

MYSTERY AND VICTORY

1 Cor 15:35-58

Key Verse: 57, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Happy Easter! Today our text comes from the last part of chapter 15. As you already know, the Apostle Paul was addressing those who had let their gospel faith become watered down by outside influences and worldly philosophies. As you heard through the messages of Jacob Kim and James Kim, Paul has been giving evidence upon evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was according to the Scriptures that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised on the third day. (1Cor 15:3-4). Paul told us of the more than 500 eyewitness accounts of Jesus resurrection (1 Cor 15:6). He also mentions his own eyewitness account (1 Cor 15:8). He also shows the disastrous consequences of not believing in the resurrection and the power available to believers who live with resurrection faith. He summarized this in one simple sentence. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (1Cor 15:22). Because of Christ's resurrection, believers are reassured that faith in His gospel gives us real power to overcome our sin and failures and keep walking step-by-step toward the kingdom of God. In today's passage, Paul reveals to us God's resurrection principal and mystery of our own resurrection that is to come. But more than that, it is about motivation and hope. What really motivates us to not give into temptation, to stand firm in the face of persecution, or to keep taking up the cross of mission day in and day out? It is God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. God has imparted to us Christ's victory over death. By faith, His victory becomes our victory. Today on this Easter Sunday let us be reminded of the glorious resurrected Christ, risen from the dead and of the victory that is ours in Him.

Let's pray. Father, on this day of celebration of Christ's victory over death and the grave open our ears to hear your words, our mind to understand them and hearts to accept them. Help us to live, not as defeated sinners, but co-victors with Christ who stands victorious over death and who imparts to us His victory and power to live our lives fully to Him and to His glory now and forevermore. Amen.

Part 1, An Extreme Makeover (35-49). Look at verses 35-37. ³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else." The first thing that Paul teaches us is that our current body is a seed of the body to come. But like a seed it must first be planted in the ground and die before it can come to life. This is the resurrection principal. Something must die, before it can be raised. Also, what is sown, is consistent with what is procured. You cannot sow a watermelon seed and expect an apple tree. These same principles apply to our lives. We are like a seed that is sown. At the time of death, the elements of our life are transferred from this life to the next.

The greatest example of what it means to sow our lives was Jesus. After His triumphal entry He said to the disciples, ²⁴ "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. (Jn.12:24)" Jesus sowed His life according to God's will to suffer and die on the cross for the sins of the world. Jesus did this to glorify God and sacrificed Himself like a kernel of wheat. Jesus sowed His body in obedience to His Father so that sinners like us may come to God. Jesus body did not remain in the grave forever; God gave Him a new and glorious resurrection body that could appear and disappear anywhere He wanted, He could walk through walls and ascend into the clouds.

According to Jesus there are two kinds of life; life that is sown and life that remains as single seed. It is worth taking a moment to consider how a seed is sown. When you plant a seed, do you then dig it up and move it somewhere else? A seed cannot be sown into too many different places. If you keep moving the seed around, it has a hard time to take root. But when a seed is sown it is sown in a particular place and becomes part of the ground, then new life comes out. Over the years, I have seen many young people who enjoy Bible study and Christian activities, but never want to make a real commitment to Jesus. They move here and there hoping something good will fall into their lap. But as seeds, we need to find our holy ground and plant ourselves there. Jesus wants us to live the life that is sown. Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever

loses his life for me will find it (Mk. 8:35).” It is good to study the Bible, but we must not remain as single seed. We must be a seed that is sown. Only then can we bear the fruit that God desires.

I know this because I was once a single seed. I grew up in a Christian home and accepted Christ when I was only 11. But, I mostly pursued my own dreams, believing I could serve Christ without really having to die. However, it was not possible. Eventually, I realized that the only way to hold Jesus was to let go of all my ideas and give my life over to him. Over the past 39 years, I have gradually made progress, in committing more of my life to Jesus. In spite of my slow progress, I love serving Jesus and His gospel ministry more and more every day. I am still a sinful man but my life is no longer a single seed life.

After giving us the principal of resurrection, Paul begins to address the specifics, or the resurrected body in verses 38-44. Just look at verse 38. “But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.” You only need to watch a nature show on television or turn the animal planet channel and see all the unique creatures that God created. Maybe you have taken your kids to see the new Disney movie Penguins. How a penguin can hold an egg for two months on the top of their feet in sub-zero temperatures. So many amazing creatures God has created.

Paul’s point is that it is no problem for God to create for us a resurrected body perfectly suited for everlasting life. Not only can God make earthly bodies, He can make all kinds of heavenly bodies as well. Now heavenly bodies are something I know I know a little but about. And I’m not just talking about my wife. No, I’m talking about the stars, galaxies, nebula, comets, planets, asteroids, quasars, black holes and all sorts of heavenly bodies. I used to study astro-physics, and these days one of my hobbies is astro-photography. I take pictures of the heavenly bodies. Here are some of my recent pictures.

We just need to look around, and see all the miraculous things God has created and you will know that giving us a new resurrected body is like child’s play for our Creator God. He can do like that, in a flash at the twinkling of an eye says vs 52. Paul’s point is that our earthly bodies will be replaced by resurrection bodies as God has determined. We are not destroyed; we will not be re-incarnated. We don’t become one with the universe. Our spirits are given a new resurrection body. **It will be the ultimate extreme makeover.**

Look at verses 42-44: ⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” These verses powerfully contrast the difference between our natural body and our resurrection body. Our natural body says Paul is perishable, dishonored, weak, and natural. We are all too familiar with these. We see evidence of this all around. Just two weeks ago a long time member of our ministry Sue Paul, who many of you know, tripped over a chair at our prayer meeting, fell and broke her hip. Two days later she had hip replacement surgery. It reminded me of just how weak and frail our natural bodies are. **In contrast to these natural bodies, our resurrection bodies, will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual.** This is good news. Does anyone who have a cold right now? Guess what? No more colds in heaven. No more sniffles or allergies. No more joint pain, or poor eye sight. No more bad knees or high blood pressure or high cholesterol. No more shingles or arthritis or cancer or aging or even bad breath. Isn’t it good news?

Now at this point it is important to note that Paul is talking to the Christian believers in Corinth. And we must remember what He said to them in verse 22. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” The key words are “In Christ” All those who die whether they are believers or non-believers will be raised to life and receive a resurrection body as God has determined based on how that life was sowed. Those who are in Christ shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven, those who are not will have eternal bodies, but they will bear the likeness of their father the devil.

This is made evident in several verses throughout Scripture the most obvious ones include John chapter 5 verses 28-29, Daniel 12:2 and Acts 24:14-15. Let me just read what Jesus said in John 5: “28 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done

what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.” Therefore, having an eternal, powerful and spiritual body is not the most important or even exciting aspect of our resurrection bodies. What matters is whose image that body shall bear.

To believers, verse 49 is the most exciting aspect of our resurrection body. Let’s read verse 49 together: "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man." If we bear in this life the image of Christ in our natural bodies, we also shall bear His image in glory. All the remnants of Adam are finally stripped away. As we become like Him death so also we become like Him in resurrection. It means we will be holy like Jesus. We will be obedient like Jesus. We will be passionate like Jesus. We will be loving like Jesus. We will be glorious and powerful like Jesus. Can you imagine being as humble as Jesus or as wise as Jesus? This is the real hope of every believer. It is far bigger than just the hope of an everlasting body, or even our own personal salvation or glorification. It is that we shall bear the image of the heavenly man Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen!

Part 2, He Gives Us the Victory (50-58). Here Paul reveals to us a mystery. Look at verses 51-53. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Now when Paul says, mystery he is not talking about a who done it mystery. A mystery in Scripture is something that was something that was previously hidden, but is now revealed by God. Paul has already told us in part what will happen to those who have died. When Christ returns, their bodies will be raised and made imperishable. But now Paul lets us in on a secret. He also reveals to us what happens to those who are still living when he returns. He says, “we will not all sleep” meaning we will not all die.

So we might have this question. Those who have already died, what happens to them in the meantime? Where are our loved one who have already died in Christ? Here is our answer. They are with Jesus. And when Jesus comes again, they will be coming with Him to receive their resurrection bodies. Then Paul says, “but we will all be changed” So now those who have died in Christ and those who are still alive when He returns, we all be changed. In a flash. In the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. Those who have already died will rise first, then those who are still alive. These details Paul explains further in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4:14-17. Here Paul’s emphasis is the relationship between our transformation and Jesus’ Second Coming, not all the details of His coming. Because of our relationship with Jesus, believers have hope for a glorious future, but for the enemies of God, His coming is a time of condemnation and eternal separation from God. Finally, the last enemy, to be destroyed by is death (26). Let’s understand something about death. Death is not a messenger of God like the grim reaper. Death is an enemy of God and Satan’s greatest ally.

Verse 56 reads, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” As long as we remain in these mortal bodies, we experience the sting of death, because we cannot satisfy the righteous standard of God’s law. I am told that if you get shot by a bullet, you may not realize it right away. Then moments later, you feel the sting of the bullet. In a similar way, we may not realize the impact that sin has inflicted on us, but at some point the impact and consequences of sin is inescapable as the Bible declares, “The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23a).” Not merely physical death, but spiritual death and separation from God in hell for eternity.

Another characteristic of death is fear. I know that most of you know what is the most important command in the Bible. It is to love God. The second is, love your neighbor. But do you know what is the most frequently repeated command in the Bible? It is “Fear not.” - “Do Not be afraid.” It is because the fear of death can make even the boldest of believers go into hiding. Fatalism, despair, sorrow, and anxiety are all just elements of death. What hope do we have when death can claim the life of anyone at any time? Our only hope is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, we shout, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Christ, death is not the end. When Jesus proclaimed on the cross, “It is finished.” (Jn 19:16b). Our hope was secured. The righteous requirements of the law were fulfilled through the shed blood of Christ. **And if Jesus death on the cross was the payment for sin, his resurrection was the receipt proclaiming paid in full!** The words written by Isaiah and Hosea are assured to come true. When Christ comes again, the perishable will be clothed with the

imperishable. The mortal, with immortality (54). The song of Christians shall be “ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ (55).”

Now if we hold firmly to the gospel we have believed as Paul said at the beginning of this chapter, then we have nothing to fear from death. Neither do we need to wait for His return before we can experience God’s victory over death. It is because He is already here. He is with me through the Holy Spirit every day. I may not have a resurrection body yet, but even now I can experience Christ’s victory over death and sin. It is because we have One who lives within us who is able to triumph over them all. That same resurrection power that allowed Jesus to defeat death and sin is available to us through Him. His victory has become our victory. Thanks be to God who has imparted to us Christ Victory through faith in Him! This victory does not come through our hard work. This victory comes to **us** only as we build our life on the victory that Christ attained on our behalf.

No matter how terribly we may mess up, or feel the sting of death it cannot effect what Christ has already done. It is finished. The battle already one. Every day we can start again with a sense of victory. In every situation we can get up and praise God for the victory Jesus has won for each of us. **Faith in Christ’s victory is the very definition of resurrection faith.** It is what enables us to keep going and going like the energizer bunny.

Also, notice Paul used the word ‘**us**’. He gives ‘us’ the victory. Resurrection faith is not only within each of us who believe, but also among ‘**us**’ as the body of Christ. We not only experience victory through Christ individually but we experience the greater victory together. We also have victory as we work together as the body of Christ.

Last weekend 9 chapters in our Great Lakes region joined together at our annual Spring conference with the title, “The Cross of Jesus.” It was perhaps the best regional conference we have ever had. It was not any one thing or person that made it great. It was because only together could we see the greater work of God beyond our individual chapters and find new ways to engage and support one another in God’s work, especially in supporting our house small house church ministries. Speaking of small ministries, Paul’s concluding statement seems to be a favorite among them. He says, ⁵⁸ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

I truly appreciate our house church ministries, who give themselves to God’s work, even though they are but one family trying to serve a campus of thousands. It must seem like trying to build a house with a couple of toothpicks. Jacob Kim’s parents M. Isaac and Rebekah Kim have been serving Akron ministry as a house church ministry for the past 20 years. Currently there are no faithful students attending. Still they are standing firm in Akron as their holy ground. Their labor in the Lord is not in vain, because Christ has already secured His victory on their behalf.

Truly, Christ’s resurrection changes everything. But the real question is, has it changed us? Let me conclude this message with a story as I always like to do. Imagine that your refrigerator has stopped working. Your ice cream is melting and your food is beginning to spoil. So you go to google and research how to fix your refrigerator. You find a manual for your model and it shows you all the parts of your refrigerator. You spend time studying this manual. And as you read the manual you attempt to apply what you learn. Yet no matter how much you apply from this book nothing seems to be working and your food spoils. Then someone comes up to you and gives you a suggestion. Why don’t you plug it in?

No matter how hard we may try, we are only wasting our time until we realize that without resurrection faith we just rot away like spoiled food, leaving behind a bad odor. But if we plug into the victory that Christ has attained on our behalf, then we can enjoy all the fruits of labor in the Lord. We can, die to our sinful nature, and plant our life seed into His holy ground where it shall grow to bear the likeness of the man from heaven and one day we receive our glorious resurrected body fit to enjoy Christ and his kingdom forever and ever. Amen.

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