

## **Victory Over Death**

**Sermon Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

**Study Text:** 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

**Sermon Recap:** The main idea of this week's sermon is: The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives His people victory over death and the promise of a future bodily resurrection. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

**Sermon Connection:** As we come to Easter each year, we remember what Christ has done for His people. That is, He came to earth in human form, lived the perfect life God demands, assumed the full weight of sin as He died on the cross, and, in victory, He rose to life on the third day after His death. We are moving into what is called "Holy Week." It is during this week that we remember the Passion of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Paul had this great truth in his mind when he penned all of his letters, and we see this particularly in writing 1 Corinthians 15. He wants to assure the Corinthian church of the guarantee of our eternal life with Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee that all who trust and follow Him will, likewise, receive the resurrection from the dead to a body that is imperishable and perfectly fit for life eternal in heaven. Paul picks up on this idea in 2 Cor. 5:1-10, noting that this earthly body is but a *tent* (a temporary dwelling) that we will one day lay down as we step into eternity with God. Such is our hope in Christ, and such is our motivation to live with full faith now.

### **Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** To see how the guarantee of the resurrection calls us to more faithful living now

#### **Lesson Points:**

**Point 1:** Groaning for the Future Hope of Heaven (vv. 1-5)

**Point 2:** Living in Light of the Future Hope of Heaven (vv. 6-10)

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<sup>1</sup> The Passion of Christ refers to His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection.

**The Context:** The Corinthian church was having difficulty understanding how our earthly bodies would be able to live forever with God.

**Opening Question:** Do you think often about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? If you are a Christian, do you think often of the fact that you, too, will one day be resurrected with Jesus forever?

**Transition Statement:** Paul's point is that the future hope of heaven and being with Jesus in our resurrected bodies should give us great hope here and now.

**Point 1 - Groaning for the Future Hope of Heaven** (vv. 1-5)

What does Paul mean when he says, "*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed...*"?

Paul's phrase, "*the tent that is our earthly home...*" simply means our earthly bodies. There are several metaphors Paul uses in this verse to compare earthly life and heavenly life. He describes our lives here on the earth as "tent life." The idea is that our lives are brief, they are not settled, they are temporary, etc. In addition, he notes that our lives here can, and one day will come to an end. Whether it be through natural causes, such as old age, or by some other means, the tent of our earthly home will come to an end. We need not find this troubling because of what he goes on to say...

Paul goes on to say, "*...we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" How does this help us to better understand 1 Cor. 15:53?

Here we see Paul's other metaphor. In contrast to the earthly tent we have now, God will give us, not a temporary body prone to disease and death, but a heavenly body that will last forever, free from sin, disease and death; Paul calls this a heavenly building. Unlike a temporary tent, we will have a firmly built building. This is the same truth Paul notes in 1 Cor. 15:53. That, in the resurrection, our perishable tent will put on the imperishable heavenly building.

Why does Paul state that we groan in this earthly tent (body)? Look back at 2 Cor. 1:8, 4:7-15; 6:4-10; 11:23-27.

Paul notes that we groan, and his point being that this is an ongoing experience for all humanity, that we are always groaning. It also carries with it the idea of deep stress and concern. As we look back through these other verses, we see some of the reasons for Paul's groanings. He has experienced affliction, confusion, persecution, being struck down, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, and hunger. Paul is right to groan; he is right to hold deep stress and concern. But, he does not dwell on these groanings. These groanings point us to the promise of a better future.

In the context of this verse, *groaning* is a distinctly Christian exercise. Why can Christians alone experience this type of groaning? See also 1 Thess. 4:13.

As we experience various trials and sufferings in this life, we do so with a God-given hope of resurrection and eternal life. We do not grieve as those with no hope. Even as we experience sufferings, hardships, and death in this life, as Christians we groan with heavenly conviction. We groan to God in prayer because we know He hears us. We do not despair for we know that there is a coming promise of eternal life.

What is Paul saying in v. 4 about the earthly body vs. the heavenly body? What should this teach us about the dignity and value of life and the body now?

Throughout history, and even today, some argue for the devaluing of the human body by over-valuing the spirit or the soul. In this verse, Paul holds the tension that we, being created in the image of God, are both body and soul. God will not destroy our body as we dwell as eternal spirits. On the contrary, as the verse notes, “...*not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed...*” There was present in Corinth, Gnostic teachings about the enslavement of the body, and putting off the body was thus a necessary part of attaining heaven. Paul was combating this idea by showing that the body would not be put off but glorified.

This truth has many modern applications as we seek to rightly honor the body as a creation of God, one that bears His likeness and dignity. Such doctrine applies to sanctity of life issues (abortion, euthanasia, etc.), burial practices, tattoos, piercings, surgeries, and any other issue that includes the body.

In v. 5, what is “*this very thing*” that Paul refers to? What role does the Holy Spirit play in teaching us about heaven and our heavenly bodies?

The “*thing*” mentioned here is the coming “further clothing” mentioned in v. 4. God is preparing us through the gospel to receive our heavenly body. The Holy Spirit has been sent now to begin the process of gospel salvation, whereby we are made more and more like Jesus. When this earthly life (tent-life) comes to a close, the Holy Spirit will carry us to heaven. We will be given our eternal bodies that are fully glorified, free from sin, free from disease, and perfectly fit to be with God.

## **Point 2 - Living in Light of the Future Hope of Heaven** (vv. 6-10)

Paul writes in v. 6, “*So we are always of good courage...*” or “*We are always confident.*” What is the truth/reality behind the courage and confidence of the Christian?

This is a great boast of confidence because of Jesus Christ. Paul knows that because Jesus has gone to the cross, died, and has achieved victory over sin through the resurrection, he has every reason to be confident and hopeful. He notes in 4:16-18 that we do not lose heart because God is sustaining us, day by day, preparing us for heaven with Him. In 1 Cor. 15,

Paul devotes an entire chapter of his letter to assuring the Corinthian church of the assuredness of the resurrection from the dead. Therefore, as he states, we have courage.

How does this courage and confidence free Paul from worry so that he might live boldly for the Lord?

The worst thing that can happen to us in this life is death. That seems somewhat silly and trite to say because death is a big deal. But, in light of the gospel and of the resurrection, death takes on a lesser meaning and holds a lesser consequence. When we die, if we die in Christ, we go to be with Him—this is what Paul says in v. 6. Therefore, knowing that death is but a step towards eternity with King Jesus, with Paul, we are freed to live bold lives of faith. As one commentator notes, “He [Paul] can abandon himself entirely to his mission because he knows that God will not abandon him in death, for he knows the Lord has determined a glorious destiny for him.”<sup>2</sup>

How does such a truth affect your life? How would such confidence change how you live?

Allow time for people to ponder and answer. Perhaps ask some pointed questions directed at your group in particular in an effort to drive this point home.

Paul says that while we are joined to Christ through the gospel now, we are not yet fully with Him (v. 6). How does v. 7 help to explain this present reality?

While we remain here in these earthly bodies, we know that we are not yet fully with Christ in heaven. There is, however, coming a day when we will be joined to Jesus. So, while we remain here, we walk by faith and not by sight. This is a continuation of Paul’s thought from 4:18 when he states, “...as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.” Our lives, in other words, are lived on the foundation of heaven and not the things of earth.

In vv. 8-9, Paul expresses an idea that he would rather be away from his body and at home with the Lord, but that something else is of greater importance. What is Paul saying here? See also Phil. 1:21-26.

Paul’s desire, expressed both here and in Philippians 1, is to depart this body (a metaphor for death) and to be at home with the Father in heaven (a metaphor for resurrection). This should be the desire of every Christian...to shed this earthly body, plagued by sin, sickness, weakness and disease and to step into eternity with God, free from sin. Yet, Paul says that over and above his desire to depart this life is his desire to bring glory to God (he says the same in Phil. 1:21-26). Our driving goal in life should be the continual glorifying of God.

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<sup>2</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians, New American Commentary on the New Testament* (Vol. 29, p. 264).

What coming reality does v. 10 highlight? How can we have any confidence knowing that this event is coming?

There is coming a day when every human—every man, woman, boy and girl—will stand before the judgment seat of God. We will not be able to vanish into the crowd, we will not be able to hide, and we will not be able to talk our way out of it. The chances that anyone might fool the God, Who knows even our subconscious thoughts, are zero.

Shepherding Note: Because many struggle with fear and anxiety over the thought of standing before God, here are four truths for Christians concerning this moment reproduced from the New American Commentary Series:

1. Paul reminds them that “immortality” is not something humans innately possess; our future life rests entirely in the hands of God who graciously bestows it on Christians after they have been judged for what they have done in this mortal body.

2. What humans do in the body has moral significance and eternal consequences. Everyone who is mindful of their mortality must therefore be mindful of their morality. Schweizer comments that the body, “far from being a burdensome envelope for the divine soul, is the very place where man is tested and in terms of which he will be questioned in the judgment.”<sup>708</sup> Our moral responsibility before God means that Christians can never be indifferent to such things as sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:1–13), trying to gain advantage over others in the courts of the unrighteous (1 Cor. 6:1–8), consorting with prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:12–20), dining at the tables of idols/demons (1 Cor. 10:14–22), or humiliating other brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Cor. 11:7–22). Paul sums it up in his warning in 1 Cor. 6:9–10: *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”* If we hope to be conformed to Christ’s glorious body in the next life, we must be conformed to His character in this life.

3. The reference to what we have done in the body refers back to 4:10, where the verb *phaneroō* also appears. “The suffering of the apostles ‘in the body’ is the means by which the power of God and the life of Jesus are manifested.”

4. We must hold assurance and warning in tension. On the one hand, we might be tempted to succumb to despair when we are lashed by one affliction after another. The promise of God’s transcendent purpose to deliver us from death as Christ was raised from the dead and the earnest of the Spirit sustains us. On the other hand, we might be tempted to become “puffed

up” and repose in false assurance. The certainty of God’s judgment (see 1 Cor. 3:1–17; 4:1–5; 5:1–5; 6:9–11; 9:24–27; 10:1–12; 11:27–34) should call forth our obedience.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Big Picture - Living in Hope**

The main point of the sermon is this: The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives His people victory over death and the promise of a future bodily resurrection. There is much in this life that gives us cause for worry, anxiety and stress without ever thinking about the life to come. We can become so easily overwhelmed with how hard this life can be. And yet, that is Paul’s point. In this life, this earthly tent as Paul calls it, we face hardship, struggle, and anxieties of various kinds. All these things teach us to long for the coming day when we lay aside this broken, earthly body and put on the imperishable heavenly building that God has prepared for us. While this promise is not yet realized, we know that God has sent His Spirit as a guarantee, a down payment to assure our hearts and minds. We know that when we die, if we die in Christ, we will go to be with the Father. As Paul notes in 1 Cor. 15, we must shed this perishable body in order to put on the imperishable, heavenly body. Therefore, we live in hope, we honor God, we preach and cherish the gospel.

### **Application Questions**

- In what ways are you hoping in the resurrection from the dead?
- What are some specific ways you can bring focus to the resurrection in your family during Holy Week (Easter)?
- In what ways are you teaching your children to look past death to the hope of eternal life with Jesus?
- How might your growth group intentionally engage your community with the gospel during Easter?

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Garland. *2 Corinthians, New American Commentary Series* (Vol. 29, pp. 266–267).