

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Introduction

Paul concludes his argument about the bodily resurrection in these verses, and brings the case to a glorious and triumphant conclusion. Then, as always, he applies the truth in a very practical way. These great truths have a steadying and stabilizing influence on the Christian life.

Details about what will happen at the second coming

We cannot enter the future state as we are. Something dramatic and miraculous has to happen to us. **Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God** (1 Corinthians 15:50). The present body, with all its weaknesses and tendency to decay, cannot enter heaven. We need something different. That is why we have to die. This is the pattern of nature. The seed has to die before it becomes a new plant and bears new fruit.

So death comes to all. Here it is referred to as a “sleep”, for the body is still and without movement, like in sleep (though the spirit is very much alive in the presence of God). Despite the grief at funerals, death is essential if we are going to enter heaven and have a new resurrection body like Christ’s.

But death will not happen to everybody. Some believers will be alive at the second coming. So Paul tells us what will happen. **Listen, I tell you a mystery** (1 Corinthians 15:51) – something revealed by God that we could never work out for ourselves. Those believers who are still alive at that time will undergo a great change, just as the dead will undergo a great change. **For the Lord himself will come down from heaven... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever** (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Body and soul will be in the Lord’s presence.

This is what will happen at Christ’s return. Whether dead or living, there must be an essential change of our bodies. It will be a very sudden affair. **In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye** (1 Corinthians 15:52). ατομος (our “atom”), which cannot be divided. In a split second, the shortest possible time. **For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** The trumpet was associated in ancient times with occasions of celebration and triumph. The “last trumpet” may be a reference to the Roman army – three trumpet calls were sounded when soldiers were about to move on after camping for the night, the first meant “strike tents”, the second “fall in”, and the third “quick march”.

In that brief moment the dead and the living are going to be totally changed. They will receive new resurrection bodies suitable for future life in the presence of God. **The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable** (1 Corinthians 15:53) - ενδύω - “put on”, like a man putting on a new suit. Death is not the end of it all. Far from it. It is a temporary halt and necessary stage on the way to glory. We get rid of our earthly uniform and put on the beautiful vestments of eternal life.

### The taunt which is cast at death

This is a marvellous change. Death will be finally beaten, **swallowed up in victory** (Isaiah 25:8). Devoured as a lion devours its prey. Overwhelmed by waves, and drowned. This is good news. Death is the last enemy, the thing we fear most, that has always haunted men. The famous Dr Johnson said to his friend Boswell that there was never a moment in which death was not terrible to him, and that life is one long effort not to think about it. And yet here Paul is taunting and laughing at death. **Where, o death, is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting?** (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Some say death is the king of terrors, for it has terrorized and cowed and tyrannized over every generation of men in all ages. There are three reasons – (1) fear of the unknown, (2) the loss of happiness, possessions and faces of those we love, and (3) a sense of sin and guilt. Fear of seeing all our sins, and having to answer for them, and pay the penalty for them. That is the sting. We have broken God's law repeatedly, and one day will come the reckoning. So death strikes terror into us. Not just the moment of death, but also its eternal dimension.

But here Paul is dancing round this great bully and tyrant, laughing and jeering and poking fun. Do your worst, I defy and despise you, for you are finished! Why? Because **He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Corinthians 15:57). On the Cross, He bore the curse of the law, the law which condemns us. He was made a curse for us. He has taken its penalty on Himself. So there is nothing against us (God, devil or man). The problem of sin, and therefore the fear of death and punishment and hell, are all dealt with. The final proof of the efficiency of Christ's death is that God raised Him from the dead.

We have nothing to fear. The threat has gone. The shadow has been lifted. We are in the clear.

*“...My fierce accuser,  
And tell him Thou hast died.”  
“When I soar to world's unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgement throne,  
Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.”*

In that great moment of the second coming, the incarnation, death and resurrection are consummated. The Gospel brings glorious liberation from sin, guilt, fear, death and curse. He gives us the victory even now. We enter more fully into the victory later, but start to enjoy it now. Because of Christ, the sting of death is drawn, disarmed, rendered harmless. There is no longer a curse and dread, but a gateway into glory. **There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus** (Romans 8:1). **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?** (Romans 8:33).

It all depends on the Lord Jesus Christ. He, through His death and resurrection and second coming, has turned the whole situation around. We are ever indebted to Him.

When Billy Bray was asked if he feared death and being lost, he replied, “Lost? Afraid? My saviour has conquered death. If I went to hell I would shout ‘Glory to Jesus’ till the bottomless pit rang. Miserable old Satan would say, ‘Billy, there is no place here for you. Go back at once.’ And the moment I entered heaven I would go on shouting ‘Glory, glory, praise the Lord’.”

### The encouragement which these truths bring

Now to the glorious climax – not only to this section, but also to the whole chapter. See the sweep of Paul’s argument – Christ is risen and alive. It was verified by many witnesses. This is the heart of the Gospel and our faith and our hope. The coming age will complete the work, and God will be triumphant over all. On the glorious resurrection day of recognition and reunion, the last enemy will be destroyed. All we need is in Christ, in order to enter a glorious eternal existence in the presence of God, with glorious bodies like Christ’s. If it depended on our hopes and power, we would have cause to be pessimistic. But as it is, we have new life now, and it will be wonderfully complete at his resurrection.

See the present life and struggles and setbacks and limitations against this background. Here is the answer for times when we are downcast. See time in light of eternity. Don’t give way or be downhearted. **Stand firm. Let nothing move you** (1 Corinthians 15:58). There is nothing more you need. Be resolute. Be steadfast. Don’t get upset and disturbed. Have stability. Don’t let selves be moved from moorings. The pressure on you is great, but don’t give way. See it all against the background of future glory.

*“When you look at others with land and gold untold,  
Think Christ has promised wealth untold.”*

**Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.** Be utterly immersed in the work of the Lord. Give selves without stint. Don’t stay on the touchline. Don’t waste time. Don’t throw life away.

A glorious day is coming. We are going to be vindicated. Our labour will be acknowledged by the only one who counts. He rewards in proportion to effort and labour. The Master’s commandments are to be heard. Think of that day when the full story of your life will be told. Live life and do Christian work as you want it to be seen and revealed on that day. We shall not think then that we worked too hard and did too much for the Lord. On that day we shall wish we could recall much of the time that we let slip through our fingers. We will wish we could recall lost opportunities for the Lord’s service, gained a greater knowledge of the Lord and His truth, been more generous in the Lord’s service, pursued holiness with greater zeal.

*“Dare to do right, dare to be true.  
Keep the great judgement seat always in view”*

How the theme of Resurrection and second coming and power and glory of Christ and future and heaven throw a whole new light on our present existence. It puts meaning into our present life. Everything is suddenly worthwhile. The yardstick by which to

assess the value of everything. If I do this, go there, say that.. how will it look in the light of coming glory?

The Christian's life is a life of purpose, meaning, abundance and enthusiasm. There is nothing cramped or narrow about it. Christian service is worthwhile and of eternal value. So labour in the Lord with confidence, in His strength, for His glory. Get a firm grip on God's truth about Christian death and resurrection and Return of Christ. Let this influence and change your whole life. Let it give you stability, firmness of purpose, put heart in you, make your life worthwhile, give meaning to all you do. The resurrection is not a theological curiosity, but a historical reality and a transforming power.