

The Hope of Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

(Discussion guide on pg. 11)

The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner once said, “What oxygen is for the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of life.” When a person has hope, they can endure great disappointments and hardship. But without hope in this world, people will suffocate and drown in a sea of despair. How many of you know, we live in a world where many people are in fact drowning in hopelessness and heartache.

The Apostle Peter, who himself was given to fear and despair as he witnessed the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, would later write triumphantly: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* 1 Peter 1:3

There’s a living hope that enables us to keep on breathing in the hardest of times. And that life-giving hope is found in the resurrection of Jesus.

After being given their divine assignment by Jesus to make disciples of every nation, the early church and its leaders faced insurmountable odds. They faced violent opposition not only from the powerful religious establishment of the day, but also from the might of the Roman empire.

And yet against all odds and with no country, army, or physical weapons to rely on, the early church withstood fierce persecution, and, as their opponents declared, turned the world upside down. The transforming power of the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond and continues to spread to this day.

How did the disciples go from fearfully forsaking the Lord after His arrest, to becoming unstoppable witnesses for Christ? They were transformed by the power of the resurrection. The resurrection of

Jesus lifted up the discouraged and defeated disciples to live courageously and with certain hope in uncertain times.

Main idea: Enduring hope is found in the risen Lord Jesus.

This morning we are going to consider three implications of the resurrection of Jesus that give us certain hope in uncertain times.

1. The Transformation of the Saved

The first implication of Christ's resurrection that we are going to consider is **the transformation of the saved**. Before we dive into our text, it's important to note that earlier in verses 20-23, Paul explains that the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits (v.20, 23).

What Paul means by first-fruits is that, like the initial batch of a crop is a sign to a farmer of a greater harvest to come, the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that the bodies of all believers will also be raised up.

Now after also explaining that just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, Adam, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven, Jesus, (v.49) Paul continues in verse 50: *"I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."*

When Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, he is not saying that the resurrected bodies of believers will not be physical. The phrase *flesh and blood* refers to the fallenness or mortality of man. So although a believer's resurrected body will be physical, it will no longer be in a fallen and perishable condition. It will be transformed to be like the glorious body of Jesus.

Concerning this transformation, Paul continues: *"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² 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. ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*” 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Twice in this passage Paul explains that the resurrected body of believers will be “changed” from perishable bodies to imperishable bodies, from mortal bodies to immortal bodies.

Keep in mind that in this chapter Paul has been answering questions the believers in ancient Corinth had about the resurrection of the dead. Because they lived in a culture that was highly influenced by Greek philosophies and other pagan religions, the Corinthians had lots of misconceptions about the afterlife.

Similarly, many today have questions about the afterlife, including what our bodies will be like in their post-resurrection state. Will our bodies have some of the same features that they had when we died? If I was thin, would I also be thin in heaven? If I was tall or short, would my stature be the same in heaven? Have you ever wondered how old you will look in your resurrected body?

Randy Alcorn in his insightful book titled, *Heaven*, writes, “The most beautiful person you’ve ever seen is under the Curse, a shadow of the beauty that once characterized humanity. If we saw Adam and Eve as they were in Eden, they would likely take our breath away. God will decide what our perfect bodies look like, but we certainly shouldn’t assume they will all look alike. Different heights and weights seem as likely as different skin colors, and this involves a genetic carryover from the old body to the new (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). But all these [body types] will be healthy and appealing, untouched by the Curse or disease or restrictions, and we’ll each be perfectly happy with the form God designed for us.”

Again, concerning what our bodies will be like in heaven, Paul explained that they will *bear the image of the man of heaven* (v.49). Similarly, Paul wrote in Philippians 3:21 that “[Jesus] *will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.*”

What will our bodies be like in eternity? We can speculate about some things. But what we can be sure about according to scripture, is that our bodies will be like the body of the risen Lord Jesus.

In his book, *What God Has to Say About the Body*, Sam Allberry writes: “We can expect something of the same continuity and difference between our present and future bodies that was evident with Jesus’s resurrection body. When he was raised, he was still recognizably Jesus. He still bore the scars of his crucifixion and broke bread with his disciples much in the way he had done before. But he was also different, seemingly able to pass through closed doors and appear and disappear at will. So, we will be like ourselves now—recognizably us—while also possessing capabilities we presently lack.”

Beloved, we should look forward to the transformation of our bodies and the supernatural capabilities we will possess. But in the New Heavens and Earth it’s not our new physique and strength that we will appreciate the most. We will not be looking in the mirror and admiring how beautiful and strong we are.

Our bodies will be changed so that they can be gloriously fitted to the New Heavens and Earth God is preparing for us. This ability our glorified bodies will have to more fully enjoy all the glories of God, is what will blow us away in heaven.

Now, when Paul expounded on the imperishable glories of our resurrected bodies, he began with the words, “*Behold I tell you a mystery...*”

When writing about the resurrected body, Paul described it as a *mystery*, but by this he doesn’t mean that it’s something impossible to understand. The bible uses the word *mystery* to describe something that was previously hidden, or not fully revealed.

What’s more, because of the vital implications of the mysteries of the resurrection, Paul prefaces what he reveals with the word *behold*. The word *behold* means to fix the eyes upon, or to observe with care.

And the application to our lives is this: To live with the enduring and transforming hope of the resurrection, we must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, fix our eyes on the glories of God yet to come rather than the things of this earth.

As Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 3:17, there are people who are unable to behold the mysteries of Christ revealed in His word. Although they may read the scriptures, there's a veil that is blinding them, because only in Christ can that veiled be removed in (v.14).

What changed the Apostles from fearful men who forsook their crucified Lord, into unstoppable witnesses for Christ, was not only seeing Jesus alive, but also the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit at work in them. And through the Spirit, their eyes were opened to the revelations of the word of God, to all that they possess in Christ, and to the resurrection hope yet to come.

Likewise, if you're saved today, you too have resurrection power within to behold the already and not yet transforming glory of Christ, and to reflect His glory in the world.

Sadly, many Christians today are so distracted by the things of this world, like social media, and politics, that they are not taking the time to ponder the transforming mysteries of Christ. We become what we behold.

O, brothers and sisters, one day we are going to see Jesus face to face in all His fullness in our resurrected bodies. But until then, in the Spirit, we can encounter His glory now in the Word and as we step out in faith to serve His kingdom.

This brings us to a second implication of Christ's resurrection:

2. The transportation of the Saints

Keep in mind that for most of this chapter Paul has been instructing the Corinthians about the resurrection and transformation of the body of believers.

And as he wraps up his teaching on the resurrection, he answers some additional questions. When will the resurrection of the saved happen and what about the saints who are still alive when the resurrection occurs? Do all believers have to die to receive transformed bodies?

To answer these questions, Paul explains in verse 51, *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,”* (1 Corinthians 15:51).

When Paul says we shall not all sleep, he means not all believers will die before meeting Jesus. But although all believers will not die, they will all be changed. And this transformation of the body will happen, Paul says, *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet”* (v.52).

In other words, the transformation of the body will not happen over time but instantaneously. And it will take place, Paul says, at the last trumpet, which points to the return of Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 Paul gives us more awesome details about the resurrection and transformation of all believers:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will

be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

As Paul makes clear, the resurrection of the bodies of believers who died in Christ, and the transformation of the body of believers still alive, will take place when Jesus returns. Whether you are alive when Jesus returns or your body is already in the grave waiting to be reunited with your soul, all our bodies as believers, either by resurrection or by transformation, will be changed. What’s more, in glorified bodies all believers will be “caught up” or transported together to meet the Lord in the skies and be with Him forever.

But as great as our future resurrection hope is, which will transport us into Christ’s coming kingdom, there is a sense in which we already are in His kingdom now. According to Colossians 1:19, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, believers have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son.

As such we have resurrection power in us through the Holy Spirit to live as kingdom representatives on earth—to be free from the rule of sin and live in the victory of Christ.

Paul writes in Roman 8:11 that if you’re saved the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead also dwells in you. Therefore, we can be confident that when we set out to serve His kingdom, His resurrection power will be at work in and through our lives.

Do you want to know resurrection power now? Put yourself in a position for the Kingdom where you’ll be in big trouble without it. Abound in the work of the Lord in a way that requires resurrection power.

We come now to a third and final implication of Jesus’s resurrection:

3. The Triumph of the Savior

Having unveiled the glorious mystery of the resurrection, Paul declares the victory that is ours in Christ over sin and death. He writes:

“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.”⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

Beloved, when the bodies of all believers are transformed and fitted for eternity, Paul words, which are taken from the prophet Isaiah (v. 25:9), will be fulfilled: *“Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

This means that when our bodies as believers are transformed at the return of Christ, death will be conquered for all those who belong to Christ. They will never taste death again. Death will be fully consumed in the victory that Christ achieved on our behalf through His substitutionary death for our sin and resurrection.

Notice that because our victory over death has already been made certain by the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul begins to taunt death: *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Apart from Christ, the certainty of death subjects us to the bondage of fear. It inflicts us with hopeless sorrow and suffering. But in Christ we can boldly declare as Paul did, *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Philippians 2:12).

We can, as our dear brother Eddy Rodriguez confidently proclaimed during his battle with terminal cancer, “I’m in a win, win situation.”

Now apart from Christ, what gives death in our world such a terrorizing sting and the grave such victory? As Paul explains, “the sting of death is sin” (v.56).

The Bible teaches us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That is, death is what we earn because of sin. Death is the judgment of God upon sin.

Keep in mind that death in the bible does not mean utter annihilation, but separation. In fact, there's a threefold separation to death that is physical, spiritual, and eternal. **Physical** death happens when the soul is separated from the body. **Spiritual** death, which is the condition we all share apart from Christ, means that we are dead in sin, separated from the life of God. **Eternal** death is separation from God for all eternity.

But for the believer the sting of death, which is sin, has been removed and our guilt, which the law of God exposed, is gone. Christ absorbed it all on our behalf on the cross. Although we may still die physically, unless Christ's returns, because of Christ's victory over sin and death, our souls will never be separated from God and our bodies will be raised and transformed from perishable to imperishable.

Death to the believer is like a bee without a stinger. It can buzz around us and make a lot of noise, but it no longer has power over us.

I love how the late Tim Keller explains the already and not yet hope of the resurrection of Jesus: "This kingly triumph over death is partially—but not fully—here now. Even though we still must physically die, nevertheless death now can only infinitely enhance our experience of the love and joy of God's presence. George Herbert addresses death, 'though what was once *an executioner* is now merely "*an usher to convey our souls beyond the utmost stars and poles.*" And at the end of time, when the kingdom is fully come, death will be completely destroyed. Meanwhile, for those who believe in the risen Christ, death is defanged. It no longer removes you from love. On the contrary, it can only bring you more love than you could imagine."

Now although the curse and sting of death remains on those outside of God's kingdom, Paul, in view of the kingdom to come and the finished work of Christ, concludes: "*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" 1 Corinthians 15:57

Notice that Paul thanks God not for the victory that will be, but for the victory that has already been given to believers through Christ Jesus. We will not only conquer death and the grave when Jesus returns, we already are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Although we still have battles to fight, the victory has already been achieved. The resurrection of Jesus was not only the first-fruits that guarantees the future resurrection of our bodies, but because of the victory He won, we already have resurrection power inside of us.

Now in light of the believers' victory in Christ over death, hell, and the grave, Paul concludes His teaching on the resurrection with an exhortation to give our all in service to King Jesus:

*“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, **knowing** that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

What should our response be to the revelation of the triumph of the Savior, which assures us of the any-moment resurrection and transformation of our bodies when Jesus comes? “Paul doesn’t urge that believers set dates for the return of Christ, quit their jobs, and sell their possessions to wait for the loud blast of the last trumpet” (Chuck Swindoll).

Rather, in response to the doctrine of our any-moment resurrection and transformation of our bodies at the coming of Christ, we should remain firm in our faith, immovable in our convictions, and seek to abound in the work of the Lord.

Conclusion

Beloved, the glorious mysteries of the gospel revealed in God’s word does not call for us to labor to win the victory, but to labor in light of the victory we have in Jesus. We can live courageously for Christ while we wait for Him because the power of the resurrection is not only a

future hope but a present experience for Christians living on mission for Christ.

We can abound in the work of the Lord knowing that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. We can work with the certain hope that when in our resurrected bodies we see Christ, our labors will not be in vain.

Discussion Guide

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53.

- How does the hope and resurrection power of Jesus bring transformation to our lives?
- What will our new bodies be like in heaven?
- What will they afford us in glory?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

- When will the transformation of our bodies take place?
- What is the already and not yet hope of the resurrection?
- How is the Holy Spirit a guarantee of our future hope? (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:22)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

- How can we experience resurrection power now?
- What position may God be asking you to be in or stay in that will require resurrection power to fulfill and bring glory to Christ?
- How is the already and not yet hope of the resurrection encouraging your walk with God?