

Victory in Jesus

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (CGS #33)

INTRODUCTION – To say that chapter 15 ends with a bang would be an understatement. Here we see the climax of a swelling crescendo. Almost every verse in chapter 15 is more exciting, more fear-shattering, and more hope-instilling than the last. Read the whole thing again and you'll feel the excitement rising like a wave on the shore, building and building until it finally crests. The final nine verses are a battle summons, rallying cry, victory shout, and urgent call for action all rolled into one. Paul has already reminded the Corinthians (and us) that because Jesus rose bodily from the dead, we can have confidence that we too will rise bodily when he returns. He then clarifies some confusion the Corinthians must've had about the resurrection body, comparing it to a seed and a plant. In the same way that a seed can't imagine being a full-grown plant, we can't imagine what our resurrection bodies will be like. We know they'll be glorious though, because they will fully reflect the image of Jesus, the man of heaven. And then we arrive at verse 50, kicking off the glorious final paragraph of this incredible chapter.

It starts by identifying the problem: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (v 50). That's a problem because we all have bodies of flesh and blood. They're made out of dust. They grow weak, they wear out, they fail. And not only that, but they're soaked in sin. Every atom of creation has been corrupted by sin, including you. If we want to inherit the kingdom of God, our very bodies must be changed. Thankfully, Paul tells us, they will be. "In a moment," he says (v 52), in the blink of an eye. Whether you're alive or dead you'll hear the trumpet blast and **snap** you'll be in a new body. A body not made out of dust, one that doesn't grow weak or wear out, one that isn't corrupted by sin. An imperishable, immortal, uncorruptible body. Like we heard last week, everyone has to live forever, either with God or without God, so everyone needs new bodies that can live forever. When Christ returns, our mortal bodies will be clothed in immortality.

When that happens, Paul says, the victory over death promised in v 26 will be complete. Death will be "swallowed up in victory" (v 54). Not fought with, not knocked over, but swallowed up, like a pill. A bitter pill, to be sure, but no longer a poison pill for the believer. See, because of Jesus' work on the cross, death has lost its sting (v 55). If you're in Christ, you get everything he earned. And what did he earn? Victory over sin and death. He died, yes, but it wasn't forever. It was just a stopping point on the road to glory. It was honestly more like sleep, which is often how the New Testament refers to death (John 11:11, Matt 9:24, Mark 5:39, Luke 8:52, Acts 7:60, 1 Cor 15:6,20, 1 Thess 4:13-15). In Christ, believers have nothing to fear from death. Jesus fulfilled the law, breaking sin's power (v 56), and then he gives us the victory he earned (v 57), so now those in Christ are not under the power of sin, meaning death is actually gain (Phil 1:21)!

What does that mean for us? Here's where the rising wave finally crests and crashes down on the shore: **None of your work in the Lord can ever be in vain** (v 58). None of it. Big or small, corporate or individual, public or private. Every tearful prayer, every act of service, every resistance of temptation, all of it, is *totally* meaningful. God is using all of it, often in ways you can't see. What winds of popular culture assail you? You can be steadfast. What chains of sin threaten to drag you back into the grave? You can be immovable. What opportunities for building up the body of Christ lie before you? You can abound in them. If you're in Christ, you receive all the blessings he earned. Your eternal life has already begun, and it's held securely by the Father. What have you got to fear?

GETTING STARTED – As a group, take time to answer this question: Share a story about a time when you had to give something up to receive something better. Was it worth it?

IN THE WORD – Let’s dig back into the passage. It’s important to strengthen our muscles in reading God’s Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God’s Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below (O.P.A.).

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God’s Word. Remember, we believe that God’s Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday-Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

DISCUSS – Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following discussion questions:

1. What did you hear God’s Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. Why can’t flesh and blood inherit the kingdom of God?
4. How did Jesus break the power of sin? Why does that take away “the sting of death”?
5. If you’re in Christ, you have nothing to fear from death. How does that make you feel?
6. The missionary David Livingstone was once asked about “leaving the benefits of England behind” and the sacrifice required to move to Africa. He famously replied, “I never made a sacrifice.”¹ How does this week’s passage motivate that kind of perspective?
7. What work of the Lord have you sensed God calling you to? Are you ready to be purposefully responsive?

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/i-never-made-a-sacrifice>