

Paul has material in chapter 15 that we could call a theology of resurrection. Today we study the grand finale, where Paul further answered the questions raised in verse 35, “*How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?*”

Jesus rose again, and we learn from the Bible the kind of body that Jesus had after He was raised from the dead.

The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers cannot be separated.

In fact, it does not go far enough to say that Christ’s resurrection certifies our resurrection. The great resurrection of believers has already taken place when Jesus rose. That brings us to the main point of this sermon: **Christ is risen, and so we are already now living out our victorious resurrection!**

1. Our bodies are not suited for heaven, so we must be transformed. (v.50-53)

In verse 50, with the phrase “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” Paul is teaching that our mortal bodies, in our existing condition, cannot enter into God’s presence. Did your mother ever say, “You cannot go to church looking like that?” Well, maybe your mother was apostolically correct, because Paul is saying, “You cannot go to heaven looking like that!”

This is a problem. Without a solution, we cannot go to heaven! In verse 51, Paul revealed that God already had a planned solution: it all starts with the word Behold. Behold means GIVE YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS.

The word “Behold” is in the English Standard Version of the Bible 1,069 times. OT- 922 times. NT - 147 times. But in the letter of 1 Corinthians, we read the word “Behold” only one time. Right here in verse 51.

It means us that Paul had something surprising and something important to REVEAL near the end of his letter. “*Behold I tell you a mystery...*” Because of how we use the word mystery like a mystery novel, it might be more clear for us to translate this word as secret. Behold, I tell you a secret.

Ready? “*We shall all be changed.*” Here is the secret - we are going to get transformed bodies! ALL of us. Wherever your life in this world has taken you, and wherever your earthly journey has gone and however your physical life has ended, whatever this world has done to your body -- disease, neglect, abuse, starvation, fires and explosions, ocean deaths, cruelty, mass genocides with mass graves -- when God says it is time - whatever condition your body is in - you are getting a new one, you are being transformed. Your old earthly body will be transformed into a new heavenly body. Literally. Physically. Eternally. Imperishably.

Our souls live forever, and heaven lasts forever, so these bodies we have

now are a mismatch. As Paul reiterated at the end of verse 50, “*nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable*” which means that God will not put an eternal soul back into an aging and dying body, and certainly not into a rotting corpse. No. Our bodies will first need to be remarkably altered, so that our imperishable souls will be fitted into our newly imperishable bodies.

That makes us wonder – our bodies will be transformed how? Paul was writing about seeds in the previous passage. Is it like seeds that transform into plants? That could take a few weeks! How quickly do our resurrected bodies get transformed?

The answer is in verse 52, “in a moment.” Can I tell you something personal to illustrate this? When we are going somewhere and my wife tells me that she ready to leave, I say, “I’ll be ready in a moment.” She gets ready fast. I am the slow one in our marriage. The question that most husbands and then my wife are asking this: how long is “in a moment”? The Greek word for moment is “atomos,” from which we get our English word “atom.” Our scientific term describing something so small that it cannot be divided down any more into smaller parts. For Paul, “in a moment” refers to the shortest possible measure of time. Thankfully, Paul gave us one more clarifying phrase, so we would not be arguing about the meaning of a moment or an atom and miss the point. Here it is, ‘*in the twinkling of an eye...*’ That is the amount of time it takes to wink your eyelid. That solves it. We understand. And we are amazed.

We shall all be changed - very suddenly. It will not take weeks of time, like the seeds that grow into a plants. The miracle of our physical transformation will be brief and fast.

When? At the last trumpet. The last trumpet within the history of God saving His people. Verse 52 continues, “...*For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*” We are awaiting God’s signal to go. The starting time is decided by God.

That brings us to verse 53, “*For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*”

This is a double-statement. Twice the main verb is ‘to put on,’ but we cannot take action to dress ourselves with these eternal qualities. We must wait for God to do this for us. To put on is figurative for being clothed. We are being outfitted. We are being given our heavenly bodies.

Our bodies will be clothed with the inability to deteriorate. No more lessening and dwindling. No more weakening and wrinkling. No more atrophying and withering. No more wearing out and wasting away. No more aging. No more dying. Our bodies will be enduring, eternal. That brings us to our second point.

2. Our bodily transformation is what marks our victory over death. (v.54-55)

Death keeps coming after us. Death is our last enemy.

What will be the proof that we truly have victory over death?

In verse 54, Paul has fast-forwarded to the end. Paul has suddenly switched to writing as if this event of our transformation had already taken place, in order to show us what is that future, sure-fire way to confirm that we have victory over death. Here goes, “*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.*”

Because of the resurrection of Christ Himself from the dead, all believers have already been raised with Christ, and so our bodies will also be raised from the grave, in the instant that the trumpet sounds.

This statement in verse 54 is a vivid illustration of the constant tension in the New Testament between what is NOW ours, and what is NOT YET completely ours. We are already made alive together with Christ, but we are not yet made full partakers of the imperishable body and the immortality that is yet coming upon us. The language about ‘swallowing up death’ that Paul wrote here in verse 54 is taken from words of God through His prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 25:8 in which God will swallow up death forever. Suddenly, in his jubilation, all that Paul can see when he looks in the past is victory over death and all that Paul can see when he looks in the future is victory over death.

God has triumphed over death in the past by Christ’s own resurrection. Necessarily connected to that, God will triumph over death in the future by raising all believers. Our mortal enemy death has already been defeated. We have the victory. Death has been brought down. The confirmation of that is your changed body.

In our experience in this world with aging, disease and crime, it seems that death continues. We have so many good-byes and losses and funerals. Death seems to wield power as our enemy, but Paul knows the deeper truth that God has destroyed death. When it comes down to YOU VS. DEATH, you win. The title of the sermon is our victorious resurrection.

Paul became so jubilant here that Paul could not help himself. Paul broke out into a victory taunt in verse 55, speaking, as it were, to our enemy directly, speaking as it were, to Death itself. “*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*” Here Paul has borrowed language from a different Old Testament prophet named Hosea. This is found in Hosea 13:14. Paul took liberties with the words of this prophet. The exact words that Hosea had written, were these “*O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?*” But here Paul instead of writing “plagues,” inserted Paul’s own theme word from this passage – the theme word of VICTORY. Whether death comes by way of plagues, viruses, pandemics, crimes, wars, or just aging out, it all comes down to who has

the victory - death or you? Up until Jesus, death always won. But Jesus changed everything when He arose!

In writing this way, Paul was not denying that plagues had taken lives, but rather, Paul's point was that death and plagues did not get the final word, death and plagues did not get the victory. Death can have the plagues, but death cannot have the victory. You the Christian have victory over death every single time. HOW?? That brings us to our third point.

3. Our victory over death, sin, and the law comes through Christ. (v.56-57)

In verse 56, Paul covered teaching on sin, the law, and death. What is the sting of death? Paul answered: sin. And what is the power of sin? Paul said: the law. So, what is the relation of sin, the law, and death? Sin is the cause of death, and knowledge of sin comes through the law. The law has a function of causation – the law has in a sense caused the entrance of death. The law has brought to light the sins we committed against God. The law gives sin its power. The law is an instrument of death because we sinners are unable to fulfill the demands of the law.

So, is there no hope for us sinners except to be stung by the stinger of death?

In verse 57, Paul cried out the glorious answer, *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”* Paul's whole chapter here has focused on resurrection, and the chapter comes to its height in verse 57. Christ gives us the victory. Christ has fulfilled the law for His people. Paul is thankful to God for the victory given.

What does this mean? What is the victory given to us? Jesus died because of our sins. Jesus conquered death for us by rising from the dead. Through Christ's death, He set us free from the bondage of sin and declared us righteous before God. On the basis of His resurrection and His glorification, we look forward to being like Christ. By faith in Christ, we have victory now! By faith in Christ, we have victory over death. We have been given the victory over the grave, and hell, and Satan, too.

SI - Walking through a park, a man passed a big oak tree. A vine had grown up along the trunk of the tree. The vine started small--nothing to bother about. But over the years the vine had become taller and taller. The day that the man was walking by, the entire lower half of the tree was covered by the vine's creepers. The mass of tiny feelers was so thick that the tree looked as though it had innumerable birds' nests in it. Now the big oak tree was in danger. This huge, solid oak was quite literally being taken over; the life was being squeezed from it by a simple vine. The man stopped and looked more carefully. Prior to this man arriving at this oak tree, the gardeners in that park had seen the same danger that the man had seen. The gardeners had brought in a saw and severed the base of the

vine--one neat cut across the middle of the vine at its lowest point. Now, to be sure, the whole tangled mass of that vine's branches still clung to the oak. The cut had been made so recently, that the vine's leaves were still green, but the fact is that the vine was already conquered. In the great battle of vine vs. Oak, the oak had won. The defeat of the vine would gradually become more plain as days and weeks passed and the creepers began to dry out and fall away from the tree. ----How easy it is for sin, which begins so small and seemingly insignificant, to grow until it has a strangling grip on our lives. And yet, Christ's death has severed the power of sin. Yes, the "creepers" of sin still cling to us and have some aftereffects. But sin's power has been disjoined from us by Christ, and gradually as we grow as Christians, we notice that sin's grip is drying up and falling away. All because that one dark Friday, Christ gave us the victory over sin, death, and the law.

Conclusion: Be faithful and productive, because Christ's winning is your victory. (v.58)

In verse 58, Paul took the opportunity to apply the whole chapter – all the verses from verse 1 to verse 57 - the 57 verses of truth to us his readers.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers...”

BE STEADFAST. What does that mean? It means stand firm. It means be faithful. It means “Hang in there”. It means become whatever is needed.

What does it mean to be steadfast. To continue in what we believe. This letter of 1 Corinthians gets its name because Paul was writing to Christians living in a city named Corinth. There were a lot of wrong teachers in that city. In a city of false teachers, Paul urged them to continue in what they believed, and not to waver at all.

BE IMMOVABLE. What does that mean? **LET NOTHING MOVE YOU.**

ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD. What does that mean? It means invest yourself in eternal things. **ALWAYS GIVE YOURSELVES FULLY TO THE WORK OF THE LORD,...** Paul included the word **ALWAYS** to express a constancy and an emphasis on the perpetual efforts of Christians. We don't retreat from the Christian walk. We don't retire from the Christian walk. We don't take time off from the Christian walk. We rest, of course, which is part of the Christian walk. But we never quit, and we never leave our assigned post, as if the work of the Lord had become outdated or obsolete. We must work for the Lord, to the end of our lives. We work until that twinkling of an eye moment.

What exactly is the labor that Paul has in mind here? It is the labor of applying the contents of the sacred Scriptures to our lives. It is the work of building each other up in the faith. It is the work of loving our neighbors as ourselves. It is the work of supporting the teaching and preaching of Christ's

message of the life of victory. Consider what Paul wrote a few paragraphs later, in chapter 16:10, *“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am.”*

Jack Higgins, His breakthrough novel *The Eagle Has Landed* (1975) sold over 50 million copies and was adapted into a successful film by the same title. His 84 novels in total have sold over 150 million copies and have been translated into 55 languages Jack Higgins is a pen name for the British man named Harry Patterson. This Summer, Mr. Patterson will turn 91 years old. He was asked what he would like to have known as a boy. His answer: "That when you get to the top, there's nothing there." It was an empty disappointment for him.

What would you have liked to have known when you were a boy?

In the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The very last phrase of an incredible chapter from Paul here is these three words NOT IN VAIN. The faithful Christians in Corinth had a sure knowledge that their deeds, which were done out of love and thankfulness to God, would not be empty or forgotten by God Himself. Their labor was not unused by the Lord Himself. Consider the way this is stated in Hebrews 6:10, *“God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints, as you still do.”*

NOT IN VAIN refers to any labor that the Lord has called us to do, and that we perform in the Lord. It includes our work throughout the week in school, home, in your workplace or on the road. Moms, it is not in vain to labor in the Lord within your calling to be moms in the home. Dads and Moms, our labor in the Lord as parents is not in vain. Children, your labor in the Lord as children is not in vain. Our labor as spouses and as Christians within the network of our extended families is not in vain. In this work we are encouraged to abound. In these various roles, we are called to be abundantly fruitful. We are to give ourselves fully to these places of service to our Resurrected Lord. We are to do this ALWAYS. This is done with faith that our effort is never a wasted effort. This is also done with knowledge. Knowledge of what in particular? Knowledge that the work that we do for the Lord in all of these different ways is NOT IN VAIN. We must do it all in the Lord’s strength, not our own.