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## The Fuel for Christian Service

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Good morning. Thank you for being here this morning as we conclude our study on the power of the resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15. I'm not sure if you've ever run out of gas, but it's not a great feeling. I want you to picture a gas tank. The gas tank represents your current desire to serve Christ. Think about a gas tank as representing your current desire to serve the Lord. We serve the Lord primarily through evangelism and edification. Doing the work of the Lord means we tell people who don't know Jesus about Jesus and we tell people who do know Jesus about Jesus so they can love Jesus more. Are you with me? Evangelism and edification are the two reasons Jesus doesn't take us home at the moment of salvation.

How is your Christian fuel tank this morning? Is it full? Halfway full? Do you feel like your Christian life is running on fumes? I think if we are honest there are times when we sincerely desire to serve Christ more than others. Sometimes it seems that our Christian gas tanks are full and we cannot wait to get up to serve Christ. We know that before the foundation of the world God chose a life of good works for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10) and Titus 3:8 tells those who believe the gospel to be zealous for good works.

Other times we know that God has a life of good works planned for us once He unites us to Christ and we know that we are supposed to be zealous for good works, but something is happening in our hearts that seems to be holding us back. Sin can hold us back. Suffering can hold us back. We go through different seasons and different struggles and sometimes it feels like we have nothing left to serve Christ. We're tired. We don't always respond well to trials. Some Christians don't understand the power they have to live for Christ and they're trying to do it on their own. We know trying to serve Christ in the flesh doesn't work but we do it. Trying to serve Christ in the flesh is like trying to eat at buffalo wild wings without napkins. It won't work.

I don't know where you are this morning as it relates to your desire to serve Christ. I know that serving Christ is not always easy. I've been trying to do it

since 1995 and some of you have been trying a lot longer than that. I don't know where you are all at or what you are all going through but here is what I do know - **Every believer is loved by God and every believer is called by God to abound in the work of the Lord.**

One of the ways we keep our Christian gas tank filled up is by continuing to study God's plan of salvation. **Instead of taking the plan of salvation for granted, we make it our number one focus every day.** Throughout every day that ends in Y we make it our goal to meditate on who God is and His plan for His people.

The apostles never assumed the gospel with churches they wrote to and they never exhorted believers to do anything for God apart from the gospel. 1 Corinthians 15 begins with a reminder of the gospel. **1 Corinthians 15 starts with the gospel and ends with a fresh summons to all of us to abound in doing the work of the Lord.** It starts with what God has done for us and ends with what God wants us to do for Him.

In the middle of the gospel in the first several verses and the last verse on doing the work of the Lord we have a lot of verses about Christ's bodily resurrection and our future resurrection with Him. The resurrection is what keeps motivating Christian service. God's plan of salvation extends into eternity. It doesn't stop when God grants us the power to repent and believe in Christ. God's plan of salvation never stops. It continues all the way into eternity.

The more you spend time renewing your mind in the glorious truths of salvation, including the resurrection, the more you will find your Christian gas tank filling up. Serving Christ is only possible through the power of Christ and through the ministry of the Spirit who puts into our minds precious truths that thrill our hearts and cause us to want to do whatever the Lord wants us to do.

I trust this study of the power of the resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15 has been encouraging to you. It's good to know God' has a plan for us and His plan doesn't stop when we die. Death is not the end for a believer. **Death does not end our relationship with Christ - It enhances it.** Paul reminded the Philippians that for him to live is Christ and to die is gain. When we are united to Christ it lasts forever.

Throughout 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is correcting a misunderstanding of the power of the resurrection. People in the church lived in a culture that taught things different than Paul. Greeks denied bodily resurrection. They prided themselves

on wisdom but their wisdom fell woefully short when it came to explaining what happens to someones body after they die. They couldn't conceive of someone receiving a new body after they die.

Some in the church were mocking this truth. They thought Paul was one fry short of a happy meal for teaching that our perishable bodies are raised imperishable. Paul didn't care. His goal was never to please men. Paul's goal was the same everywhere he went - to speak truth in love. To speak the Word of God and trust the Spirit of God to use it in people's hearts the right way. Paul wasn't scared to correct error in the church and we shouldn't be either.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul exhorts us to a life of confidence in the resurrection through 6 exhortations that we should always keep in mind.

- A. The First Exhortation: Consider the Evidence for the Resurrection (15:1–11)**
- B. The Second Exhortation: Consider the Consequences of No Resurrection from the Dead (15:12–19)**
- C. The Third Exhortation: Consider the Centrality of the Resurrection in God's Program (15:20–28)**
- D. The Fourth Exhortation: Consider that the Christian Life Is Made Purposeful because of the Resurrection of the Dead (15:29–34)**
- E. The Fifth Exhortation: Consider the Majesty of the Resurrection Body (15:35–50)**
- F. The Sixth Exhortation: Consider the Miraculous Change Resulting in the Resurrection of the Dead (15:51–58)**

In this last section on 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 we want to consider how the resurrection of Christ and our future resurrection with him is the fuel for Christian service. What we know about the resurrection of Christ motivates us to keep serving Christ. Again, we are told in Romans 12:11, "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." How do we keep from becoming Christian sloths? We have to consider the miraculous change that results from the resurrection and then ask God to take these truths and fill our hearts with new thoughts that turn us from sloths to servants.

There are three words I would like for you to consider with me this morning from 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 that will help us abound in the work of the Lord:

1. Consummation - 1 Corinthians 15:50-53
2. Celebration - 1 Corinthians 50:54-57
3. Continuation - 1 Corinthians 15:58

Let's begin with consummation in verses 50-53.

### 1 Corinthians 15:50-53

- 50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
- 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.

Notice the word brothers. Later in verse 58 it says beloved brothers. That's how Paul viewed this church. They were family. Paul had served them for 18 months before moving on, but he clearly still loved these people. His love for them prompted his letter to them. Love motivates service. Paul is writing to all believers in Christ. He wants everyone who is loved by God to know that God has a future plan for His people and Paul wants us to know what we need to know about His plan.

The first thing Paul makes clear at the end of verse 50 is that our earthy bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The particular aspect of the kingdom He is describing is the eternal kingdom. The new heavens and the new earth as described at the end of Revelation. These bodies we now possess cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Just as we have to be born again to enter the kingdom of God in the first place, we have to receive new bodies to live in God's eternal kingdom for all eternity.

Paul has already made this clear. Our sin cursed corruptible bodies are not fit for glory. We need new bodies. The fact that Paul writes about flesh and blood (Our earthy bodies) not being able to inherit the kingdom of God means that we are

not in the kingdom right now. The kingdom Paul is describing that we need new bodies to inherit is a future kingdom.

David Prior, "Even now God's Spirit dwells in our mortal bodies: but the more the Spirit makes us like Jesus, the more these mortal bodies groan under the strain of anticipating their own demise and the freedom of totally new bodies designed for glory and power. The first body has all the limitations of our earthiness; the second body has all the capacity of God's Spirit. From this perspective it is obvious that the first body (flesh and blood) cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because decay and corruption cannot be part of what is eternally incorruptible."

What Paul is helping us understand is a mystery. By using "mystery" in reference to the resurrection body, Paul implies that there are things about that body that the Corinthians did not understand, about which he wants to inform them. Like what?

A. Some Christians will still be alive when Christ returns

1 Corinthians 15:51

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed

We refers to Christians - saints in Christ Jesus. Paul is addressing all saints, not just the ones in Corinth. Sleep here means death. We shall not all sleep means that some Christians will be alive when Christ returns. 1 Thessalonians 4:15, "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."

Isn't this incredible? I hope this happens to me. I hope this happens to us. I hope Christ returns in my lifetime. Here is what we know about Christ's return - Only the Father knows when Jesus is coming back and whether or not we are alive or dead when He returns, we will all be changed.

Why hasn't Christ returned? One reason is that God is patient with people giving people time to repent. 2 Peter 3:8-10, "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count

slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

One reason Christ has not returned is because there are people God has chosen to be saved who are not yet saved. When the full number of the Gentiles comes in, we will learn more about this in Romans 9-11, God will send His Son.

If you are here and you have not yet repented. You have not acknowledged what God says about your sinfulness and turned to Christ, do it now. Don't view God's patience with sin as an excuse to keep living for sin. You don't know when Christ is coming back. You need to be ready. Turn from whatever sin you are living for and place your trust in the one time sacrifice of Christ for all your sins. Confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved (Romans 10:9-10).

We don't stop repenting when we are saved. We keep returning. The promise of Christ's return is meant to have a purifying effect on our present Christian lives. 1 John 3:1-3, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

I love a preacher from Scotland who preaches in Chicago named Colin Smith. I have heard him say recently, "Repenting is turning from all of the sins you know that you have in your life to all that you know about Christ." If Christ could come back any moment we need to always be doing that. Always turning from all the sin that the Spirit uses Scripture to convict us about to all that we know Christ has done, is doing, or will do for us. We keep short accounts with God.

Another truth about this mystery:

B. Christians will receive transformed bodies when Christ returns

### 1 Corinthians 15:52-53

- 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.

Christians who are alive when Christ comes back will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. **When the trumpet blast sounds, not a single one of God's people will be neglected.** The dead will rise in an incorruptible state and those who are alive at Christ's coming will be transformed. Those who died believing the gospel will be reunited with those who are alive believing the gospel and we will always be with the Lord. God's plan for saints will be consummated.

This past week two well known pastors died. A pastor from Birmingham named Harry Reeder and a Pastor who ministered in New York City for many years named Tim Keller. One died in a car crash and another died from a 3 year battle with pancreatic cancer. Does God have a future plan for Harry and Tim? Yes. What is it? When Christ comes back they will be changed. The same thing is true for all of your loved ones who died believing the gospel.

### Philippians 3:20-21

- 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

As I have thought a lot about 1 Corinthians 15 the past few weeks, here is one thought I have had. What Paul is describing in these verses about the resurrection connects back to what you believe about the power of God. Tozer got it right, "What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you."

The issue in this chapter on the resurrection really comes down to trust. Is God omnipotent? Is He really all powerful? What was the song some of us sang as children - My God is so big, so strong and so mighty there's nothing my God cannot do. Do we still believe that? The same power God will use to subject all things to Himself in the end is the same power God will use to transform our lowly body into His glorious body.

So many problems in our lives are addressed by asking and answering two simple questions:

1. What does the Bible say about the character of God and the promises of God?
2. Do I trust His character and do I trust His plan?

The next thing Paul describes in verses 54-57 is death's defeat through the resurrection.

## 2. Celebration - 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

### 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

- 54 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?"  
56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.  
57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What's the perishable and what's the imperishable? Our earthly bodies are perishable. Our perishable bodies are wasting away because of sin. They are not fit for the eternal kingdom of Christ. These earthy bodies must put on imperishable bodies, our mortal bodies must put on immortal bodies for us to enter God's future kingdom.

Put on in verses 53-54 was a common term for getting dressed, and implies the physical nature of the raised body. It is invested with immortality, when death is utterly defeated for all believers. Death is swallowed up in victory alludes to Isaiah 25:8, where Isaiah prophesies that God will swallow up death when He comes to rescue His people. Verse 55 alludes to Hosea 13:14, in which God tells death and Sheol to get ready to assist Him in the judgment of Ephraim. But in the resurrection, there will be no more judgment, grave, or death.

In verse 56 Paul explains why people die. What is the sting of death? Sin. What is the power of sin? The Law. Sin is the cause of death and knowledge of sin



comes through the law. The law has a causative function, it brings to light sin committed against God. The law gives sin its power. The law which is good, arouses sinful passions and empowers sin. It did with Paul.

Remember Paul wrote in Romans 7

Romans 7:7-11

- 7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."
- 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.
- 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.
- 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.
- 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

The law convicted Paul and killed him. The law convicts and condemns the sinner to death. The law is an instrument of death because the sinner cannot fulfill it. John Calvin writes, "Death has no other weapon, except sin, with which to wound us...it is the Law of God that gives that sting its deadly power."

Paul loves to do this. He loves to talk about sin in order to then celebrate salvation. Who gives us the victory over sin and death? God does. How does God do it? Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Victory, even over death and the grave, has been won through our Lord, who died and rose and is coming again.

The tense of the verb gives in verse 57 is really important. It's in the present tense. **God keeps on giving us there victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** That means we must continually appropriate Jesus' triumph and rejoice in the riches of our salvation.

There is victory over sin and death through one unique person - Our Lord Jesus Christ. Victory comes through Him. Jesus died and rose again to set us free from the curse of the law. If Christ tarries we will all have to walk through the pain of sin and death. It won't be fun and it won't be easy. Knowing God gives us (present tense) the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ is what gives us hope.

John MacArthur once told a story in a sermon about a man named Bishop Bergeroff. He was from Norway and he was once asked, "What is death like for the Christian?" And this is what he said, "Death for the Christian is like this...Once there was a peasant who had a little son, and he took his little son by the hand one day, and he said, "Son, I want you to come with me on a journey to another village. I have some business to take care of." And his son said, "I'd be happy to go, Dad." And so they went. They took off, and they came to a stream. It was running very rapidly and it was very deep. And there was a very rickety old bridge, and it didn't look like it would hold them. And it was rather insecure, and parts of it were broken out. And the little boy became very afraid, and he said, "Dad, we'll never make it across, because the bridge won't hold us." His dad said, "Don't worry, I'll hold your hand, and we'll be careful, and we'll make it."

They got to the other side and went to the village and finished their business. On the way home, it became dark, and the little boy began to remember the bridge and the stream. And with tears in his eyes, he looked up to his dad, and he said, "Dad, I know we won't make it. It's dark, and we can't see." And his dad, without saying a word, reached down and picked him up in his arms and, in a matter of seconds, the little boy was sound asleep in his dad's arms.

The next thing he knew, the little boy woke up, and he was lying in his own bed in his own room in his own house, and the sunlight was breaking through the window. He was home. And Bishop Bergeroff said, "You see, that's what death is. What you fear the most, you don't even experience. One day you fall asleep in the arms of Jesus, wake up, and you're home." Isn't that a sweet visual picture of God giving us the victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ?

Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

John 10:27-30

- 27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.
- 28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
- 29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
- 30** I and the Father are one."

Consummation in verses 50-53 followed by celebration in verses 54-57 followed by:

### 3. Continuation - 1 Corinthians 15:58

#### 1 Corinthians 15:58

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.

When we see the word therefore in Scripture we need to tap the breaks and go back and read what has just been written. Some people think that therefore connects farther back from the previous section and farther back than 1 Corinthians 15. Some commentators think that therefore in verse 58 summarizes all that Paul has written in the whole letter up until now.

Before Paul tells these believers what to do, he thoroughly describes what God does for them. Christianity does not major on the imperatives (on what we do for God). Christianity majors on the indicatives (What God does for us). What God does for us means that we are uniquely loved by Him. Beloved brothers means that we are uniquely loved by God. Our eternal security is based on God's eternal love.

It was because these people were uniquely loved by God that they were uniquely loved by Paul. In light of all these truths, Paul exhorts us to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Because of these truths we must be steady and unshakeable Christians.

This verse reminds me of a drill we did when I played soccer at The Master's University. The coach would set out four cones in a square. We would line up in groups next to the cones and he would say go and we would have to sprint as fast as we could from one cone to the next. I remember if we stopped running all the way through he would make us keep running. I remember him saying over and over again, "Run all the way through." You had to sprint all the way through the cones without slowing down.

This is not the time to slow down. **Our culture is decaying faster than a car in the Indy 500.** This is not the time to be slothful Christians. God wants us to always be doing something - Because God is always giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ we must be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Again, the work of the Lord is evangelizing unbelievers and edifying believers. How do we evangelize unbelievers? We study the gospel and share it with other people and we trust the Spirit to convict people of sin and convert people to Christ. One way we can do this a little better is by carrying tracks and passing them out.

Look at the end of verse 58, “knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Why do we know our labor is not in vain? What have we been learning the last 6 weeks from 1 Corinthians 15:58? Christ rose again and we rise again when He comes again. Therefore, everything we do for Him now matters. Our labor is worth it. It matters. It’s the only thing that matters. What you and I do in Christ for Christ is all that really matters. Your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

I want to close with something I hope challenges and comforts you. It is not easy to be a Christian. Yes, Jesus’ yoke is easy and His burden is light. He never asks us to do something He doesn’t give us the power to do. Serving Christ in Corinth was challenging. Corinth was a city known for celebrating sin. It wasn’t easy to evangelize or edify in Corinth but still Paul tells them to keep doing it.

So must we. It is not easy to abound in doing the work of the Lord here. The majority of people around us are wrapped up in what the world has to offer. John calls it the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. Others are wrapped up in the cultures view of celebrating what God says is sinful in terms of marriage and gender. The culture will continue to spiral out of control. In the last days difficult times will come. They’re here.

Our concern needs to move from the culture to Christ. Our service is for Him. We love others because we love Him and we love Him because He loved us first and He keeps loving us and He is preparing a place for us and He is coming back. If your Christian gas tank is on fumes then fill your mind with the glories of Christ and keep abounding in the work of sharing Christ with lost people and then take what you are learning about Christ and share it with saved people. Christ is the answer for sinners and saints. This Christ we learn about in 1

Corinthians 15 who saved us and has a glorious plan for our resurrection bodies is worthy. Let's pray.