Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Victory over Death
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58
Code: 1882

Take your Bible if you will, and let's look at the 15th Chapter of 1 Corinthians. This is our last message in this Chapter. We're going to close out the 15th Chapter of 1 Corinthians, and we've had a great time. Time passes so fast. We're getting to the end of the book. Just one chapter to go. 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 and we're going to see verses 50 through 58 this morning.

Last Easter when I preached at the sunrise service at the Hollywood Bowl, I began with the words of another preacher. I think it fitting for this text if I repeat those this morning. 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 of his sermon is always the same. He is an eloquent preacher, often stirring feelings which no other preacher could in bringing tears to eyes that never weep. His arguments 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 some day everyone of you will be his sermon.

Thomas Gray looking at death, said the boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, and all that beauty and all that wealth err gave a way to like the inevitable hour, the paths of glory lead, but to the grave.

Men fear death. Thomas Gray says, it all ends in the grave. Maybe that is the unhope of the world, but it is not the hope of the Christian, and that's what we've been seeing in 1 Corinthians 15. For the Christian, all of the fear of death is cancelled in the hope of bodily resurrection. We've learned, haven't we, that we're going to go into that grave and come out the other side glorified in new bodies for heaven.

I remember as a little boy my father taking me to Christ Church in Philadelphia, which is a famous old church where many of the founding fathers of America and those who signed the Declaration of Independence attended. I remember sitting in the pews of various famous people. It's not far from Independence Hall. Some of you may have been there.

And I remember going to Christ Church Cemetery, which is down the block a little bit and reading the epitaph written on the tomb of Benjamin Franklin. Benjamin Franklin composed his own epitaph before he died and had it placed on his grave at his death. This is what it says. "The body of Franklin,

printer, like the cover of an old book its content torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding lies here food for worms. But the work will not be lost for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant edition revised and corrected by the author."

That's the truth for the Christian. Over the magnificent mausoleum that holds the mortal remains of Queen Victoria and those of her royal husband whom she loved very dearly are inscribed these words. "Here at last I will rest with thee and with thee in Christ I shall also rise again." That's the Christian's hope, and that's the whole message of 1 Corinthians 15. That's what he's saying here.

Now the skeptics have come along today as they did in Corinth and denied it and that's what Paul is answering verse 12 of the Chapter. "How say some among you that there is no resurrection?" Let's straighten this out. In verse 35, and how are these people supposed to...to get away with saying these mocking statements like "How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?"

They don't seem to think it's possible for God to create a new body. They want to deny and scoff and mock at the resurrection and so Paul in answer to these critics, these mockers, these skeptics has given us this great chapter of 58 verses, the longest in the book, in order that we might affirm the confidence in the resurrection.

And of course, the basis is that Christ has risen and become the first fruits of all of those who sleep. And so Paul has given us all this great truth about resurrection. He's talked about the evidence of resurrection in the first section. The importance of resurrection, the sequence of it, the value it. He's even described the body of resurrection and now he comes to the section which was just as literally the praise section in response to all of the truth that he has already talked about.

A celestial symphony ought to accompany this section. Handledid write music to it. And it should probably be sung rather than preached because it's just pure praise. But as we look at verses 50 to 58 and we see the praise of the apostle over the anticipation of resurrection, I want you to note four lines that he follows. The great transformation, the great triumph, the great thanksgiving, and finally the great therefore.

First of all the great transformation. As he begins to think in his mind and as he begins to let himself fly a little bit, as he begins to soar on the wings of the reality of resurrection, then he comes first of all to the thought of the great transformation that resurrection is going to be. What a tremendous difference. Verse 50, "Now this I say brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

In other words, we've got to be transformed. We've got to be different in order to dwell in that domain. We won't be earthy like Adam, as he's been talking about in the previous verses. We'll be heavenly like Christ. Verse 49, he says, "We have born the image of the earthy Adam, we shall also bear the

image of the heavenly Christ."

We've got to be transformed for that existence because verse 50, "flesh and blood," and that is simply a term to describe the physical body. It is used such exclusively in the New Testament. It is used in Hebrews 2:14 to describe human beings and Christ who became a human being. It says, "And they were partakers of flesh and blood and so was He." It's talking strictly about human flesh. Being a human being.

And so that's what he's saying, human beings flesh and blood, natural beings cannot enter the kingdom. And the idea of the kingdom of God here is not the kingdom of God in it's universal sense through the whole universe, the rule of God. It's not the kingdom of God in it's spiritual sense, the reign of God in the heart, it is the kingdom of God in its consummate sense in the eternal state.

And he is saying we cannot enter the eternal kingdom in bodies like this. We've got to be transformed and you remember really that's a link with the past section, isn't it? And last week we went into great detail to show how Paul describes this body of transformation, this unique new body that won't be like this one. It won't be a body of flesh as we know it. After all our flesh has to be recycled every seven years and every time we get a new set, it's worse than the one before, because decay is involved.

But in that day we won't be flesh and we won't be blood like we know it. The component parts of blood are dependent upon the other elements of human existence for their production and will not be human so we'll not have blood as humans have it. Something different, supernatural.

Verse 42 says, "It's sown in corruption, but it's raised in incorruption. It's sown in dishonor, it's raised in glory, it's sown in weakness, it's raised in power. It's sown in natural body, but it'll be raised a spiritual body." That is one accommodating itself to the spiritual dimension. It doesn't mean just a spirit. It's a spiritual body. So a tremendous transformation has to take place. And Paul has said death becomes the planting of that seed. And like a seed goes into the ground, so when you die you go into the ground as it were and out of the decomposition and deterioration of that seed springs new life bursting through the soil so shall it be in the resurrection. The believers are going to come out of the grave in new life with a connecting link, the same life. There'll be some union, some connection, some continuity, and yet there will be a great different. We'll be unique for the spiritual dimension.

Now all of this is thrilling, but it raises a serious question. And the question it raises is this, well if this is such a big thing Paul, and we're going to get changed in the resurrection and we're going to go into the ground and we're going to die and then resurrection brings us out, what about the people who don't die? That's the question.

What happens to the Christians who don't get into the ground? I mean, and Christ returns and the time of the resurrection, what happens to them? Oh he says, that's easy. Verse 51, "Behold I show

you a mystery. We shall not all sleep." And what does sleep mean? It means to die, doesn't it. "We shall not all die, but we shall all be," what, "changed."

In other words the're not going to die, but they will be changed. That's right. That answers the question. They're going to be changed. That because there's no way to dwell in the incorruptible, immortal kingdom of God in a mortal corruptible body. Got to be changed. Some of us will go into the ground and be changed and the moment we come out of the grave, others will be changed on the way up. I'd like to hang around for that. Wouldn't you?

I really don't...I don't want to die, and I think maybe it's because I don't want to miss the things that are going on. I don't like to take a nap even, because I might miss something. Are you like that? I got to be alert, things are happening. Now, if I die, I...I'm not saying I won't be busy in heaven, but I...I don't know, I'm connected here. I'd like to see what's going on until Jesus gets here.

And I don't look forward to the agony and the pain and all that and the sorrow. I just...and all the flowers and the casket and all that, that costs a lot of money. I'd just assume wait for the rapture. And I'm not worried about not getting into the ground and getting my seed decomposed, because I'll just get changed on the way up. That's what he's saying.

"I'll show you a mystery." What do you mean, Paul? What's the mystery? Well, a mystery is not something you can't understand, it's something for the first time you can understand. Musterion is used in the New Testament to speak of that which has been hidden and is now, what, revealed. So he's saying, I'm going to tell you a whole new thing folks. There will be a rapture and there's a good forerunner to that and that's Enoch and Elijah, because they just took off one day and walked up into heaven and got changed on the way up too. So they're kind of preliminary examples.

So he says, we're going to be changed. There's going to be a change on the way up. You say well, how does this happen? I mean, how does it take place? Well, verse 52 say this, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed."

Now he says, are we going to get changed? Well, it's going to be in a moment. Now the first thing we learned, is it's not a process. Okay? It's not some kind of a long drawn out metamorphosis. It's not some kind of an illusionary cycle that we have to go through. It is going to happen in a moment and the Greek word for moment is atomos, from which we get the word atom. Which really, in the Greek, simply meant the smallest possible particle which could not be divided. Literally it means that which cannot be cut. Atomos, it cannot be cut.

In other words, in the smallest amount of time of which there is no smaller. In the most finite unit of time, we will be changed. It's going to be so fast you won't even realize it. And the minute it happens

you'll forget what you used to be. So don't get all worked up about watching yourself change, you know. It's not going to happen. It's going to hit so fast...in fact, it says in the next...just to help you understand that he says in a...in an atomos. Shortest possible time of which it is possible to have no shorter. You will be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Now, the twinkling is the not the blinking. The twinkling...one fellow said that I was reading, he said, the twinkling is the time it takes for the light to go from the iris to the retina. And apparently some scientist measured this and said it's 1/6thof a nanosecond. You don't know what a nanosecond and neither do I, but I'll try to help you. I decided...it didn't make much sense unless you know what a nanosecond is. I'll give it to you this way. Okay? You know what a second is, 1/1000th. Okay? A microsecond is one millionth of a second. Okay, that's a microsecond is one millionth of a second. A nanosecond is 1000thof microsecond.

And this going to happen in 1/6thof a nanosecond. You say why are you saying all that. I don't know, I just thought it was interesting. You listened, so some of you for the first time. Anyway...anyway, it's going to be fast, that's the point. We will be changed. The miraculous power of God goes to work. You say well I see it's going to be...we're just going to be changed on the way up. We...we don't all die, but at the time of the resurrection when the dead are raised to meet God, we just get caught up with them. We'll see that later in 1 Thessalonians 4.

And we'll be changed. And he says, it's going to happen at the last trump. At the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead in Christ or the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. You have in 1 Thessalonians "And here the dead being raised first and then we are changed."

Somebody says that's because they have six feet further to go and they want to come out at the same level, but I don't think that's true, because in New Orleans, they bury them above the ground. But anyway, I don't know why that is other than God is just saying you've waited the longest, you get to come first. I don't know. The last shall be first or something.

Now eschatology is a very interesting subject and people have studied trumpets in the Bible at infinitum. Trying to figure out what trump is what trumpet and which of the trumpets are these and that and the other. Well, when you see a phrase like the last trump, you don't have to assume that it's the last trumpet that will ever be blown forever. It certainly is the trump that ends the end of the church age. It is the trump that ends the end of the struggle with death. It is the last trump in the sense of it's relation to resurrection. It is the final summons.

Now, the trumpets in the Bible are used for many things. Sometimes to assemble people for festivity, sometimes to assemble people say for...for the triumph that wants to be announced over a great victory in a war, but sometimes trumpets are used to assemble people before God. To summon

people to God.

Now you go way back for this to the 19th Chapter of Exodus and here you were introduced to this thought. Exodus 19, and of course, it's time for Moses at the foot of Sinai and the people of Israel to listen to God and "So it came to pass," it says in Exodus 19:16, "on the third day in the morning that there were thunders" and God is really letting them know He's up there on Sinai, "that there were thunders and lightenings and a thick cloud on the mount." Now watch, "and the voice of the trumpet exceedingly loud so that all the people that were in the camp trembled."

Now watch verse 17, "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God." Now the trumpet is used then in this situation to summon people to God. To gather God's people to himself. In Isaiah Chapter 27, you have it also. I think it's 27 and verse 13, right.

And in 27:13, it says this, "And it shall come to pass," it's talking about the kingdom, the millennium, the future, "shall come to pass in that day that the great trumpet shall be blown and they shall come who are ready to parish in the land of Assyria and the outcast in the land of Egypt and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem."

And again, that's just a couple of examples and there are several others where God uses a trumpet to assemble His people to Himself. So some day all that are in the graves are going to hear that trumpet and they're going to come out and be joined with those who are going to be transformed on the way up in the resurrection.

You know, can you imagine what it's going to be like in that day when the graves start releasing their victims. I tried to imagine that and I was reading an interesting thing that came out of the Civil War. This is recorded by very old writer and this is what he says. "During the Civil War, a regiment of soldiers was compelled to sleep in the open field one winter night. In the early morning the chaplain arose and saw a very strange sight. During the night several inches of snow had fallen completely covering the tired, slumbering soldiers who were bundling in their blankets and thus caused the entire field to be filled with many small bounds like newly made graves. The bugler sound revelee and almost instantly a soldier came forth from each mound. And the chaplain thought of 1 Corinthians 15:52, "The trumpets shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed."

Paul says don't worry about those that are dead and don't worry about those that are alive. They're all coming out. Now there are several other passages that talk about this same rapture truth. Let me just point them to you for just a brief moment. Chapter 14 of John and verse 1. Just a couple of points that maybe you ought to know.

"We're all going to be changed." By the way the word changed is the same word used in Hebrews 1:12 to speak of the way the creation will be changed. The creation wax is old as the garment and it's going to be changed too. So the same kind of change is going to happen in the new heaven and the new earth that's going to happen to us. We're going to be made different.

Now this rapture...this great resurrection and the raising of those that are here is spoken of in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions," it says. But it means rooms. The Greek is rooms, many rooms. You can't have mansions in a house. You have rooms in a house. "If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you," here it comes, "I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there ye maybe also."

Now here Jesus gives us a word regarding the resurrection day. I'm up there preparing for you. I'm going to come and receive you to myself. The great truth of the rapture is that it's Christ coming. We're not looking for an event. We're looking for a person. And I want you to notice something. He says, "I'll prepare a place for you." We've had this misconception that heaven's full of these different houses and so forth, but what Jesus is really saying here the word to prepare a place for you doesn't mean to construct, doesn't mean to build, it doesn't mean any of those things. What it means is to equip or to furnish. And what he's really saying is in my Father's house are many rooms and I'm busy furnishing one for you.

That's the imagery. And he says, "if I'm doing that I will come again and I will receive you unto myself that where I am there ye maybe also." See it's all connected to Him. He's coming for us, this same Jesus who is taken up from you. Acts 1:11 says "shall so come in like manners you've seen Him go."

So Christ is going to come to take us the dead, the living and we'll all be changed. Paul said to Titus in Titus 2:13 "We're looking for that glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We're not looking for an event. We're looking for a person who will change us.

Now in 1 Thessalonians 4 the apostle Paul gives another detail or two about the rapture, just to look at it from the other side. Now I want to...think with me for a minute will you? Get your head on a minute here. Now remember the issue in 1 Corinthians? The issue in 1 Corinthians is what happens to the people who don't die? How do they get their change if they don't go into the ground like the seed and come out? And Paul answers that by saying they're changed on the way up.

Now the Thessalonians they knew about the change on the way up, but they didn't know about what happens to the people that die. They were in the very opposite situation. So they were all sitting around, you know, waiting with great anticipation, Chapter 1, verse 10 says "waiting for the appearance of the Son." They were all anxious. They were really super rapture conscious, ready to go and their question was "what about the people who are dead will they miss the rapture?" So they

asked the very opposite question. And he says no, verse 15, "We who are alive and remain under the coming of the Lord will not precede them who are asleep for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout," and that's the word for a military command. It's the same word used in John 11 when Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave and He may say the same thing, "come forth," only this time He won't qualify it by saying Lazarus. It'll just be "come forth church," out they'll come.

And then the voice of archangel, you say who's the archangel, that's Michael. And what's the voice about? He's probably shouting his head off because he's so glad the grave yields up the saints and then the trump of God and the dead in Christ rise first and we are alive and remain caught up together to meet them with the...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So those three passages, John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4, and 1 Corinthians 15 are the passages in the New Testament related to the rapture.

They cover both sides of the question. If you're dead, that's fine, you're going to come out of the grave with a glorified transformed body. If you're alive, you just get changed on the way up and that is the great transformation. What a day that's going to be. And it has to be...it has to be...look at verse 53, "Why for this corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality," because it could not occupy the kingdom in its mortal, corruptible frame.

So Paul says let me let you on a secret never revealed before. A whole generation of believers who will still be alive at the time of the resurrection in their natural bodies will be taken up in an instant transformed into a glorified body without ever dying. That's the mystery revealed. The great transformation.

That leads us secondly to the great triumph. This is the triumph folks, when this happens, death is vanquished. The triumph occurs. Verse 54, "So," to key words here, "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

In other words, when this happens, when the great transformation comes then will the saying come true and the Hebrew literally says death is swallowed up forever. And I say Hebrew because it's a quote from Isaiah 25:8. Paul always uses Scripture to confirm his word, his message.

So he's saying when the transformation comes, the triumph can be proclaimed. Death is swallowed up forever and the term swallowed has to do with total destruction, total end to death. Now death is not yet swallowed up. No, when this corruptible shall put in incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality, then will come to pass the saying death is swallowed up. Death is still an enemy, you know that. It is.

We may not fear death, but there's a sense in which death still violates us. It still violates our dominion. It still breaks long love relationships. It still leaves unfinished symphonies. It still removes those that are greatly needed. It still pounces on the blushing baby cheek and the aged wrinkled face. It still snatches souls and draws them into Hell. Death is still an enemy even though we who are Christians have no fear. It's still invades us and can hit us with a tremendous blow. But there's coming a time when the resurrection happens, then we can shout that Isaiah 25:8 has come to pass and the Hebrew literally says he will swallow up death forever.

And that's a great thing. Linski, commentator says this, "Death is not merely destroyed so that it can't do further harm while all of the harm which it has wrought on God's children remains. No, the tornado is not merely checked so that no additional homes are wrecked while those that were wrecked still lie in ruin. The destruction of death is far more intense. Death and all of its apparent victories are undone for God's children. What looks like a victory for death and like a defeat for us when our bodies die and decay shall be utterly reversed so that death dies in absolute defeat and our bodies live again in absolute victory."

In other words, death is not just defeated from doing any more harm. Everything it's ever done is undone. Death is swallowed up forever. The incredible wonder of this triumph causes Paul to taunt death in verse 55. He taunts death. "Oh death where is thy sting? Oh death," literally the Greek says, "Oh death twice where is thy victory?" The word grave is not in the Greek.

"Oh death where is thy sting?" Oh death where is thy victory?" And he taunts death, he feels so triumphant. And by the way that's a paraphrase of Hosea 13:14, so again Paul is using Old Testament Scripture. "Where is thy sting? Kentronin the Greek, it has to do with the sting of a bee, stinger of a bee or a poisonous serpent snake.

After that day death will have no sting. The stinger's removed. You know frankly, for the Christian in the truest sense when death plunged it's stinger into Christ at the cross, it left it's stinger there. And Christ bore the whole sting of death for us, so the death for us has no sting.

It's still an enemy, it still buzzes around and makes you dodge a lot, but it can't sting any more. It left it's stinger in Jesus Christ and it's been flopping around in the throws of death ever since. Now he goes on to interpret because Paul at heart is basically an interpreter of Scripture and he can't get too far into praise without a little interpretation. So he slams in verse 56.

By the way folks, a little theology wouldn't hurt. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." You can't resist introducing some theology into that. What do you mean, Paul, "The sting of death is sin?" Listen, I'll tell you what he means. It's not death that harms. Death doesn't harm us. Really, it invades our world and we have to dodge it a little bit. We have to recover from what it does, but it doesn't ever really harm us unless there is sin there. The sting of death is sin. Now what that

means is wherever there is sin, death can give a fatal blow, but wherever sin has been paid for, forgiven, and removed death has no sting.

And so we say on the behalf of a believer there is no sting in death, because the sting of death is sin and sin in the case of a Christian has been removed. Is that true? It's forgiven. So all death can do is buzz around and annoy you a little. It can't sting. The sting of death is sin. And if you're a Christian, Jesus bore all your sin. He already took the sting. If you're a Christian he forgave it all. If you're a Christian there's not one sin imputed against you. If you're a Christian, the Bible says "who is he that condemneth, shall God that justifies?" The Bible says "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ." There is no sin against your account. God has forgotten it. He's buried it in the seas, removed it as far as the east is from the west.

1 John 2:12, he's forgiven you all your trespasses for His name's sake. There's not sin there. So for the believer there's no sin, there's no sting. Now that doesn't mean you don't commit sins as a Christian. It simply means that they're already covered. They're already forgiven. They're already paid for. You see death has already killed once for you sin. And who did it kill? Christ. That's all, it's done. Now if you're not a Christian and there's sin in your life, then you've given death the right to sting you with a fatal blow.

On the other hand he says, "the strength of sin is the law." "The strength of sin is the law." You see what it is that makes us sinners is that God has certain principles. If God was up there saying I don't really care what you all do. You can all just do whatever you want and I don't really have any rules at all. Just...just have a nice time. There wouldn't be any sin would there? Well, there wouldn't be any rules. But God has said this is right, this is wrong, this is right, this is wrong, this...and therefore God has set up standards that makes sin a reality.

Now you say oh my, I don't know what those are, I've never read the Bible. Well, you don't need to read the Bible to be responsible. God's planted them in your conscience. The law of God written in your heart as Romans 2 says. So while God has deposited His law in the heart of man, as well as in the word of God, He has laid down rules and it's against those rules that sin is manifest. And once sin is manifest then the sting is given to death and the only way to eliminate that sting is to have that sin taken care of. And that's why Jesus died.

Jesus died in order to take for you and me the sting. And if put our faith in Him, He's taken it for us and death has no sting. And even though we break the law, the penalty is paid. So the strength of sin is the law. And then sin becomes the sting of death.

But Christ has fulfilled the whole law, Christ has paid the price for sin, death's sting is removed in the case of a believer. Read Romans 5 where Paul says that where there was no law, sin was not imputed. Read Romans 7 where Paul says that when sin came, then I died. When I saw sin then I

died. Then I knew the problem and I didn't know sin he says in Romans 7 until the law came. The commandment came.

So the law of God is the standard that reveals the sin and the sin is the thing that gives death its sting. And by the way the smallest sin gives the sting to death. Smallest one, you don't have to be a criminal. Smallest sin, unforgiven. Unaccounted for, unrepented of, smallest sin in the life of an unbeliever is enough to cause the fatal blow. But Paul says death is swallowed up forever for the one is the promised...who has the promise of resurrection in Christ.

So the great transformation leads Paul to the great triumph. The triumph of life over death. The triumph of forgiveness over sin. The triumph of grace over law. That leads him to the third thing, which I call the great thanksgiving, the great thanksgiving. Verse 57, "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, well, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for sin. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law of God. He took care of those elements in 55 and 56. This sounds exactly to me like Romans 7:25. "Who shall deliver me from this body of this death?" Christ, and he goes in that great statement about Christ.

Christ is the one who causes us to have victory. So thanks go God, he says look, I can't remove the sting of death myself. I can't do anything about the consequence of violating God's law. All I can do is thank God that He gave us the victory as a gift in Jesus Christ. You see. If you...if you are a sinner and you are, there's only one way to eliminate that sin and that's through faith in Jesus Christ and apart from that, death has it's sting and it will deliver to you a fatal blow.

The work of Christ satisfied the law as claimed. The work of Christ paid the penalty for death. It says in Galatians 3:13, that he became a curse for us. He took the curse of the law and He's given us the victory. I love that. "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory." Listen even when a Christian dies, there's no sting. Why the apostle Paul said "for to me to live is," what, "Christ, and to do is gain. Far better," he said, "to depart and be with Christ." Why death is nothing.

Death is nothing. Death is just simply leaving here and going there to be with Christ. Death is our spirit ascending to the presence of Jesus waiting the day when the resurrection body joins us. Death is a friend. Death has no sting. We have a victory. The great thanksgiving.

Back in college I remember one time reciting a poem by James Weldon Johnson. It catches the emotion of this thought of victory over death, if not the explicit theology. Listen to what he wrote. "Weep not, weep not, she is not dead, she's resting in the bosom of Jesus. Heart broken husband weep no more, grief stricken son, weep no more, left lonesome daughter, weep no more, she's only just gone home.

The day before yesterday morning, God was looking down from His great high heaven looking down on all His children and His eye fell on sister Caroline tossing on her bed of pain and God's big heart was touched with pity with everlasting pity and God sat back on His throne and He commanded that tall bright angel standing at His right hand, call me death, and that tall bright angel cried in a voice that broke like a clap of thunder, call death, call death. And the echo sounded down the streets of heaven until it reached way back to that shadowy place where death waits with his pale white horse. And death heard the summons and he leaped on his fastest horse, pale as a sheet in the moonlight, up the golden street, death galloped and the hooves of his horse struck fire from the gold, but they didn't make a sound. And up death rode to the great white throne and waited for God's command.

And God said, go down death, go down to Savannah, Georgia, down in Yamacrawand find sister Caroline and bring her to me. She's born the burden in heat of the day, she's labored long in my vineyard and she's tired and she's weary. Go down death and bring her. And death didn't say a word, but he loosed the reigns of his pale white horse and he clamped the spurs to his bloodless sides and out and down he rode through heaven's pearly gates past suns and moons and stars on death rode.

And the foam from his horse was like a comet in the sky. On death rode, leaving the lightings flash behind straight on down he came. While we were watching around her bed, she turned her eyes and looked away. She saw what we couldn't see. She saw old death. She saw old death coming like a falling star. But death didn't frighten sister Caroline. He looked to her like a welcome friend.

And she whispered to us, "I'm going home," and she smiled and closed her eyes. And death took her up like a baby and she lay in his icy arms, but she didn't feel no chill and death began to ride again up beyond the evening star, out beyond the morning star into the glittering light of glory on to the great white throne and there he laid sister Caroline on the loving breast of Jesus. And Jesus took His own hand and wiped away her tears and He smoothed the furrows from her face and the angels sang a little song and Jesus rocked her in His arms and kept saying, take your rest, take your rest, take your rest, weep not, weep not. She's not dead, she's resting in the arms of Jesus."

Well, that's sentimental. But in a sense it's true, because that's the experience of the believer. That's the victory of death and then later when the body is joined, the fullness of life occurs. Death is disarmed, defanged, declawed, and destroyed. And so Paul says thanksgiving to God.

In Revelation 20:14, it says "death is cast into the lake of fire." In Revelation 21:4 it says, "in heaven there is no more death." So the great transformation and the great triumph and the great thanksgiving and now friends, we've been flying around in space and we've been soaring into the future and now we're coming down to here and now. Number four the great therefore.

The great therefore, verse 58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren," now when Paul starts getting lovey dovey, get ready. He's going to lay one on you. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast,

immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that you're labor is not in vain in the Lord." What he's really saying is listen brother if all this resurrection stuff is true, man that lays two big things on us. One stand true to work hard. If the resurrection is a reality, he says to the Corinthians, don't vacillate and don't let people shove you around and force you to think it isn't, be steadfast, immovable in your commitment to that reality.

And number two if it's true that we're going to live in the life hereafter, if it's true that there's an eternal kingdom, if it's true that only what we do that laying treasure in heaven in the future is going to matter, if it's true that that kingdom is everything and this passing, then you better start working for that kingdom. So he says two things, stand fast, work hard. Stand fast and work hard.

Gordon Clark has an interesting paraphrase of this. He says, "therefore we should mortify emotion, be steadfast, unchangeable, not erratic and scatterbrained, easily discouraged, and should multiply our good works in the knowledge that Lord will make them profitable." Every good work you do for God in this world has eternal ramifications, right?

"Behold I come quickly, my reward is with me to give to every man according as he works shall be." Everything you do is going to have eternal qualification and consequence when you do it for Him. It's winning someone to Christ or it's doing a good work for which there will be an eternal consequence. Everything you do for yourself is wasted. It's all wood, hay, and stubble.

So he says, look, number one stand true. Look at the two terms, steadfast and immovable. The word steadfast is an adjective that means sitting. Take your sit, fixed, settled, seated, firm, solid. Immovable a most interesting word. The root verb is kinemeand kineme the noun form and I'll just give you a little linguistics a bit.*Kinos* is German word for motion picture and the English word is a derivative of it, cinema. Comes from kinos, k-i-n-o-s. Cinema is c-i-n-e-m-a and so this root word means to be in motion, to be in motion.

But Paul says, be ahkinos. Be ah...in fact, he says, be ahmetakinos, which means to be super not moving. It's a bad translation, but you get the message. Be...don't be moving at all. Don't let me see a twitch. Don't be a motion picture. Don't let your theology be like that of Ephesians 4:14, "Children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine." Every day somebody sees you, you've a new theology. Don't be victimized. You settle it. You sit on it. You stand on it. You put your feet on it. You be immovable and steadfast that the resurrection is a reality and you stand for it.

Why? Because he knows this beloved that if ever the doctrine of resurrection waivers, we'll abandon ourselves to the living standards of the world, because if there are no eternal consequences we lose our motivation, right?

Stand on it and don't you let those people come and move you. You stand on that and then he says, now that you know it's true and you're standing on it, you ought to work hard with that in view. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

The word labor there means to work to the point of exhaustion and perspiration. To literally work so hard you are wearied. And notice this, always means what? Always, not when it isn't your vacation or before 5:00 or after 6:00 or whatever. "Always abounding," there's an interesting in the Greek, that means to overdo it. You say, oh?

That's what it means to overdo it. By the way it's the same word used in Ephesians 1 where it says "when God was gracious to you He over did it." Super abounded didn't He in all wisdom and knowledge and grace. Same word and He expects you to super abound in service. Listen if there is a reward and there is a kingdom there, and that's all true, then we ought to get with it.

How can we lose ourselves in the pettily stuff in this world it's going to fade away. It's going to pass away. What a word this is beloved for the thousands of Christians who work and pray and give and suffer as little as possible. You see you don't get the point folks. You better overdo it. People always say to me, you've got to slow down John. Listen, I've got to get going. I've got to overdo this.

Listen, I can rest forever. I'll find me a cloud and a harp and just take my time. But not here, I'm not interested. People say, you think you'll ever retire? Yes, when I'm dead and laid out. Not until. You know, if people don't even listen to me, I'll still go somewhere and holler. Like old Billy Bray said, "If they stuck me in a barrel, I'll shout glory out of the bundle hole." Whatever that is.

You know, I think we live in a world today where everybody's trying to tell us take it easy. We've got to have leisure. Listen, you know, that's really messed a lot of Christians. And I'm not against, you know, having a little time of recreation and stuff. Well, that's fine, but you know, there are some people who just fold up their tents, steal away into the night. Only their tent is a camper or a cabin somewhere.

I mean, they just say well, I've given the Lord so much. I'm going away and little for myself, we're going to do this. You know, and they hobby themselves right out of the kingdom activities. We got to be with it folks. Henry Martine went to India and said, "Now let me burn out for God," and he did before he was 35. David Braynor, went to the American Indians and was dead before he was 30 and his name goes on and on and the kingdom will be filled with the results of his work.

That's what matters. Work hard, man the work of the kingdom it's got to be done people. There are souls to reach, ministries to accomplish, and you've got to be a part of it. You've got to be in there. We need you with your funds, your mind, your body, your soul, your capacities, your gifts, investing that in God's kingdom.

So Paul's praise like so often in Paul's case ends with practicality. A great therefore. Resurrection's a fact, do you know that? It's going to come, and it has some tremendous implications for the present.

Let's pray. Thank you Father for our time this morning, for the encouragement of the word of God, for how it strengthens our hearts, how it gives joy, peace in the midst of anxiety to know that all things are in Your hand, there is a future, there is a resurrection, there is an eternal reward, and it has tremendous implications for how we invest our life here and now. May it be so, Father, that we give You the best. That we overdo it, that we work too hard for Your kingdom. That we literally exhaust ourselves in ministry. Whatever it is, wherever we are, counting first on what we know is true and standing on it and working hard for Your kingdom. Thank you for the resurrection You've promised us. May our gratitude speak in the way we live before we enter into that great anticipated hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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