

Victory in Jesus!

(1 Corinthians 15:50-58 ~ Part 1)

Introduction

- As a pastor, I have been a part of many funerals and memorial services (both Christian and non-Christian), and it never ceases to make an impression on me how people view and cope with death. It is a strange society when we are entertained by death and dying (books, movies, TV shows, video games), but consider the topic taboo or morbid for conversations. I have witnessed everything from the exuberant joy and hope of a celebrated life, and the extreme depression and despair regarding death. I have seen people respond to death with tears, alcohol, drugs, laughter, joy, relief, thanksgiving, anger, and even attempted suicide. Being a part of funerals always reminds me of two things: 1) The value of life, and 2) The certainty of death.
- You can learn a lot about people's perspective of death by reading epitaphs written on tombstones. I did some research, through the internet, to find some actual sayings written on real tombstones:
- ◆ In a cemetery in Hartscombe, England:
On the 22nd of June - Jonathan Fiddle - Went out of tune.
 - ◆ Anna Hopewell's grave in Enosburg Falls, Vermont:
Here lies the body of our Anna; Done to death by a banana; It wasn't the fruit that laid her low; But the skin of the thing that made her go.
 - ◆ On a grave from the 1880's in Nantucket, Massachusetts:
Under the sod and under the trees; Lies the body of Jonathan Pease. He is not here, there's only the pod: Pease shelled out and went to God.
 - ◆ Harry Edsel Smith of Albany, New York: Born 1903 – Died 1942:
Looked up the elevator shaft to see if the car was on the way down. It was.
 - ◆ A gunman named Zeke:
Here lies a man named Zeke: Second fastest draw in Cripple Creek
 - ◆ Arthur C. Homan:
Once I wasn't; Then I was; Now I ain't again
 - ◆ Tombstone of Edward Hyde:
Here lies the body of Edward Hyde: We laid him here because he died
 - ◆ On the grave of a man named Bill Wilson:
See, I told you I was sick!
 - ◆ Here is my all-time favorite:
Only one life, twill soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last.
- In many ways, the Christian's view of life and death is unique – especially when it comes to the death of another Christian.

Ps 116:15 ~ “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

Ps 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.”

2 Cor 5:8 ~ “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

Phil 1:20-23 ~ “as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

1 Thess 4:13-14 ~ “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. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

➤ As we have seen, the fifteenth chapter of “1 Corinthians” is almost entirely dedicated to the resurrection – the resurrection of Christ, and the resurrection of those who are in Christ (who have died). In the passage before us this morning, 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, Paul concluded his teaching to the Corinthians on Christian’s final resurrection.

1 Cor 15:50-58 ~ “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in 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. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When 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?’ ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, 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.

➤ In drawing to an end his teaching on the resurrection, the apostle Paul (writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God) points out four glorious truths concerning the Christian’s final resurrection to come when Christ Returns.

1. The necessity of the final resurrection (vs.50)

➤ Paul first reminds the Corinthians that without resurrected bodies, Christians cannot spend eternity in heaven. The reason is that *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”* (vs.50). Our physical, corrupted, and mortal bodies simply cannot dwell in the spiritual dimension of heaven; let alone dwell in the presence of the holy God. In the words of the apostle: *“the perishable”* (*phthora*; corruptible, mortal) cannot *“inherit the imperishable”* (*aphtharsia*; vs.50).

As we have already studied, our human bodies are mortal (*“perishable”* [*phthora*]; vs.42), dishonorable (*“sown in dishonor”* [*atimia*]; vs.43); weak (*“sown in weakness”*, [*astheneia*]; vs.43), and physical/corporal (*“natural”* [*psychikos*]; vs.44).

➤ Our human bodies simply cannot coexist with the blazing splendor of God’s divine glory! We cannot survive the penetrating radiance of His absolute holiness. Our physical eyes cannot look upon the fullness of God; our physical ears cannot hear the unmitigated voice of God; our finite brains cannot fully comprehend the infinite God; our corruptible hands/feet cannot unwaveringly serve God in holiness; our sinful hearts cannot truly and fully worship God.

➤ Moses saw only a brief and heavily obstructed view of the back of God, and it still almost killed him.

Ex 33:18-23 ~ “Moses said [to the LORD], ‘Please show me your glory.’ ¹⁹And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.’ ²¹And the Lord said, ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²²and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.’”

Ex 34:29-35 ~ “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ...

³³And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.”

➤ Moses’ face was not “sunburned”; that is, it was not passively affected by God’s glory but actively reflecting the glory of the Lord (perhaps like seeing the reflection of the sun’s brightness off of a window or chrome bumper). Spurgeon suggested that “The face of Moses was to God what the moon is to the sun” (sermon: “The Shining Face of Moses”; 1890).

Physically speaking this was not a beautiful thing to behold, as we see that the Israelites were afraid to look at Moses (vs.30). Remember, if God had not protected Moses – keeping him from seeing God’s face, the fulness of God’s glory – Moses would not have survived (Ex.33:20; 1 Tim.6:16; Heb.10:31; 12:28-29).

2 Cor 3:7 ~ “... the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory ...”

1 Tim 6:15-16 ~ “...he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” (see 1Jn.1:5; Rev.1:16; 22:5)

➤ If this is not your understanding of God, you are gravely mistaken. Too many people today have a “domesticated” or “manageable” or humanizing view of God. They think and speak of Him – irreverently and/or blasphemously – as “the man upstairs”, “the big guy in the sky”, a cosmic bellhop/bellboy, or a divine Santa Claus. They gravely underestimate Him, minimize Him, and humanize Him. God is not at our beck-and-call. He is not whoever we want Him to be, nor will He do whatever we ask Him to do. God is not the best of all humans; He is not like anything in all creation. He is the one and only eternal, self-existing, Creator and Sovereign God!

➤ Our physical bodies cannot withstand the radiance of God’s glory. We must be resurrected with new, spiritual (vs.44-46), and glorified bodies in order for us to be in the presence of God for all eternity. We must experience a final, spiritual, resurrection in order to eternally *“inherit the kingdom of God”* (vs.50). Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ all who believe in Him will be clothed in a new eternal body perfectly suited for eternal life in heaven. The believer’s new resurrection body is not perishable but imperishable, not dishonored but glorified, not weak but powerful, and no longer natural but spiritual (vs.42-44). Jesus’ victorious resurrection enabled us to shed the earthly body *“borne in the image of [Adam]”* and be clothed in a spiritual body that will *“bear the image of [Jesus Christ]”* (vs.49; see Jn.17:24; 1Cor.13:12).

1 John 3:2 ~ “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.”

Phil 3:20-21 ~ “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

2 Cor 5:4 ~ “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened – not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”

2. The mystery of the final resurrection (vs.51-53)

➤ Secondly, Paul describes the mystery of the final resurrection. He wrote, *“Behold!”* (vs.51; *idou*), which means “Listen!”, “Look!”, or “Pay attention!” He wanted to ensure that he had the full attention before he revealed a portion of one of life’s greatest mysteries – the mystery of Christ’s Second Coming. *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”* (vs.51).

➤ As we have seen, Christians who die before Christ returns will be the first ones to be resurrected:

1 Thess 4:13-16 ~ “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. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For 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. ... And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

➤ Then, those (Christians) who are alive at the Jesus’ Second Coming will experience what is commonly referred to as “the rapture”: *“ ... We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in 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. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”* (vs.51-53).

1 Thess 4:17 ~ “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.”

Acts 1:9-11 ~ “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

➤ Those Christians who are alive when Christ Returns will be given resurrected bodies – *“we shall all be changed”* (vs.51) – and this will happen *“in a moment, in the twinkling of the eye”* (vs.52). The Greek word translated *“moment”* (*atomos*) is from which our English word “atom” is derived. It refers to an indivisible point of time – the smallest (infinitesimal) instant of time that cannot be further divided or reduced. It refers to the smallest fraction of a second (a split-second).

Paul illustrated this truth in saying that it was like the time it takes for an eye to involuntarily twitch: *“in the twinkling of the eye”* (vs.52; *“twinkling”* [*rhipē*]). In other words, as fast as the human eye – which is faster than any other visible part of the human body – can twitch or blink, our bodies will be transformed in the likeness of Christ’s glorious body (cf. Phil.3:21; 1Jn.3:2). Christ’s return will not be slow or gradual, but instantaneous, universal, and unexpected.

2 Pet 3:10 ~ “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief ...” (cf. Matt.24:42-43; 1Thes.5:2; Rev.3:3)

➤ This will all occur *“at the last trumpet”* (vs.52). While this is not likely to be the final trumpet ever to be sounded, it will be the last trumpet believers will hear before they are resurrected to be with Christ. In Biblical times, the sound of the trumpet represented the call to battle (Jer.51:27), the warning of the judgment of God (Joel 2:1), the announcement of the coming of the Lord (Zech.9:14), and the calling of God for His children (Is.27:13; Matt.24:31).

Therefore, as the piercing sound of a trumpet would announce the coming of the King, or sound the battle cry for war, so this *“last trumpet”* (vs.52) will resound (simultaneously) worldwide proclaiming the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The dead in Christ will rise first and be joined by those Christians who are alive, to meet the Lord in the air. *“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed”* (vs.52).

➤ Again, Paul gives more details in his letter to the Christians in Thessalonica:

1 Thess 4:16-18 ~ “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. ¹⁷Then 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. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

➤ To be sure, there is still great mystery regarding all the events, and the chronology of events, surrounding Christ’s Second Coming. What we know for sure is most important. Christ will indeed come again, and when He does those who are in Christ (dead and alive) will be resurrected with Him in glory for all eternity: *“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”* (vs.53).

3. The victory of the final resurrection (vs.54-57)

➤ The third glorious truth is the victory of the final resurrection. *“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’”* (vs.54). Here Paul paraphrased the prophet Isaiah who, in speaking for God, said: *“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken”* (Is.25:8). The outcome of Jesus’ resurrection is the death of death. Just as we who are *“mortal may be swallowed up by life”* (2Cor.5:4), death (mortality) itself will be swallowed up in the victorious resurrection of Christ.

➤ As if he were speaking to a personification of death, Paul asks, *“‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”* (vs.55). Paul taunts death by quoting another OT prophet – this time Hosea – who said: *“Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? ...”* (Hos.13:14).

Paul likened death to a bee, or a scorpion, whose stinger is poisonous and deadly: *“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law”* (vs.56). In other words, were we to be accountable to the law we would all perish; we would all be condemned. For no one, apart from Christ, has perfectly obeyed God’s law.

Rom 3:9-12, 23 ~ “... For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. ... ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (see Rom.4:15)

Rom 5:12 ~ “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”

Rom 6:23 ~ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Gal 3:10 ~ “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’”

James 2:10 ~ “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” (see Jms.1:15)

➤ Thankfully, Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the full penalty of all sin for all who would ever believe. Jesus’ sinless (righteous) life perfectly and eternally satisfied the demands of the law for all who truly receive Him, by faith, as their Lord and Savior. While death is not gone, its deadly sting is. This does not mean that Christians will no longer sin, but that any sin we commit is already forgiven

through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, believers no longer bare the fatal sting of sin. Christ alone bore the sting of sin for all who believe.

I have heard it said that “Christians are born twice and die once, and non-Christians are born once and die twice.” That is to say, at their conversion, Christians are “born-again” spiritually and are therefore saved unto eternal life in heaven. Non-Christians, on the other hand, are not saved and will experience the second death of God’s eternal wrath.

Gal 3:13 ~ “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’”

John 3:16 ~ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Rom 5:8 ~ “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

2 Cor 5:21 ~ “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

➤ In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul put it this way: *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (vs.57). Thanks be to God for He is the one who sent His one and only Son to be born of a virgin, to live a sinless life, to die a substitutionary death, to be supernaturally raised to life after three days. God is the one *“who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (vs.57).

➤ However, for every unbeliever the sting of death remains on them; they are still in their sins and condemned under God’s wrath. If they die rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they will not be resurrected to glory but resurrected to an eternal judgment (Jn.5:29). Only through faith in Jesus (as our Lord and Savior) can a person be freed from the eternal death of sin and condemnation of God, because Jesus is the only Savior from God – one who lived a perfect (sinless) life, died a substitutionary death, and was raised victoriously from the dead. Jesus Christ alone offers eternal life, because He alone has conquered both sin and death.

Heb 2:14-15 ~ “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Rev 20:14-15 ~ “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Rev 21:3-4 ~ “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

➤ Death came through sin, and sin came through the law for it is through the law that we become conscious and condemned of sin (Rom.3:20; 7:7; 8:1; Gal.2:19, 21). By fulfilling the law and raising from the dead, Jesus was victorious over sin and death. While death is still an enemy in this life, it is an enemy with no stinger – declawed, defanged, disarmed, and destroyed – powerless to harm those who are in Christ. There is victory over sin, but that victory comes only in and through Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6; Acts 4:12)!

Conclusion

➤ I feel contractually obligated, with the title I have used for this sermon, to include the hymn “Victory in Jesus.” This well-known, well-loved, song was written by Eugene Bartlett in 1939. Bartlett was born on December 24, 1885. He grew up loving music – both writing and singing. Over the course of his

life, Bartlett wrote more than 800 songs. In 1939, at the age of 54, he suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed and virtually bedridden. It was during this difficult time in his life, that Bartlett wrote the song "Victory in Jesus." He died on January 25, 1941, less than two years after writing it.

Verse 1

I heard an old old story / How a Savior came from glory
How He gave His life on Calvary / To save a wretch like me
I heard about His groaning / Of His precious blood's atoning
Then I repented of my sins / And won the victory

Chorus

*O victory in Jesus / My Savior forever
He sought me and bought me / With His redeeming blood
He loved me ere I knew Him / And all my love is due Him
He plunged me to victory / Beneath the cleansing flood*

Verse 2

I heard about His healing / Of His cleansing pow'r revealing
How He made the lame to walk again / And caused the blind to see
And then I cried dear Jesus / Come and heal my broken spirit
And somehow Jesus came and brought / To me the victory

Verse 3

I heard about a mansion / He has built for me in glory
And I heard about the streets of gold / Beyond the crystal sea
About the angels singing / And the old redemption story
And some sweet day I'll sing up there / The song of victory

- There is a new song, written in 2022, by the amazing Christian group called CityAlight Music (if you do not know their music, let me strongly encourage you to become familiar).

Verse 1

There is hope in grace unceasing / You withhold your wrath from me
Poured it out upon my Saviour / On the cross of Calvary

Verse 2

There is hope now for the hopeless / There is victory all can know
For the tomb lies bare and broken / And death's pow'r is overthrown

Chorus

*Jesus Christ my hope forever / Hope unlike the world can bring
Your steadfast love beyond all measure / There is hope in Christ my king*

Verse 3

There is hope for sons and daughters / Who have wandered on their own
Hear the songs of joy from heaven / As the lost are welcomed home

Bridge

Hallelujah, Hope of heaven / Precious treasure of my life
All my joy is in your presence / I am yours and you are mine

Verse 4

I will wait until I see him / Though the twilight turns to night
For my hope is not defeated / It will greet His dawning light

➤ The only hope for eternal life – for God’s forgiveness – is in and through Jesus Christ. He is the only Savior from God, and He is the only one who has – once and for all – won the victory against sin and death.