

Pastor Mark Vucekovich

THE VICTORY

1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Key Verse: 15:57

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Happy Easter! Easter marks the beginning of Spring. The days are getting warmer and longer, plants are coming back to life, and it feels like we’re coming out of hibernation. But Easter is more than this. Easter is the time to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord. His resurrection holds a great promise for us—greater than our wildest dreams. Today we want to learn what the resurrection of Jesus means to us. Paul sums it up as “the victory.” Let’s learn why it’s so important to believe this promise of God, and what life looks like when we do. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

1 Corinthians 15 is called “the resurrection chapter.” But actually, it’s all about God and his grace. God promised this good news in many places in the Scriptures, and God fulfilled it (3,4). Not only did Christ die and rise again exactly according to God’s plan, but also God caused him to appear to various witnesses, to help us believe (5–7). When the Risen Christ appeared to him, God poured out his grace on Paul, a persecutor of his church, and changed him into a most humble, hard working apostle (8–10). This grace of God through the Risen Christ is still available to us today. In this world filled with death (12–19), God raised Christ from the dead and made him the firstfruits of the resurrection, and pioneer of a new redemptive history (20–21). In the Risen Christ, God can make any spiritually dead person alive (22). God’s will is for Christ to reign, making peace with his enemies through the blood of his cross (Col1:20) and advancing his kingdom (24–25). In the end God will send him to destroy our last enemy, death, hand over the kingdom, and make God all in all (26–28). God’s grace calls us all to die every day, to truly live for Christ (29–34). It’s God, who created the miracle of life itself, all plants and creatures, all earthly and heavenly glory, who promises us a glorious body fit for heaven (36–41). God will make our current bodies like seeds that produce new bodies of unimaginable beauty, life and power (36–37,42–44). Though at present we’re like the man of dust, Adam, God promises even us that we will bear the image of the man of heaven, our most gracious and glorious Lord Jesus Christ (45–49). So, in every way, this good news of the resurrection comes

from God and his grace. Now in verses 50–58 Paul describes the day when Christ comes again and believers are raised. What will it be like?

Part 1: “We shall be changed”

Look at verses 50–52. “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” We notice several things here. *First*, Paul calls this future event “a mystery.” It means no one can know all about it. God alone knows, and in his own great wonder and mystery God will make it happen. *Second*, Paul says this future event will be signaled by a trumpet. It’s called “the last trumpet,” and it will be heard all around the world. This last trumpet will sound suddenly, summoning all God’s angels to bring his judgment and gather his elect (Mt13:41,49; 16:27; 24:31). This last trumpet will mark the end of the chance to repent, and the new era of God’s eternal kingdom.

What stands out most here is that “we shall be changed.” It’s repeated twice (51,52). Why do we all *have* to be changed? Verse 50 explains that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” “Flesh and blood” refers not only to our bodies but also to our sinful tendencies. We have to be changed so that we can last forever in God’s kingdom, and so that we can be completely holy there, with no hint of sin anymore. Only changed people can get into his kingdom (6:9-11).

How will our change happen? Verses 51–52 say it will be “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” All believers will change instantaneously. This will happen by God’s power (Php3:21b). When Paul says, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,” he means not everybody will die physically; some will still be alive when Christ comes (cf. 1Th4:15,17). But whether dead or alive, “we shall all be changed.” The word “changed” in Greek is “exchanged” or “transformed.” In both body and soul, all believers will be changed.

What will our change be like? In verse 52b Paul says the dead will be raised “imperishable.” This word is repeated in verses 50, 53 and 54. It’s first used in verse 42b: “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.” “Imperishable” can also mean “incorruptible.” This is not just about physical decay. When we’re changed and given a new resurrection body, we won’t be susceptible

to sin anymore. Just the opposite: we'll become like our Lord Jesus Christ: sinless, full of God's life and power, abundant and flourishing forever. Look at verse 53. "For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality." Paul repeats "this...body" twice here, meaning that though we'll be changed, we're going to keep our personality and individuality (cf. v.38).

Then in verses 53–54 Paul repeats four times the words "put on." Literally it means to "sink into" something, or to cover something over with something else. It's a metaphor for putting on clothing. In English, when we say, "Get changed!" we mean, "Put on some new clothes!" 2 Corinthians 5:2–4 uses this same Greek word three times, and those verses help us better understand what Paul means here. It reads: "For in this tent we groan, longing to *put on* our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by *putting it on* we may not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further *clothed*, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." What a great hope, to someday put on our resurrection body! Paul adds here that we will "put on immortality" (53–54), meaning our resurrection bodies will be able to live forever with our Eternal God. So, who helps us "get changed," to "put on" our imperishable body, our eternal clothing? It's not us, but God. When Jesus comes again, God will put our imperishable body on us and make us fit to inherit his kingdom. Again, it's only by his amazing grace.

Part 2: The victory

At the resurrection, besides changing us, God also promises us victory. Look at verse 54b. "...then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (cf. Isa25:8a). To some people, death disappearing may sound like a fantasy. But one day God is going to fulfill this prophecy. Right now, death seems so final. Death seems to swallow up everything and everyone in its path. Death has spread over all creation, throughout all history, all of time. No one, good or bad, has been exempt from death. But God promises that one day he's going to swallow up death forever. When God swallows it up, it truly will be gone! So, death doesn't win the final victory; God does.

Look at verse 55. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" These questions are mocking death. But honestly, death still does have a sting in it. We get stung by death whenever someone close to us dies. We taste grief, emptiness and fear. We can even lose the desire to keep on living. And we

get stung by death when our own physical life comes to an end. We try to avoid it, but this sting of death is real.

So in what sense has death lost its sting? It happened because our Lord Jesus absorbed the sting of death for us in his own body. The Bible says that when he died and rose again, Jesus crushed the head of Satan (Ge3:15). Now, it's just the devil's tail flapping around, trying to intimidate us. The Bible says that in the end, the Risen Christ is going to throw the devil into the lake of fire and sulfur to be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev20:10). For now, the devil is still accusing us and intimidating us with the fear of death (Heb2:14–15). But our Lord Jesus promised us, "Because I live, you also will live" (Jn14:19b). If we hold onto his promise, we find we're no longer afraid of death. Instead, his promise gives us hope—real, living hope. Thus, the sting of death is erased, totally wiped out.

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (55) With God's promise of victory in Jesus, these words are telling us we can even laugh in the face of death. As Christians, we suffer, we sacrifice, we seem like nobodies, we even get ridiculed. But God promises us that one day we'll be raised as heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Ro8:17). So, victory in Jesus is actually the greatest reversal, the greatest vindication. It takes us from total humiliation to the utmost glory, just like our Lord experienced (Php2:8–11). By faith in Jesus, one day we'll get to say to the devil, "Who's got the last laugh now?"

Paul briefly mentions something more. Look at verse 56. "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." These are other enemies, behind the power of death, that knock us down and defeat us all. They are sin and the law. Simply speaking, it's sin that defeats us. It's sin that causes us to experience the sting of death. And it's the law that stirs up the power of sin in us. Under sin and the law, we feel condemned; we taste the sting of death. And there's no way out.

Read verse 57. "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." No matter how much we've been caught by sin, condemned by the law, and stung by the power of death, God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll never win this victory with our own efforts or abilities. God himself won this victory over sin and death, through Jesus' death and resurrection. All we need do is put our faith in him. 1 John 5:4 says, "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome

the world—our faith.” Faith in the resurrection of Jesus may seem obscure, but it’s so powerful. It enables us to overcome the world. It’s a faith not just for the end of time, but for right now. It inspires us to fight the good fight of the faith every day (1Ti6:12). It empowers us to fight to the end and finish our race of faith (2Ti4:7).

In Greek, the word “victory” is the same as “conquer.” So what’s this victory about? Romans 8:37 says, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” The death and resurrection of Jesus show us how much God loves us. God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (Ro8:32). He was “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Ro4:25). Jesus who died and was raised is now at the right hand of God interceding for us (Ro8:34). Holding onto God’s great love for us in Jesus is what gives us victory, victory over tribulation, distress, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, victory over death or life, angels or rulers, things present, things to come, any powers, any height or depth or anything in all creation (Ro8:35b,38–39).

So what do we do? Read verse 58. “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” This world is a dark place. People’s hearts are hard, and there is much opposition. But with the victory of faith in Jesus, we can be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. In the Lord, we know that all our labor, all our grief and suffering, is not in vain. May God help us believe that through the resurrection of Jesus, he gives us the victory.