truly died, He did not remain in the grave or see corruption.

Acts 2:31 (ESV)

“He foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”

Unlike all others before Him, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). His resurrection marked the defeat of death's finality.

Revelation 1:18 (NIV)

“I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

It was impossible for death to hold Jesus, because He is the Author of Life (Acts 3:15). His divine nature and perfect obedience rendered death powerless against Him.

What Does This Mean for Believers?

Christ's resurrection is not just historical it's personal. For all who

place their faith in Him, the agony of death no longer holds power.

2 Timothy 1:10 (NIV)

“...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

When believers die, their spirits do not descend into torment or unconsciousness. Instead, they are taken immediately into the presence of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NIV)

“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

This is why Matthew 27:51–53 speaks of saints rising at Christ’s

resurrection a foretaste of what all believers will experience.

Furthermore, the resurrection of believers is guaranteed by Christ's own resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:20–22 (NIV)

*“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.
For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”*

We await the redemption of our bodies at the Second Coming (Romans 8:23), when we will receive glorified bodies fit for eternity (Philippians 3:20–21).

A Solemn Warning for Those Outside of Christ

However, for those who die in sin outside of Christ the agony of death is just the beginning. Upon death, the soul enters a state of

conscious torment, awaiting final judgment.

Hebrews 9:27 (NIV)

“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...”

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) offers a vivid picture of this reality: the rich man dies and finds himself in torment, separated from God, unable to cross the chasm between himself and paradise.

Eventually, both body and soul will be reunited at the final resurrection, but for judgment.

Revelation 20:14–15 (NIV)

*“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.
Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life*

was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This is the full weight of what it means to be held by the agony of death eternal separation from God, under divine judgment.

A Call to Reflection

Are you still living in sin? Are you spiritually lukewarm? Scripture warns us that we do not know the day or hour of our departure from this life.

James 4:14 (NIV)

“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

If today were your last day, whose presence would you find yourself in Christ’s or that of eternal separation?

The answer lies not just in your heart but in the truth of the Gospel. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

Shalom. Peace be upon you as you consider these eternal truths.

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