

Sermon 76: How the Gospel Drives Ordinary Faithfulness: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord..."

Introduction: This week we look at the capstone of the section on the resurrection.

Summary: Properly understanding the gospel should drive ordinary, daily faithfulness.

Truth 1: Death is triumph, not defeat: 15:54 "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory..."

- **His argument has two parts:**
 - **It is impossible to escape this reality:** "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality..."
 - **When it happens, death will become the ultimate victory, not the ultimate defeat:** "When... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory..."
- **Contrasting ways to process death:**
 - **Common thinking:**
 - People often fear death more than anything in life.
 - They tend to see it as the end.
 - They know it is often accompanied by pain and struggle.
 - They know it often brings humiliation.
 - **The Biblical reality for the unbeliever:**
 - It is the end of suffering in this world and the beginning of eternal suffering.

- When it accompanies pain and struggle, it will be the beginning of eternal pain and judgment.
 - The world should fear the second death more than the first.
- **The Biblical reality for the believer:**
 - Corruption will put on incorruption
 - Mortality will put on immortality
 - Death will become the victory.
- **Interpreting Paul's reference: 15:54** "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory..."
 - **Five Prophetic Points: Isaiah 25:8-10** "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest..."
 - **The resurrection will be a triumph:** "He will swallow up death in victory..."
 - **Pain will be replaced with joy, and discouragement will be replaced with comfort:** "The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces..."
 - **His rebellious people will be restored:** "The rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth"
 - **The remnant will be vindicated and comforted:** "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation"
 - **God's presence will rest in Jerusalem:** "In this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest..."
 - **Isaiah does not lay out a timeline.**
 - **It indicates five things will occur in the end:**
 - **Paul teaches that resurrection will be triumph, not defeat:**
 - Death will be the door to an incorruptible and immortal body.
 - It will be the door into unending eternal glory.
- **Application:** Don't be afraid of death.

Truth 2: Christ secured this triumph: 15:55-57 "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

- **Old Testament reference: Hosea 13:14** "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes..."
- **This is an interpretively difficult text:**
 - **Interpretation 1: God will redeem His people though they will face temporal judgment.**
 - **Interpretation 2: God will redeem His people, and He is using this difficult period to communicate that promise:**
 - **KJV and NKJV: Hosea 13:14** "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death..."
 - **YLT: Hosea 13:14** "From the hand of Sheol I do ransom them, From death I redeem them..."
 - **NIV: Hosea 13:14** "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death..."
 - **Interpretation 3: God will not spare His people because they have resisted His numerous extensions of grace.**
 - **NASB: Hosea 13:14** "Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death?"
 - **ESV: Hosea 13:14** "Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death?"
 - **NET: Hosea 13:14** "Will I deliver them from the power of Sheol? No, I will not! Will I redeem them from death? No, I will not!"
- **My view of this difficult passage:**
 - **Two helpful quotes from the AV Preface:**
 - **Some words can be translated several different ways accurately:** "We have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words, as some...would wish that we had done, because they observe, that some learned men somewhere have been as exact as they could that way...we cannot follow a better pattern...than God himself; therefore he using divers words in his holy writ...if we will not be superstitious, we may use the same liberty in our English versions out of Hebrew and Greek..."¹
 - **Sometimes the exact interpretation of a phrase or word is questionable, and we should be humble about how we approach these texts:** "Some...would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the

¹ Cambridge (pp. cxvii–cxviii).

authority of the Scriptures...by that show of uncertainty should somewhat be shaken. But we hold their judgment not to be so sound in this point...For though whatsoever things are necessary are manifest...in those things that are plainly set down in the Scriptures all such matters are found that concern faith...it hath pleased God in his Divine Providence here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseem us than confidence, and if we will resolve, to resolve upon modesty...It is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain...in such a case doth not a margin do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily...it is a fault...to doubt of those things that are evident; so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable, can be no less than presumption...diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear...is necessary, as we are persuaded. They that are wise had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other..."

- The Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous and supports two very different but legitimate ways to interpret and translate what Hosea wrote.
- The LXX interpreted the Hebrew the same way it is translated in the KJV, NKJV, YLT, and NIV.
- Paul was not quoting **Hosea 13** but rather interpreting it in the light of its fulfillment.
- **Promised in Hosea 13:14** "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes..."
 - God promised to ransom and redeem His people from the power of the grave.

- He would be death's plague and destruction.
- Nothing would change that purpose despite what the people would soon face.
- **Fulfilled at the cross: Mark 10:45** "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many..."
 - **2 Corinthians 5:21** "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him..."
 - **1 Peter 3:18** "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God..."
 - **Colossians 2:13-15** "Having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us...nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it..."
 - **Romans 6:5-9** "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection...he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him..."
- **Explained in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57** "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ..."
 - **Two questions:**
 - Where is death's sting?
 - Where is the grave's victory?
 - **The answer:**
 - Sin is death's sting.
 - The law is the grave's victory.
 - **Why the gospel matters:**
 - **1 Corinthians 15:57** "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ..."
 - **Galatians 3:13** "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree..."
 - **Romans 8:1-3** "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the

likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh..."

- Christ dealt with sin in the flesh.
- He made an end of the law's condemnation.
- Sin and death are powerless because Christ triumphed on the cross and by the resurrection.

Truth 3: This triumph should drive ordinary, daily faithfulness: 15:58

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord..."

- **Three wrong responses:**

- Fear of risk
- A desire to escape
- Fear of death

- **Right Response 1: "Be steadfast and unmoveable..."**

- **Diligently invest in eternity: Matthew 25:18, 26** "He that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine...His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant..."
- **Run your race to the end with endurance:**
 - **Hebrews 12:1-2** "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..."
 - **2 Timothy 4:6-8** "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing..."

- **Face death with courage: Psalm 23:4** "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for

- **Right Response 2: "Be always abounding in the work of the Lord..."**

- **Diligence: "Always abounding"**

- Consistency
- Getting back up when we stumble
- Not allowing ourselves to become complacent

- **Eternal focus: "Work of the Lord"**

- Not laziness
- Not diligence in sinful or empty pursuits
- Diligence in the Lord's work
- **Right Response 3: Live with the confidence** "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord..."
 - **This is walking by faith: Hebrews 11:6** "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him..."
 - **Abraham walked by faith: Hebrews 11:10** "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God..."
 - **Moses walked by faith: Hebrews 11:25** "When he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible..."

Application:

- **Question: How much of our thinking is truly built on a gospel foundation?**
 - Are we afraid of death?
 - Are we looking for an escape?
 - Are we afraid to live life with the necessary risk that accompanies eternal investment?
- **Exhortation: We must build our thinking on the gospel:**
 - Death is triumph, not defeat.
 - Christ secured this triumph on the cross.
 - This triumph should drive ordinary, daily faithfulness.
- **Practical daily living:**
 - **To our young people:**
 - Do not be afraid of the uncertainties of the future.
 - Do not waste your time on sinful or empty pursuits.
 - Purpose to invest all of your life in eternal pursuits.
 - **To our young families:**
 - Raising a family is exhausting

- It is sometimes monotonous.
- It is easy to get distracted or discouraged.
- Stay faithful in shaping those lives.
- **To those whose children are grown:**
 - Your race isn't over.
 - Don't waste this period of your life.
 - If necessary, re-engage in eternal pursuits.
 - Keep your focus and use your time, energy, and experience for God's glory.
- **To those near the end of life:**
 - Don't fear death.
 - Don't despair.
 - Look to Jesus and draw on His strength and presence.
 - Your race is nearly complete, so endure until the end.