

## 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

### INTRODUCTION

Someone has written this; see if you can work out what the writer is talking about before the quote tells you.

“There is a preacher of the old school but he speaks as boldly as ever. He is not popular though the world is his parish and he travels every part of the globe and speaks in every language. He visits the poor, calls upon the rich, preaches to people of every religion and no religion and the subject is always the same. He is an eloquent preacher often stirring feelings, which no other preacher could and bringing tears to eyes that never weep. His argument none are able to refute, nor is there any heart that has remained unmoved by the force of his appeals. He shatters life with his message. Most people hate him everyone fears him. His name? Death. Every tombstone is his pulpit every newspaper prints his text and someday every one of you will be his sermon.”

Death is still the subject that no one wants to talk about it is the one thing in life that is certain, and the one guarantee in life that we all have is that death will come to us unless Jesus returns. However for the Christian death holds no fears because Christ has been raised from the dead and has conquered death and therefore his resurrection assures us of our resurrection and his victory over death is applied to us. In concluding this marvellous chapter on the resurrection, Paul proclaims the victory that Christ’s resurrection brings for those who are united to Him by faith.

This final section has been called a victory song and it has been put to music brilliantly in Handel’s Messiah. As we look at it Paul gives us three reasons why we can praise God in anticipation of resurrection and he concludes the chapter by giving us a great exhortation to live holy and obedient lives until that day comes for our labour in never in vain.

### 1. THE TRANSFORMATION (vs. 50-53)

Paul reminds the Corinthians again that the resurrection body will not be flesh and blood, which though wonderfully suited for earth is not suited for heaven and therefore cannot inherit the kingdom of God (v 50). The term “the kingdom of God” is not used here either in its universal sense referring to God’s ruling of the universe or in its spiritual sense of God ruling in the hearts of his people but in its transcendent sense referring to the eternal state, to heaven.

Even Christ’s own earthly body had to be transformed before he could return to his Father in heaven. The human body is subject to decay it ages and deteriorates and eventually death will overtake it. The human body is perishable, it is not suited for and therefore cannot enter heaven, for it is perishable and therefore cannot inherit the imperishable.

It must be made different in order to inherit its new conditions in heaven. It is sown a perishable body but praise God it is raised imperishable. It is like the seed that is planted in the ground which dies and then grows into a beautiful plant. Although there is a clear link between the seed and the full-grown plant yet what grows from the seed is completely different from what was planted.

However although transformation takes place that seed, which is sown, cannot be anything other than itself so you cannot sow wheat and get barley. So it is with the human body, it dies and is raised from the dead and is transformed yet it is not someone else’s body that we have but our own. It will be similar (in that it is our own body that is transformed) and yet it will be completely different from our human body for it will be perfectly suited for our new heavenly conditions.

But this raises a question what about believers who are still living when Jesus Christ returns? Well Paul anticipates this question (v 51). He tells us a mystery but as we know the idea of mystery in

the New Testament always refers to that which at one time had been hidden and unknown but which is now revealed.

This mystery is that Christians who are alive when Christ returns will not have to die to be changed (v 51), for they will be instantly changed so that their bodies will be fit for their heavenly conditions. Whether people are dead or alive at Christ's return does not matter, whether people have been dead for days or thousands of years does not matter for we will all be changed, for the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable.

I said this change is instant for we are told it takes place in a flash in the twinkling of an eye (v 52). So this change will not be a process that will take years to complete but it will be instant. We will be changed from bodies that are only suited for living upon earth to bodies that are perfectly suitable for living in heaven and this will take the time it takes to blink. This change will take place at the last trumpet call, which is sounded to declare the King is coming.

It seems that in the bible, trumpets seem to perform two main functions. They call people together for an assembly and they warn people. Here it means the assembling together to meet the Lord, this is not a warning to the unbeliever for by this stage it is too late for when King Jesus comes we will meet him.

It is too late then to turn to him the time of opportunity will have gone that is why you must turn to Him today. Make no delay my dear friends turn to Him today. For when the trumpet sounds the dead will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed instantly (v 52). The perishable will become imperishable these mortal bodies will be clothed with immortality (v 53).

Don't worry my dear Christian friend you will not be left out, God will not forget about you or pass over you. On that trumpet blast when Christ returns then we will rise from our graves with imperishable and immortal bodies prepared to live eternity with body and soul united to worship and serve our God and our Saviour. If we are still alive then that is no problem either for God will see to it that we are instantly changed and we will not miss out in any way.

## 2. THE TRIUMPH (vs. 54-56)

Christ's resurrection broke the power of death for those who trust in Him. Death is no longer master over believers because death is no longer master over Christ (Romans 6:9). However death is still the great enemy of mankind even for Christians it is a great enemy for it breaks relationships, it disrupts families and causes untold grief.

Although Christians do not need to fear death it still invades our lives and affects us as we live our mortal lives upon earth. As long as we stay mortal then death will affect us. But praise God that one day when Jesus Christ returns the perishable will be clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality then the saying of Isaiah (Isaiah 25:8) will become a reality.

Isaiah's great shout of victory will be true for every one of God's people on that great and glorious day. Death will be swallowed up in victory (v 54), so when the great transformation takes place the great victory will come as well. When the Christian dies it seems like a victory for death and it feels like a defeat for the gospel.

But it only seems that way, Jesus however has died and rose again and has triumphed over death and one day when He returns we will be raised and death, which was defeated at the cross, will finally be put in its place.

Paul it seems taunts death here by quoting from Hosea 13:14. "O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting?" If I may continue with this metaphor what Paul is implying is that death

left its sting in Jesus as a bee leaves its stinger in its victim. Jesus bore death's sting in order that we would not have too. To make his point Paul reminds us that the sting of death is sin (v 56).

The sting in death is caused by sin in fact death itself is caused by sin. Only where there is sin can death deal a fatal blow but praise God where sin has been removed death can only interrupt our earthly life and usher us into our heavenly home. That is what Christ has done for all those who trust in him for salvation.

He has defeated our great enemy of death and He has done that by dealing with our sin through his death and through his resurrection. Sin has been removed from us therefore death's sting has also been removed from us. This of course does not mean that Christians do not sin, but it means that the sins we commit are already covered by Christ's atoning death on our behalf so that the effects of those sins are not permanently fatal (1 John 1:7).

However for those who refuse to believe in Jesus for salvation then death's sting tragically remains forever. That sting is ultimately judgement and eternal punishment in hell.

Paul continues to remind the church about the power of sin by telling us that the power of sin is the law (v 56) God's law reveals God's standards and when those standards are broken then sin occurs. If there was no law then there could be no sin for how could we sin if we have no lawful standards to meet. (Romans 4:15). But the truth is that we all die because we have all broken God's law.

That law can be written down so that it can be read or it can be communicated by faithful preachers or even if someone has never read or heard of God's law Paul tells us in Romans that it is actually written within the hearts of men and women. We all know right from wrong for our conscience reminds us of our wrong doing even before we may know it is against God's law (Romans 2:14-15).

Therefore death has a sting, which is caused by sin and sin is the breaking of God's law. But Jesus Christ has come into our world and has lived died and rose again to take death's sting upon himself so that all that are united to Christ through faith are able to say

"Where O death is your victory, where O death is your sting" (v 55)

Can you say that my dear friends? Do you trust in Jesus' death and resurrection for forgiveness? If so then because Christ has defeated and conquered death then you will do likewise. But perhaps there is someone who has not yet come to trust in Christ for salvation then can I plead with you to do so, and do so now for when that trumpet sounds then it will be too late for you.

### 3. THE THANKSGIVING (v 57)

Because of Jesus' perfect obedience to God's law and the atoning sacrifice of his life for sinners, sin and death has been conquered. Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf and therefore because He was sinless his death and resurrection conquered sin and all its consequences.

Paul gives thanks here to God, to the God who will bring about our great transformation and He will do this through His beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death on our behalf; He has triumphed over it and has done what we were powerless to do on our own.

We cannot live sinless lives and therefore we break God's law. Every one of us breaks God's law and that makes us sinners. The consequence or the sting of sin is death and every one of us is subject to it. There is nothing we could do to reverse the situation.

It would be doom for us all if it was not for the fact that God sent his Son into the world to conquer sin and death and to pass that victory on to all who turn to Jesus and trust him for salvation. You know today our nation is living in the victory that was won during the Second World War. Men and women gave their lives so that we could live in freedom.

That should make us grateful to those people who willingly served their country. But in a much greater way Jesus has won the victory over sin and death and all that are trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation are living in that victory won by Jesus.

Therefore how can we who are born again do anything other than praise and thank our God for what He has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ. The result of Jesus victory is that one-day we will be raised imperishable and will live body and soul in heaven praising and serving our God. Our resurrection is absolutely assured because Jesus has gained the victory over sin and death through his death and resurrection. As a consequence death has no power over Christians because God has taken away our sin. For Christians, death is the passing from this temporary life with all its mortality to our permanent home where immortality reigns.

The only reason why we should ever want to stay on this planet in our mortal bodies is to serve our God and to spread his gospel so that others might know what it is to have their sins forgiven and the sting of death removed. This brings me to my final point.

#### 4. THE EXHORTATION (v 58)

Now if we really believe and if we are truly thankful that our resurrection is sure then that will affect how we live in the here and now. It is because of what Christ has done and because of the fact that we will one day rise from the dead and be changed that we are encouraged to stand firm and to give ourselves to the work of God.

We are to stand firm and be immovable as far as our belief in the resurrection of the dead is concerned. Many in the church at Corinth were trying to move the church away from this belief but Paul says that once they were convinced of the resurrection of dead then they should not be moved from it.

As we have discovered Christ's resurrection is clear evidence that the dead do rise therefore nothing should move the church away from such a core belief. Without the resurrection of the dead then Christ is not raised and we are still in our sins and therefore the sting of death remains for every one (v 17).

We live in a day when the resurrection is no longer attacked as it once was because quite simply people no longer believe in a resurrection. The idea that death is the end for everyone is a view that is presented within our world. I say it is presented and not necessary believed because I believe that most people like to believe in life after death. Sadly people's thinking on life after death is seriously flawed.

But the view of there being no resurrection is presented so that we do not have to face up to Jesus' resurrection and to the reason for it which was to deal with sin and death. But as individual Christians and as a church we are to stand firm and immovable when it comes to the resurrection. We are to contend for it, preach it and live in such a way that people know we believe in the resurrection.

Now because there is a resurrection of the dead then we are to give ourselves wholly to the work of the Lord for we know our labours are not in vain. If there was no resurrection then our work

would be in vain, it would be a waste of time for as Paul has shown in this chapter if there is no resurrection then Christ has not been raised and we are still in our sins and heading for hell.

What would be the point in working for a dead Saviour and a God who will only punish us at the end of the day because of our sins?

However the dead are raised because Jesus was raised and conquered sin and death therefore we have a glorious message to share. We have a message that offers forgiveness for sin and eternal life to sinners. A message that offers a certain hope beyond the grave, a message that removes the fear of death from us and gives us an assurance of heaven.

You see once we have confidence in the resurrection then that will be reflected in our work for the Lord. Is this not a rebuke to so many of God's people who work and pray and give so little to the cause of Christ? This is a challenge to those Christians who seem so preoccupied with this world and with the things of this world. How can so many Christians in our day be so content to take life easy when so many around us are dead spiritually and in desperate need of this live giving message? No Christian can ever say I have done my bit let someone else can do the work now. You know the words translated "always give yourself fully" carries the idea of exceeding the requirements, of overflowing or overdoing.

So Christians are to overdo their work for the Lord we are to do more than is reasonably expected. The reason for giving such energy to our Lord is that Jesus has died and rose again and conquered sin and death so that we are to enjoy his victory for all eternity. It seems to me that no Christian has any excuse for apathy or for doing their bit and no more. For we are encouraged to do more than we are expected to do because we know that whatever we do is as a result of what Christ has done for us.

Finally we must always remember that our work is never in vain. Our work cannot fail to accomplish what God wants it to accomplish. It might seem at times to be unprofitable and there are times when it seems that our work is achieving nothing of any worth yet we can rest assured that God's work done in God's way is never a waste of time.

So let us hold firm to this truth of resurrection and then let renew our commitment to our God, to pray and give and work beyond reasonable requirements. As we do remember that sin and death have been conquered and our labour and toil will never be in vain.

Amen