

THE Best IS YET TO COME

Death is Your Problem

Peter Hartwig

“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.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 (ESV)

Hey there, NCC family! It's Peter Hartwig here. Today we are continuing our conversation on eschatology - the study of the end. For the last two days, I've referenced verses in 1st Corinthians 15. That was not necessarily by design, but it's sure not by mistake.

1st Corinthians 15 is one of the places where Paul talks directly about resurrection. Some people in Corinth had begun to think that no one but Jesus would be resurrected. I don't know what they did think happened to Christians at the end. So Paul spends most of this chapter defending this idea that people who are in Christ are looking forward to a resurrection themselves.

Paul ends by quoting a few passages from the prophets and giving a bit of commentary. Here is what he says:

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.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In short, Paul is saying that resurrection means the defeat of death. That is what the hope of resurrection celebrates: the end of death itself.

Have you ever thought about the fact that pretty much everyone thinks that something is wrong with the world? The left and the right? Religious and secular? Socialists and capitalists? Everyone thinks that *something* is wrong - something needs to be corrected.

From the broadest point of view, I think the Biblical authors would say, “the problem is death” with a capital D. In Genesis, do you remember how God warns the first two human beings not to eat the fruit? God says, “Do not eat the fruit... on the day you eat it, you will die.”

Of course, lots of things are wrong with the world. There is evil and sin and shame. That is all real, but it seems like the Bible’s white whale is Death Itself. That is the problem: when humanity broke God’s first and only law, Death found its way into creation. That is what Paul is saying here. Death is the problem, sin is its sting, and the law - in turn - is sin’s power. Death is kind of an anchor issue.

It does not seem like a mistake, then, that God would fix the world with a resurrection - with someone defeating Death Itself. That is why Jesus’ resurrection is the anchor of the whole world’s hope. All the world is trying to get out from under the thumb of death. Just for that reason, the whole world can find some real hope in Jesus. Like the New Testament says, Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead” and “the firstborn of all creation.” Jesus’s resurrection made a way out from the oppression of death.

Like we said yesterday, the death of death is not just in the future. It is not JUST the not-yet. It is also part of the now. When you put your faith in Jesus, you start to live that resurrection life. It is the promise of a different quality of life, in the most fundamental sense - a different way of being. Perhaps you have never heard that before, perhaps today simply comes as an invitation to remember it again. Whether this is old news or new news, who doesn’t want news like this. Our lives don’t have to be just a lurch towards death. They don’t even have to be bracing for the pain of death just because we know heaven is on the other side.

No! Our lives get to be the resurrection of Jesus continuing to overcome death both in the now and the not yet. Our lives get to be the future breaking into the present. Our lives get to be lives that have already begun to right what is most fundamentally wrong. Who doesn’t want a life like that?

Do you feel like you are just existing in life, waiting for death? Or do you have expectancy in life, living it to the full? How can you live a more vibrant life, overtaking the power of death?