

Living in Light of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

As many of you may know, it's been reported that when the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky was offered assistance from the US to evacuate and leave the capital, while bombs were dropping, he responded, "The fight is here. I need ammunition, not a ride." Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological seminary, noted that this statement by the Ukrainian President will most likely go down in history as one of the great lines of political and moral courage of our generation. Although the Ukrainian people are up against insurmountable odds, many including their leader have resolved to stay and fight rather than to run and hide.

How many of you know, if the church is going to fulfill the mission of Christ today, like the President of Ukraine, Christians and their leaders must possess spiritual boldness and courage. Could it be that, although there are millions of professing Christians in the world, the reason the church is failing to make a greater impact for Christ is that many Christians today are lacking spiritual courage?

Do you know that after being given their marching orders by King Jesus to go into all the world and make disciples of every nation, the early church and its leaders also 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, physical weapons or ammunition 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 Jesus was arrested, to becoming unstoppable witnesses for Christ? They were awakened by the Holy Spirit to the glory of Christ and the hope of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus gave this frightened group of Jesus followers the strength to overcome the might of the Roman

Empire. The resurrection of Jesus lifted up the discouraged and defeated disciples to boldly proclaim the gospel in a hostile world.

Main idea: Looking to the already and not yet power of the resurrection encourages us to persevere in the work of the Lord no matter the cost.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider three implications of the resurrection of Jesus that give us the conviction and courage to fight the good fight of faith.

1. The Transformation of the Saved

The first implication of the resurrection of Jesus that we are going to see is **the transformation of the saved**. We learned in previous messages that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep or have died in the Lord (v.20, 23). What Paul means by firstfruits 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 to be like His glorious body.

Now after further 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.”*

It’s important to note here that when Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, he does not mean that the resurrected bodies of believers will not be physical. In the scriptures the phrase *flesh and blood* is a reference to the fallenness or mortality of man. And although the 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 resurrected and glorious body of Jesus in order to be fitted for eternity. Notice that Paul continues: *⁵¹ 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. Remember that in this chapter Paul has been answering questions that the believers in Corinth had about the resurrection of the dead. Because they lived in a culture that was highly influenced by ancient Greek philosophies and other pagan religions, the Corinthians had lots of misconceptions about the afterlife.

Now knowing the predominant views of the culture that clouded the thinking of the Corinthians regarding the afterlife, Paul wrote in verse 35: *“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”* Like the Corinthians, many today, including believers, have questions about the afterlife and what our bodies will be like in their glorified and transformed state. Will our bodies have some of the same features that they had when we died? If I was thin, will I also be thin in heaven? If I was thick, will I also be thick in heaven? If I was tall or short, will I also be tall or short in heaven? Have you ever wondered what age we will be in our glorified bodies?

Randy Alcorn in his 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. Racial identities will continue (Revelation 5:9; 7:9), and this involves a genetic carryover from the old body to the new. He goes on to speculate that your natural height or body type would also carryover. “But all these sizes will be healthy and appealing, untouched by the Curse or disease or restrictions [of this life], and we’ll each be perfectly happy with the form God designed for us.”

You know, although, as believers, it's alright to speculate about what our resurrected bodies will be like, we don't have to be skeptical. Concerning what our bodies will be like in heaven, Paul made clear that our bodies will *bear the image of the man of heaven* (v.49). Paul also explained in Philippians 3:21 that "[Jesus] *will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.*" In other words, the best way to know what our resurrected bodies will be like is to look to the risen Savior.

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."

Now we should look forward to the transformation of our bodies and the supernatural capabilities we will possess. But in the New Heavens and New 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 it can be gloriously fitted to the new creation that God is preparing for those who belong to Him. The ability that our glorified bodies will afford us to more fully enjoy all the glories of God is what will blow us away in heaven.

As Sam Alberry also explained, [Our transformed bodies] will be the perfect vehicle to glorify God. It is this that makes the future body so wonderful. We might be tempted to think that a resurrection body will be great because it will finally mean a flat stomach or a full head of hair, or any number of other imperfections made right. But the real glory is not that our future bodies might conform to our present culture's view of beauty in some particular way, but that with these

new bodies we will be able to glorify and serve Jesus perfectly. That is what should make us most excited.”

Now remember, when Paul begins to clarify the imperishable glories of our resurrected bodies, he began with the words, “*Behold I tell you a mystery...*” When Paul says, *I tell you a mystery*, he doesn’t mean that he’s revealing something that is impossible for them to understand. The bible uses the word mystery to describe something that was previously hidden, or not fully revealed. And of course, what was hidden, which Paul is making known to them, was revealed to Him by the Holy Spirit. And because of the major implications that this revelation of the resurrection of our bodies ought to have on how we serve God’s kingdom here and now, Paul prefaces what he’s going to reveal to them with the word *behold*. The word **behold** means to fix the eyes upon, or to observe with care.

How many of you know, if we are going to live counter cultural Christian lives we must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, fix our eyes on the glories of God yet to come and not on the things of this earth. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:14, there are people that read the Bible, but they are unable to behold the mysteries of Christ. When some read the scriptures, there’s a veil that remains unlifted that only in Christ can be taken away (v.14).

What changed the Apostles from fearful men that forsook the Lord after he was arrested into unstoppable witnesses for Christ was not only that they saw the risen Lord, but that the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit came to live inside of them as Jesus promised. And through the Spirit their eyes were opened to the revelations of the word of God, to all that they were in Christ and to the resurrection hope yet to come.

And if you’re saved today, you too have resurrection power on the inside to behold the transforming glory of Christ in His word and to see with the eyes of faith the glories yet to come. As we have often heard from this pulpit, we become what we behold. But sadly, many Christians today are so consumed by the things of this world that they are not taking the time to behold the glorious mysteries of Christ

revealed in His word and illuminated by scripture fed and Spirit led prayer.

In an article entitled, “Are we too distracted for revival,” Bret McCracken writes, “The social media algorithm is a menace to healthy Christian formation. Has Satan ever delighted more in any human technological invention? He doubtless cackles in delight at how easily Christians today voraciously gorge on digital junk food ingeniously concocted by Artificial Intelligence in Silicon Valley eager to commandeer our attention. Is there a better strategy to undermine Christian mission, formation, and holiness than to fill up every open second in a Christian’s life with ceaseless content, such that we have no free space left in which we might pray, seek, savor, and commune with God? If revival often coincides with a collective return to fervent, desperate prayer, what would revival look like in a church increasingly too distracted to pray? In a world where the dopamine rush of notifications, likes, and instant-feedback is intoxicating, the more patient discipline of prayer can feel like a slog. Prayer is a struggle for every generation of Christians, but it’s harder than ever in our stillness-averse age. We’re simply too distracted by ever-present media to long for God’s presence. But if we want revival, we need to want God’s presence. More than we want anything else.”

Oh, brothers and sisters, one day we are going to see Jesus face to face in all His fullness in resurrected bodies. But until then, we can behold His glory now and contemplate the glories yet to come in prayer and the word so that we might be transformed to be more like Christ by His resurrection power within.

This brings us to a second implication of the resurrection of Jesus.

2. The Transportation of the Saints

In addition to the bodily resurrection and **transformation of the saved**, the resurrection of Jesus assures **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 who die in Christ. And as he wraps up his teaching on the resurrection of the body of the saints from the dead, he answers some additional questions. When will the resurrection of the saved take place and what about the saints that are still alive when the resurrection takes place? Do all believers have to die in order 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 Corinthian 15:51). When Paul says we shall not all sleep, what he means is that 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 details about the resurrection of the dead saints and the transformation of the living saints. He writes: *“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).

Notice that Paul makes clear that the resurrection of the dead saints and the transformation of the living saints will take place when Jesus comes for His bride the church or what some theologians call the rapture of the church. Whether you are still alive when Jesus returns

or your body is already in the grave waiting to be reunited with your soul in the presence of the Lord, all the bodies of saints either by resurrection or by transformation will be changed. And in their glorified bodies all believers will be “caught up” or transported together in the sky to meet the Lord and be with Him forever.

Now after revealing this glorious mystery of the resurrection and transformation of the saints at the return of Christ, Paul declares, with rapture, the victory that is ours in Christ over sin and death.

This brings us to the final implication of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the Triumph of the Savior.

3. The Triumph of the Savior

Having unveil the glorious mystery of the resurrection and transformation of the saints, Paul continues: “*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”* (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Oh brothers and sisters, when the bodies of all believers are transformed and fitted for eternity, Isaiah’s prophesy, in Isaiah 25:9 will be fulfilled which declared: “*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 those who belong to Christ. We will never taste death again. Death will be completely swallowed up or consumed because of the victory that Christ achieved on our behalf through His death for our sins and resurrection.

Notice that because our victory over death has already been made certain by the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul, in verse 55, begins to taunt or trash talk death saying: “*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 my dear friend and brother in Christ Eddy Rodriguez proclaimed in 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? Notice that Paul explains that it’s because of sin. He writes: “*the sting of death is sin*” (v.56). The Bible teaches us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). In other words, death is what we earn because of sin. Death is the judgment of sin. But 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 that we are all in 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 the cross on our behalf. Although we may still die physically, unless Christ returns, because of Christ’s victory over sin and death, our souls will not be separated from God and our bodies when He does return will be raised and transformed from perishable to imperishable.

I’m reminded of a story I heard about a father who was driving his son to school. While driving, a bee flew into the open window and began buzzing around in the car. And as the bee was buzzing around, the son began to panic and cry out, “daddy, daddy, the bee, the bee, the bee is going to get me, the bee is going to get me.” While the boy was panicking, the father reached out and snatched the bee with his hand. And after holding the bee in his hand for a few seconds, he released the bee. The bee starting buzzing around the car again and the son began to cry again, “daddy, the bee, the bee, daddy, the bee is going to get me. And as the boy was panicking again, the father said, “son, stop panicking. That bee can’t hurt you.” The father then opened his hand and showed him the bee’s stinger. And the father said, “son, the bee can’t hurt you because it already stung me. And because it stung me and it only has one stinger, all it can do now is buzz around and make

a lot of noise.” On the cross, Jesus reached out and caught the stinger. That’s why Paul in our text taunted death saying, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). Paul is saying, the sting of death has been overcome by the death and resurrection of Jesus. So for the believer all death can do now is buzz around and make a lot of noise but because Jesus holds the stinger in his hands, in his feet, in his side, because he was wounded for your transgressions, bruised for your iniquities, because the chastisement of your peace was upon him, and by his stripes you are healed, if you know Christ, all death can do in your life is make a lot of noise (Tony Evans).

Now although the curse and sting of death remains in this fallen world, Paul, in view of the kingdom to come and the finish 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 us 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 won. The resurrection of Jesus was not only the firstfruits that guarantees that the bodies of all believers will rise again and be transformed, but because of the victory He achieved we already have resurrection power inside of us.

Now in light of our victory in Christ over death, hell and the grave, Paul concludes His teaching on the resurrection and transformation of the body with an exhortation to give our all in service to King Jesus. Paul writes: “*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 that assures us of the any-moment resurrection and transformation of our bodies when Jesus comes for us? As one bible teacher noted, “Paul doesn’t urge that believers set dates for the

Rapture, 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. And we should do so knowing that in the Lord our labor will not be in vain.

Notice also that Paul doesn't just say that our labor will not be in vain, but that “in the Lord” our labor will not be in vain. The work that's going to count when we see Jesus is not the work we do to receive the recognition of others, but the work that we do for God's eyes only even if in this life no one even notices. God is not calling us to out shine anyone else, but to be faithful to fulfill His unique calling in our lives with grace filled efforts and to the glory of His name.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, the glorious mysteries of the gospel that have been revealed in God's word does not call for us to labor to win the victory, but to labor in the victory that we already have in Jesus. We can be bold witnesses for Christ while we wait for the Lord because the power of the resurrection is not only a future hope but a present experience in the lives of praying 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 is to be revealed to us. We work knowing that when we see Christ are labor will not be in vain. May the Lord find us faithful!