

Victory in Jesus

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Sermon Manuscript



This is probably my favorite paragraph in the entire Bible. It's so encouraging! It's the culmination of everything Paul has been saying in chapter 15. He started off with the basic reminders we've been looking at the past few weeks. He reminds them of the gospel, that Jesus really did rise from the dead like he said he would, and therefore all of his promises are true. What does he promise us? That he's coming back. That we'll be given new, resurrection bodies. We can't imagine what those bodies will be like any more than an acorn can imagine an 80-ft oak tree, but we can trust God to give us everything we need in both this life and in the age to come. Just as we bear the image of "the man of dust" (Adam), so we will bear the image of "the man of heaven" (Jesus) when he returns.

With all of that in mind, we turn to the final 9 verses. The culmination, the climax, the crest of the swelling wave, what it's all been building towards. Having ironed out some of their misunderstandings about the resurrection, he now provides the necessity of the resurrection, the justification for our confidence in the resurrection, and the motivation for our godly living in light of the resurrection. Why do we need this? Well, partly because we're so forgetful. We get tied up in the needs of our day to day lives, and we lose sight of eternity. Whenever we think of the resurrection, it seems "out there somewhere." We can't see it. It doesn't seem to impact our schedules. We still need to get groceries, drop the kids off at school, and get to work on time. We forget that we are eternal creatures. In this passage, Paul is shaking us out of our blindness with some of the most stirring, hope-filling, fear-shattering verses in the whole Bible.

Another reason we need this passage is because we're blinded by sin. As we'll see today, if you're in Christ Jesus, you've been set free from sin's dominion. It has no claim on you anymore. But we still have to live in a sin-soaked world, in sin-soaked bodies, with sin-soaked minds. Sin still impacts us at every level. It's all around us. Do you ever feel it dragging you down? It wants to keep reminding us of our past, to make us doubt God's promises, to drag us back into its dominion. We must not let it. We need reminders like 1 Cor 15:50-58 to stir our hearts to keep loving God, trusting him, and living for his glory. Whenever you feel afraid, discouraged, or like you're wasting your time, turn to these verses. The truth is, we've been given victory over sin and death. Jesus earned that victory on the cross, and if you're in him, you have that victory too. And **victory in Jesus means we have nothing to fear.**

1) The Necessity of the Resurrection (vv. 50-53)

- a) We cannot experience the resurrection in the new Earth in these bodies. Why?
 - i) Like everything else in this world, these bodies wear out, they grow weak, they fail. Biggest reason: sin. They're soaked in sin. Every molecule.
 - ii) And remember, we're not multiple things: body and soul separately, but like we learned last week, we're one thing: embodied souls.
 - iii) So my body, soul, mind, heart, desires, all of it, all of me, is marinated in sin.
 - iv) That makes it perishable. Other translations say "corruptible" here.
 - v) This world, and everything in it, including you and me, is corrupted by sin.
 - vi) And sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God, so that means if your sin-soaked body were to go directly before the throne of God, right now, as you are, you'd be instantly vaporized. Your body just couldn't handle it. You'd be evaporated in the presence of his pure, uncorrupted, white-hot holiness.
 - vii) So we need new bodies. The word "must" in v 53 is a clue. It's necessary. Bodies free of sin. Immortal bodies, imperishable bodies, incorruptible bodies that can handle the immeasurable weight of God's glory.
 - viii) God's kingdom is imperishable, immortal, incorruptible, and indestructible, so to get there we need to be those things as well.
- b) The mystery in v 51 refers to two things:
 - i) **1 The timing**—we don't know when it's going to happen. We know it'll be when Jesus returns, but we don't know when that'll be.
 - ii) **2 Clarifying his point in v 36:** "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."
 - (1) Just like us, the Corinthians didn't know when Jesus was returning. They knew it could be any day, so we can guess they were a little worried about still being alive when he returns.
 - (2) "We have to die to rise, so if I'm still alive, is that a problem?"
 - (3) Paul's saying, "No. Not a problem. Don't worry. Even those who are alive when Jesus comes back will be given new bodies. We're not sure how, or when, but God will give you a new body too. We will all be changed."
 - (4) That's comforting for us because we're closer to Christ's return than they were.
- c) But that change will happen quickly, "in a moment," v 52 tells us. In the blink of an eye.
 - i) Whether you're alive or dead when Christ returns, you'll hear that trumpet blast, and you'll be in a new body. Just like that. Everyone.
 - ii) Remember, *everyone* must be given a new body that can live forever. Like we heard from CS Lewis last week, there are no mere mortals.¹ Everyone has to live forever, either with God, or without God.
- d) **Where we spend eternity is determined by where we place our trust in this life.**
 - i) So we have to ask: What are you trusting in?
 - (1) Are you trusting in the world? In money? In family? In your political party? Unlike you, those things are all temporary. They won't last a fraction of a second compared to you. So they can't protect you. They can't keep you happy. At least, not for very long.

¹ C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 46.

- ii) God's kingdom is eternal. You are only eternal in one direction: forward. You had a beginning. God is eternal in both directions: past and future. He has no beginning, so He's bigger than you. So he can protect you and keep you happy forever (Psalm 16:11).
- iii) If you haven't placed your trust in Christ yet, I'm begging you to do it right now. Cry out to God. Ask him to save you from your sin, and he will.
- iv) The passage goes on, and the crescendo continues to rise:

2) The Defeat of Death (vv. 54-57)

- a) Do you feel the victory of this passage? Do you feel the hope-filled implications?
 - i) Death loses! It can't win! It gets swallowed up. Not chewed on. Not struck down. Not knocked over. Swallowed up. Implication: It's just a small thing. Tiny. Not even a grape. More like a pill. Just pop it in, swig of water, boom, gone. That's what happens to death when Jesus returns.
- b) We've all been touched by death. Even if you're young and it hasn't been right up in your face, you've seen it to some degree. Even in movies.
 - i) It's awful! Death is a horrible enemy. If it's a pill, it's a bitter pill. A heartbreaking pill.
 - ii) But if you're in Christ, it's not the end. It cannot win in the end.
- c) Look at v 55: we get to mock death! As it's pummeling us, even when it strikes us down, we can look death straight in the eye and say, "Is that all you got?"
 - i) "You can knock me down but I'll get up again. I'm not scared of you anymore."
 - ii) You can say that to death. Today. How?
- d) V 56-57 provide the justification for our gloating, and v 56 is probably what took up most of my prep time this week because, if we're honest, it's a little confusing at first, but it is packed with meaning.
 - i) "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."
 - ii) Does that mean the law gives sin power? If that's true, then why did God give Moses the law in the first place? Does the law somehow *cause* us to sin? Or at least make sin, somehow, *worse*?
 - iii) Here's a helpful thing to remember: **Sin always incites rebellion (against God) when a proud heart encounters the law (of God).** (Rom 7:7-25)
 - (1) The law doesn't *cause* us to sin, but it points out our sin and condemns us for it.
 - (a) No one likes that, so we run away from it, further into rebellion.
 - (2) It's like if I came home with a giant box, all wrapped up, and I said to my family, "No one look in this box." Can you imagine how that would go? Would my kids suddenly be like, "Well he said don't look in the box, so I guess I'm not curious."
 - (a) Of course not! They'd be in agony! They'd be dying with curiosity!
 - (b) But the fact is, they didn't know what was in the box before I brought it into the house. Their status in regards to the contents of the box did not change. But, importantly, before I brought it in, they didn't even know the box existed, so they weren't curious.
 - (c) You were already dead in sin before the law came, you just didn't know it. The law didn't change your status in regard to God, but it shined a light on your separation from him.
 - (3) We've all lied. We've all hated. We've all disrespected our parents. You didn't need to be taught how to do that.
 - (a) We all sin by nature and by choice. You don't have to teach it to kids, they just do it.
 - (4) The law shows us why.

- (a) It shows us how far we've fallen, how badly we've missed the mark. And that hurts.
 - (b) Have you ever been caught in sin? How'd it feel? Good? It hurts!
 - (c) Sin is everywhere, and the law points it out, it convicts us, which causes us to run away even further from the law, further into rebellion.
- iv) **So here's how the law gives sin power:** We're all born law-breakers, as we've seen, we're all born sinners, and that places us, tragically, under the dominion of sin.
 - (1) If you're not in Christ, John 8 and Romans 6 actually say you're in slavery to sin, under sin's authority and dominion. It rules your heart. And sin is a cruel master.
 - (a) It makes promises but never fulfills them. It puts you in a cage and the key is always just out of reach. It leads you down paths you don't want to go.
 - (b) Like keeping a baby tiger in your bedroom, sin seems manageable at first. Even cute. Not a big deal. But it grows. And it grows. And eventually, it'll kill you.
 - (2) "The power of sin is the law." We've all been born in sin's power because we're born law-breakers.
- v) But here's the good news embedded in v 56: Jesus lived a perfect life, never breaking the law, therefore he was never under sin's dominion. He was never in sin's cage, so he could grab the key.
 - (1) By itself that would be great, but here's the amazing part: He offers that key to us!
 - (2) He broke sin's power by dying under the law without breaking the law, and now he offers to break sin's power in your life as well.
 - (3) Sin and the law are like two sides of a hydraulic press, and we're stuck between them. On our own, we can't uphold the law, so we're crushed by sin.
 - (4) But Jesus, by fulfilling the law completely, couldn't be crushed by sin. So when he was placed in that hydraulic press, something had to give. The law couldn't break, Jesus couldn't break, so sin broke.
 - (5) He broke the power of sin by fulfilling the law and dying under the law anyway.
 - (6) "The power of sin is the law," but Jesus fulfilled the law, so sin had no power over him, so death couldn't crush him.
- e) But what about the first part of v 56: "The sting of death is sin." What's that mean?
 - i) Under sin's dominion, death is forever.
 - (1) Again, remember, we're all immortal creatures, and you have to spend eternity somewhere, either with God or without God.
 - (2) If you die under sin's dominion, you're under that dominion forever, separated from God. And because God is the source of all life, eternity without him is like eternal death.

That's the sting of death.
 - (3) That's why death is scary. That's why we're terrified of it. The sharp edge of death is that it's the end, forever. Lights out. Curtain drops. No more life.
 - (4) As one commentator puts it: "The sting in death, then, is that it separates people from God, and that separation is permanent if one does not have life in Christ."²
 - ii) And that sets us up perfectly for the alternative: **If you do have life in Christ, then you're not under sin's dominion anymore.**

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 326.

- (1) Colossians 1:13 - He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
- iii) In other words, if you trust in Christ, you switch kingdoms. No longer sin's, but Christ's.
 (1) If you're in Christ's kingdom, sin's power is broken, so death isn't forever! It gets swallowed up in Christ's victory on the cross!
- iv) And what does he do with that victory? Does he keep it to himself? No!
- f) V 57: He just gives it to us! **He gives us his victory!** The key to the cage of sin! Freedom from the fear of death! It's all yours! In Christ Jesus!
- i) If you're in Christ, you can say with the prophet Hosea, "Death, where is your victory? Death, what happened to your sting?"
- ii) Commentator Jon Courson has this cute little parable to drive the imagery home:
 A little girl was having a picnic with her daddy. Deathly allergic to bee stings, she became terrified as a bumblebee buzzed overhead. Seeing the bee, her father caught it and held it in his hand for a few seconds before letting it go. As it buzzed around once more, the little girl cried, "Daddy, Daddy, why did you let the bee go?"
 Rather than explain, the father chose to simply open his hand to show his daughter the stinger embedded in his palm.³
- iii) If you're in Christ, death's stinger has no threat for you. It's embedded in the palms of Jesus. He still bears the marks.
- g) In this life, death still buzzes around us. It gets in our faces.
- i) We're doing another cycle of GriefShare right now, and the stories of loss are heartbreaking. Tragic. Awful. We hate death, as Christians.
- ii) Death still hurts. It will always hurt, on this side of Christ's return.
- iii) But it doesn't have to be the end. Death doesn't get the final say.
- iv) It's still an enemy, but a defeated enemy. It hasn't lost its bite, but it has lost its fangs. It's still a bitter pill, but it's lost its poison.
- h) Some of us have lost loved ones and we're not sure about their salvation. I know I have. I'm so sorry for your loss. It's ok to grieve.
- i) I wish I could promise you that they're in Christ, but I can't. The fact is, we just don't know.
- ii) But here's what we do know: God is good. Whatever happens, you can trust him. Even shallow faith is still faith.
- i) Death will always be buzzing around in the background of this life, but it's stingless. It cannot kill you forever if you're in Christ.**
- i) Here's how I think of it: Death has a sword. A big sword. And when it comes for you, as it has come for billions of people before you, it strikes you down with that sword. That happens to everyone.
- (1) Now, if you're still under the dominion of sin, having broken God's law, then that sword is still sharp. When it hits you, you're dead. You don't get back up.
- (2) But if you're in the kingdom of Christ, having placed your trust in him, then that sword is dull, it's more like a baseball bat. When it hits you, it still hurts, for sure. It even knocks you down, but you'll get back up one day. It only strikes once.
- ii) Like a middle school bully, it's only scary for a little while. It only talks big, but it cannot win in the end.

³ Jon Courson, Jon Courson's Application Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 1090.

- iii) DL Moody wrote this in his Bible by v 56: “A believer may feel the *stroke* of death, but he shall never feel the *sting* of death.”⁴
- iv) We still grieve, but not without hope (1 Thess 4:13).
- j) “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” Here’s how I summarize it:
 - i) We’re born law-breakers, so we’re under the dominion (power) of sin, and death under the dominion of sin is forever, so it stings.
 - ii) But Jesus fulfilled the law, so he’s not under the dominion of sin, and he transfers our allegiance from sin’s dominion to his kingdom, and death in his kingdom is temporary. Just a gateway to glory.
- k) What does that mean for us today? The final verse of this chapter, the peak of this swelling crescendo, is the main point of this entire chapter:

3) Nothing is Wasted (v. 58)

- a) First, what do you do when you see a “therefore”? Ask what it’s “there for”!
 - i) In this one word, Paul is saying, “With all of chapter 15 in mind, with the death of death in the life of Christ, with sin’s power being broken and the fear of death removed, how then shall we live?”
- b) One handy tool for interpreting the Bible is “The What, the So What, and the Now What.”
 - i) We’ve heard the **What**
 - (1) What happened: Christ’s victory on the cross by dying under the law without breaking the law
 - ii) We’ve heard the **So What**
 - (1) Why it matters: the defeat of death, sin’s power was removed so death’s sword was blunted
 - iii) And now we get to the **Now What**
 - (1) What it means going forward, how it actually changes our lives
 - (2) We ask, How does any of this affect me today in 2026 America?
 - (3) Does it affect me? Absolutely.
- c) Look at what it says: With all of chapter 15 in mind, what could possibly shake you? What do you have to be afraid of? What’s holding you back? In Christ, you can be...
 - i) **Steadfast:** You can stand strong when the winds of a rapidly changing culture and societal norms try to knock you down.
 - (1) There’s always going to be someone trying to pull the rug out from under you.
 - ii) **Immovable:** You can resist sin.
 - (1) After Jesus unlocks the cage of sin and sets you free from it, sin wants you back. It doesn’t give up without a fight. It’s a sore loser. It wants to put you back in the cage.
 - (2) But what does Paul say? “Be steadfast. Immovable.” Don’t let sin drag you back into the cage. Don’t let the winds of popular culture or trendy heresy knock you over. Stand firm.
 - (3) When sin starts banging on the door, demanding that it still owns you, how will you respond?
 - (a) 1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

⁴ D. L. Moody, *Notes from My Bible: From Genesis to Revelation* (Chicago; New York; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1895), 161.

- (4) What's your "off-ramp" for sin? God will always provide one. He promised.
- (a) Sin doesn't want you to see it. It wants to keep you blind. So the first step to being steadfast in the face of overwhelming temptation is to pray for God to show you the way of escape.
 - (b) Just ask him to show it to you. It's always there, you just have to see it.
 - (c) And then the second step is to pray for the strength to actually take that way of escape. To steer into the off-ramp.
 - (d) That's not easy to do! If it was easy to avoid, sin wouldn't be such a problem. But it's a huge problem.
 - (e) So pray for the eyes to see the off-ramp, and then the strength to take it.
 - (f) So many times we blitz right past it and we give in to sin, but it doesn't have to be that way.
 - (g) Remember, Jesus died and rose again to enable and empower you to take the off-ramp. He broke sin's power and gave you the victory so that you could be steadfast and immovable, even in the face of overwhelming temptation.
- iii) **Always abounding in the work of the Lord:** You can be overflowing in good works
- (1) What good work is the Lord calling you to?
 - (2) There are lots of ways to uncover this. We've talked about some of them here.
 - (a) What are you passionate about? What gets your blood boiling? What gets you excited? What need have you seen? What opportunity is on the horizon? What are your natural talents? What are your spiritual gifts?
 - (b) Whatever it is, pursue it! Take a step of faith and trust God to carry you.
 - (3) Keep in step with the Holy Spirit and he will guide your steps.
- d) **The last few words of v 58 give us all the confidence we need.** There's a truth here that has motivated missionaries and martyrs, pastors and parents, doctors and disciple-makers, teachers and translators, suffering servants and steadfast saints throughout the history of the church.
- i) It's this: believer, **your work in the Lord can never be wasted.** Never. It can never be meaningless. It can never be in vain. What do you have to be afraid of?
 - ii) Think of it this way: the king of the universe, who is sovereign over every atom of creation, who is everywhere and has all power and all knowledge, that almighty king makes you, Christian, a promise.
 - iii) He promises that whatever you do in service to Him, whatever you do that seeks to unify and build up the church, whatever effort to kill sin, whatever labor of love, no matter how much it costs, all of it is totally, completely, absolutely, *worth it*.
 - iv) It's all worth it. It can never be wasted. It can never be meaningless or vain. What do you have to be afraid of?
 - (1) Isaiah 55 tells us that the word of the Lord is like rain that waters the earth, it will not return to him empty. It will accomplish that for which he sent it. No matter what it looks like to you.
 - v) He will make your efforts effective. He promises.
 - vi) Moms! Hope you had a great Mother's Day. I want to talk to you for a second.
 - (1) So much of your effort to raise up godly children goes unnoticed and uncelebrated. I know I'm not telling you anything new. It feels like no one sees your endless work.
 - (2) But God does. He sees it all. He sees you. Your efforts are never a waste.

- vii) But not just moms: Dads! Grandparents! Prayer warriors! Servant-hearted saints! Generous givers! Mentors! Teachers! Homemakers! Foster parents! Friends!
 - (1) If you ever feel like you're wasting your time in service to God, look back at verse 58. It is not a waste.
 - (2) In Christ, your labor is never in vain. No matter how big or small. Seen or unseen. Individually and corporately.
 - (3) The ripple effects of your faithfulness to whatever work God has called you to do, will continue echoing into eternity. No matter when you start.
 - (4) Of course you can't see it all today. It's eternal! It'll take eternity to see it all!
 - (5) Right now we're looking in a dirty mirror, but when Jesus returns, we'll see face to face. You'll see all the ways he used your efforts. Every tearful prayer, every humble act of service, every steadfast resistance of temptation, all of it.
- viii) You are God's instrument. He is calling you into the work he has already begun. And he promises to use you effectively.
 - (1) What do you have to be afraid of?

4) Victory in Jesus means we have nothing to fear.

- a) Christ's victory on the cross took away the power of sin and the sting of death.
- b) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). His promises never fail (2 Cor 1:20).
 - i) He said he'd rise from the dead, and he did. He said he'll raise you from the dead, so he will. He said he's coming back, so he's coming back.
 - ii) As we look forward to that day, look around. You're surrounded by precious eternal human souls. You've never met a mere mortal. Everyone's going to live forever, and you've been given a job to do in the meantime.
- c) Quoting George Herbert, Tim Keller said, "Death used to be an executioner, but the Gospel makes him a gardener.' Death used to be able to crush us, but now all death can do is plant us in God's soil so we become something extraordinary."^{5 6}
- d) If you haven't placed your faith in Christ yet, it's not too late. He will clothe you in his righteousness, and you will wear that righteousness forever.
 - i) If you are in Christ, you have nothing to fear. He defeated death, and he gives that victory to you.
- e) So go ahead. Do whatever God puts in front of you: Make disciples. Build up the church. Love your neighbor. Abound in the work of the Lord! None of your efforts are wasted! You can trust him.
- f) And by doing so, you'll be sticking your finger in the eye of death, reminding it that it can't win. That it doesn't scare you anymore. That you're looking ahead to eternity.
- g) As you leave today, Christian, remember that you're on the winning team. You've been given the victory through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Not even death can take that away from you.
- h) **Let's live in light of that indestructible victory today.**

⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/20-quotes-tim-kellers-new-short-book-death/>

⁶ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/death-can-only-make-me-better-remembering-tim-keller-1950-2023>