

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

⁵¹Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵Death, where is your sting?

Grave, where is your victory?

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Victory

I.

The Theme of the Day today said, in part: "...Death stings. We know death is coming; it separates us from those we love; there can be a fear of what follows death." It's true, isn't it? Death ruins life. Everyone knows its coming, but I don't think anyone is excited about it. Death is considered just a fact of life. Benjamin Franklin made the phrase famous; he said: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Tax day passed recently; the day of your death is still to come, but come it will.

That, however, wasn't God's original intent or his desire. He warned Adam and Eve; he told them not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, because there were consequences they would face if they did. Like spoiled children, they forgot the warning when the devil, in the form of the serpent, promised them treats that seemed better than what God had already given them.

They ate. Then came the shame. With shame came the knowledge they would face the consequences God had warned them about. He came to them and gave them more specific information. Death would come...eventually. Adam and Eve had to live with a fear of death, even though they had never experienced it—not for themselves, or even seeing anyone else face death—for years.

They had to face the other consequences: disease, sickness, aging. Eventually they had to face death when they buried a son who had been murdered. After many years, their own deaths came, too.

II.

"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56, EHV). "It's important to have a positive self-image." You've probably heard that expression. That might *seem to* work for a while. But eventually reality starts to creep in. Your behavior isn't always flawless. Sickness starts to threaten your quality of life. God uses death to remind us that we are not our own masters. Our inability to beat death brings with it hopelessness.

"The power of sin is the law." Sin's power threatens in another way. Just before the words of our text Paul said something frightening: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and what is perishable is not going to inherit what is imperishable" (1

Corinthians 15:50, EHV). Because of our sin, we are separated from God. There is nothing any human being can do to change our relationship with death.

God uses death as a sign of his wrath and punishment for our sins. Death is a tool in the hand of God to call us to repentance.

God put death on public display. In mercy, he did not use *us* as his public example. Instead, he found another place to put death: the body of his One and only Son, Jesus, on the cross.

Jesus on the cross shows the horrific consequences of sin. Jesus is God himself. Yet hanging on the cross he cried out in anguish: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, EHV). We can’t even begin to understand what was going on there on the cross. In place of the human beings who had disobeyed him from the very beginning, in place of *all* human beings, God himself suffered eternal damnation on the cross. As incomprehensible as it is, God was abandoned by God to suffer the pangs of hell. He did it for all of us because no human could bear the full wrath of God being poured out on someone.

John writes in his Gospel: “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished!’ Then, bowing his head, he gave up his spirit” (John 19:30, EHV). Before he died there on the cross, Jesus fully completed the payment for sins.

III.

That’s why we can gather here today, on Easter Sunday—Resurrection Sunday. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:57, EHV).

When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning God verified that the debt for sin had truly been marked paid in full when Jesus said: “It is finished.” Because Jesus rose again, we are able to put death in its proper place in our lives.

Paul writes: “Indeed, sin will not continue to control you, because you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14, EHV). You and I haven’t fully escaped the clutches of death, we still have to go through it. But death is no longer the controlling force in our lives. The influence of death in the life of one who believes in Jesus is drastically reduced.

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:57, EHV). Death is no longer the hopeless termination of our lives. We have the victory, even over death, in our Lord Jesus.

“For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53, EHV). Our “mortal” existence has been replaced with an “immortal” one.

“Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, EHV). Christian immortality isn’t easily seen on this side of eternity—it is something we know only by faith. On the Last Day we will experience the fullness of all Jesus has won for us with his victory on Good Friday when he proclaimed “It is finished,” and his victory celebration on Easter Sunday. For now, we wait in joyful anticipation. Because Jesus lives, we also will live...forever.

“Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55, EHV). For now, death is still here. Funeral homes are still in business. You can still find obituaries all over the internet. Yet, for the believer, everything is different. The terror and the uncertainty are gone.

IV.

“Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58, EHV).

All that you know about the victory of Christ, the victory you share, impacts your life—not just in your eternal future, but right now.

Knowing the victory you have in Jesus, you live your life in his earthly kingdom differently than you otherwise would. “Be steadfast.” Elsewhere Paul writes about becoming a mature Christian. He says: “The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray” (Ephesians 4:14, EHV). The life of a Christian will be filled with challenges, to be sure. Knowing that we have the victory in Jesus helps us to move steadfastly through life, not getting tossed around by every wind of change that society throws at us. Instead, we roll with the punches.

Our lives are “immovable,” Paul says. Our sure and certain victory in Jesus means that we no longer need to consider other views of life and death. Other forms of spirituality no longer have any impact on us. We have the sure and certain answer; there is no reason to doubt any longer.

“Always abounding in the Lord’s work.” Because you and I have victory over death, our purpose in life has a new and God-given focus: to lead others to faith by telling them the Good News of Jesus and his victory.

“...because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” How many tasks have you ever had with that kind of assurance? When God put death in its place—when God gave you and me the victory over death—he changed the rules of existence for every believer. Our attitude about death is no longer based on wishful thinking; it is rooted in the fact of Christ’s victory over death in his resurrection.

Back to the Theme of the Day. This time, we look at the whole thing. **Because He Lives: Death has lost its sting.** Death stings. We know death is coming; it separates us from those we love; there can be a fear of what follows death. Because Jesus lives, death has lost its sting. At the Last Day, we will rise to a world of incomprehensible and unending joy.

Death takes its place on our list of Defeated Enemies because we daily walk in the victory Christ won for us. His victory has become part of our very being, and will be fully part of us on the Last Day. Amen.