

Death Swallowed Up in Victory

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Date: 20 April 2025

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[0 : 00] All right, we're going to read together from God's Word from the New Testament. From 1 Corinthians 15, and that's verses 35 all the way down to 58.

So we have Bibles upstairs and downstairs. If you'd like to have a hard copy of God's Word today, feel free to grab one of those. It's also, the text is printed in the bulletin as well.

And then you can also read along on the screens as I read for us. So let's look at God's Word together. Paul writes, But someone will ask, how are the dead raised?

With what kind of body do they come? You foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or some other grain.

But God gives it a body as He has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same. But there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

[1 : 05] There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is another. Then there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars.

For stars differ from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown in natural body, it is raised, a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, the first man, Adam, became a living being.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is the first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust.

The second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust. And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

[2 : 09] Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable. And this mortal body must put on immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[3 : 20] This is God's holy word. For three weeks, we've been working through this chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. This is our final look at it here on Easter Sunday. And if I was to put it all together, 1 Corinthians 15 as a chapter, it's an argument.

And Paul is saying to every single one of us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us today a hope and future glory that is so certain that it can change us in the present.

So he's saying to us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a hope, a future glory, that's so certain that it has the power to change you in the present, to have an immediate effect on your life.

Right here. And so Paul's been making this argument, and he said that Jesus Christ really did die for the forgiveness of all sins. And he said he really was buried because he was actually dead.

And he really was raised from the dead, not just as a mere symbol, but physically, bodily, he was raised from the dead on the third day. And that means in his power, the Holy Spirit brings that to matter to us right here, right now, in 2025.

[4 : 33] The resurrection matters right here, right now, today. How? Two things, two ways. Number one, death has been defeated. Number two, you have hope today in a holistic glory.

So those two things, let's think about them. The resurrection matters right now because death has already been defeated. That's the first thing we learn here. Now, this is a formal argument Paul's making in this chapter, but he lands on the conclusion down in verses 54 and 55, and it's where he says this poetic form here, quoting from the Old Testament, the conclusion, death is swallowed up in victory.

Death, where is thy sting? So he's been making this very formal argument. It's been philosophical. It's in this Greek philosophical style that would have matched the Corinthian philosophical environment.

But then he gets to the conclusion. He just says, death, you've been swallowed up, Isaiah 25. Where is thy sting? No more. And so he enters into this moment where he taunts death, and then he just starts to worship.

That's his conclusion. Now, there is lots of argumentation and detail and important words and clauses all throughout this chapter. We've looked at some of them the past couple of weeks, and it would be easy to get way down into all the little details that Paul's probably addressing in the context.

[6 : 00] But I don't want to overcomplicate it, and I know that sometimes I do overcomplicate it. So let's be simple. Right? Paul is saying, we're all going to die. And he's saying, we don't want to die.

We want to live. And with Dylan Thomas, we say, I rage against the dying of the light. Right? I will not go gently. I don't want to die. Death is our great enemy.

And here in verse 38, especially in 55, he's saying, but God will raise the dead because Jesus is alive. And he starts to worship. And that's basically the whole of it.

And verse 38 is really the turning point. A lot of commentators will point this out because in verse 38, he says, but God gives the body. So people in this day are saying, but Paul, how could somebody be raised from the dead?

And he says in verse 38, God can do it. And then he just starts to worship at the end of this passage. And that's really the whole of it. We said last week, if there is no resurrection of the dead, God is not God.

[7 : 02] Paul says you can go worship a different God altogether if Jesus is not alive. If there is no resurrection, God is not God. But the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead can raise you.

He can raise you from the dead. He has that power. Now, let's get into the details a little bit. Paul is dealing with skepticism in Corinth.

And that's why the text begins in verse 35 by him saying, but somebody is going to ask a question. So he's basically just saying there's going to be objections.

Somebody is going to object to what I'm saying. What is the objection? Somebody is going to ask, how are the dead raised? And you can see that he's dealing with something that's frustrating him. He says, oh, foolish person for asking a question like that.

Because basically what's happening is people are making fun of the concept of the resurrection. And in this time in Greek philosophy, people are saying things like, how can it be that when somebody's body goes down into the grave and they decay, or let's say in our time they're cremated, we ask these same questions, and their particles go into dust and they become dust.

[8 : 12] He's saying, you and Corinth, some of you have been making fun of that and saying, oh, Paul, you've been talking about resurrection, but how is it that, are all the dust particles that have fed the grass going to come back together?

Is that what it's going to look, in other words, they're saying, are we looking for a zombie apocalypse situation? So is it going to be that when the resurrection happens, people are going to have their particles come back together in a bandaged way?

They're going to stick their arms through the dirt? In the same way we say, what exactly should we think about how the resurrection works? How could a person have a resurrection body?

Anthony Thistleton, one commentator, he puts it a little more elegantly than zombie apocalypse language. He says, they're asking, can we conceive of such a thing, such an impossible thing, that somebody who has died and decayed could come back from the dead?

And he says, what are the mechanics of that? How could that work? That's the objection that's coming up in Corinth. And now, we can think about that in a Greek perspective.

[9 : 15] The Epicurean philosophers were saying, once somebody disintegrates, they don't come back together. And in the same way, we can think about objections that come up to the resurrection in our time. It's very similar for us today.

And in our time, I think the most common view, counter to the idea of the Christian resurrection, is that people will say that death is normal.

Even though they'll say, death is a friend. Death is something that you can befriend, that you can count as simply normal. Dylan Thomas has that famous line I quoted earlier, where we say, I rage, I rage against the dying of the light.

But we often don't read the next line right after that. And this is what he says, those, though wise men at their end, know dark is right. So we rage, we rage against the dying of the light.

He wrote that for his father on his deathbed. But the very next line, though wise men, at their end, know the dark is right.

[10 : 17] What was he saying? He was saying, yes, on the one hand, we modern people, we hate death. And we say, I will not go gently. But at the same time, he was saying, but we know as modern people as well, death is right.

It's good. It has to be that way. It's part of the natural process. And so many, many people in our culture today would say, death is not an enemy. Death is a friend.

Death is necessary. Death is part of the natural order. It has to be that way if we're going to continue as a species, if we're going to survive in this world. And so the naturalist position, that's what that's called.

There's a man named Todd May who wrote a book called Death. And he's an atheist philosopher. And I really appreciated it because he was very honest. And he writes this, I know that death is necessary, but I hate to think about it.

And he says, the silence that is death, the idea of me not being here any longer, it's something else entirely.

[11 : 21] It seems to resist fault altogether. It's a wall that my mind runs up against without being able to penetrate or find its way around it. It confronts me as an incomprehensibility.

Sometimes I wonder, what is the point if death is to undermine all the meaning that I've created in my life? Now, we ignore death as much as we can as modern people because we don't see it as much as people used to see it.

It's behind closed doors. It's under sedation. Right? Or, we call it normal. And we might even call it a friend. And remember what Mufasa said about it.

Remember? He said, Simba and Mufasa, what do they do? They eat the antelopes and then they die and they become grass and the antelopes eat the grass and it's the circle of life and it's beautiful.

Right? But, I don't know if you've ever seen a lion eat an antelope. It's not that beautiful. But far beyond that, have you ever seen a human being die?

[12 : 28] See, death, Paul's saying something very different. Death is not a friend. Death is ugly. And in our modern advances in medicine, we're able to sedate and we're able to push back the ugliness in a way, but it always comes out.

Death is ugly. It's not beautiful. Death is an intruder. Death is an enemy. Death is punishment. Death is a sin. And the Greeks, knowing that there wasn't going to be a physical afterlife, that's what they thought, they would say things like, will anybody remember me after I die?

You remember Achilles, you know, he said, I will go into battle and I die as long as they raise a statue for me. And that was the greatest hope is that you might be remembered. But is anybody remembered? Think about it.

Can any of you say anything about your great, great grandparents? Maybe, maybe some of us, the oldest in the room, maybe could say their names. Maybe. But most of us, not a single word.

We can't say anything about them. There's a famous tale by Percy Shelley called Ozymandias. He was the husband of Mary Shelley who wrote the book Frankenstein.

[13 : 38] Shout out to Edinburgh for inspiring Frankenstein, the book. And Percy wrote a little tale, a short little tale about a man who was out in the desert and he writes this, I met a traveler from an antique land who told me about a desert monument and on the pedestal these words appear, my name is Ozymandias, king of kings.

Look upon my works, ye mighty, in despair. But nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away.

Even the greatest people in all of world history that have done the most, nobody really remembers them. And nobody will. Happy Easter. Right? You walk through a graveyard, have you had this experience where you walk through a graveyard and you enjoy it, you see the beauty of a graveyard right in a way and you look at the headstones and you read about all these people and you think, wow, I wonder what their story was like.

And you see, when did they die, when were they born, when did they die, how long did they live, what caused their death, you look for things like that all in the graveyard. But at the end of the day, at the end of the day, what you realize is what?

You don't know anybody in the graveyard. Not really. And you realize your name is going to be there. And one day, what's left is going to say, here lies Corey.

[15 : 12] And somebody's going to walk by and they're going to say, oh, when was he born? When did he die? Is there a single line about who he was? And they'll know nothing. Right? And that's all of us. We all are facing that.

We're all facing death. And the naturalist naturalist, the naturalist, the modern naturalist comes and says, you see, that's a good thing because death brings meaning to life. And if that wasn't going to be the case, I would never appreciate life as it is today.

I wouldn't have any meaning in my life right now. Paul comes with a very different idea. And he says, death does not bring meaning to life. The resurrection does.

Only the resurrection brings meaning to life. Death is an intruder, an ancient foe. And only the resurrection gives real meaning, real hope.

Death makes us, look, death makes us nameless. Christ remembers our name. How does he argue this? Verse 37, it feels like a complicated argument, but it's quite simple.

[16 : 18] He says, people in Corinth were saying, look, Paul, explain it. How does it happen? You're saying people's decayed body parts will come back together somehow? And he says, you foolish, that's a foolish question.

And then he says, let me say this. He doesn't give us much, but he says, let me say this. You go down into the ground, you're sown like a seed. And in a way, metaphorically, that seed dies.

That seed goes down perishable, but you come up imperishable. You go down perishable, able to die. You come up imperishable, not able to die.

He says, you go down in weakness, but you come up like a beautiful flower. That's the seed metaphor. You come up like a great oak tree. You come up, you go down in weakness, you come up in glory.

That's his word for it. Doxa, glory. You come up gloriously, somehow, you go down mortal, but you come up immortal. He says, you go down bearing the marks of shame, dishonor is the word he uses, but you're raised in shamelessness, glory.

[17 : 26] That's his comparison. All light, all good. How, Paul, the people were asking, and he says, verse 38, God does it. God, it's all God, top to bottom.

God shall be all in all in that day. He shall be everything to everyone, he said in the last section. God does every bit of it. And he's telling us here, the resurrection body is of a different kind of glory altogether to one we can imagine.

So he says, you know, the stars have a certain type of glory and animals have a certain type of glory and the stars are glorious and, you know, they've never sinned. They've never done anything wrong. They're glorious. And he says, but the resurrection body is of a glory altogether different that we have yet to see, yet to imagine.

And he's saying, look, don't, don't try to answer the question, what exactly happens? What exactly is it like? He says, God will do it. If God raised Jesus Christ from the dead in the middle of history, God can raise you from the dead and it will be to a glory that you can't imagine that we have yet to see in world history.

He's, he's telling us that you shall be raised in Christ to a glory so great that today if you were allowed, if you were able to get to see a picture of your future self, you would be strongly tempted to worship.

[18 : 45] A glory beyond imagination. That's his answer. And to the question, how does it all work? You know, Paul, how does it all work? He just says, let God be God. God will do it. And the connection there he makes, he says, I will tell you this, verse 49, he says, here's how it works.

Just as you were united to Adam from the very beginning, everything that Adam deserved, you get because you deserve it too. Adam merited death, so you merited death. Adam was guilty, so you're guilty.

He says, but in the second Adam, everything that he deserved, now you get. Adam went, Adam went down in death, but the life, the one who was raised to life, he comes up and you get what he deserves.

You get what he got. He says, that's how it works. There's a question here that a lot of people will ask verse 44 and 45 because Paul says, you're sown in a natural body but raised in a spiritual body.

Is he saying, you go down physical but you come up spiritual? You come up ethereal? And here, the important thing to see is that natural equals sinful.

[19 : 53] Spiritual doesn't equal ethereal. Spiritual equals by the Holy Spirit, cleansed, pure. You go down natural, sinful, you come up, cleansed by the Spirit, pure, glorious, spotless.

Jesus Christ becomes for you the life-giving Spirit. He's so connected to the Holy Spirit that when he's raised from the dead, he sends the Spirit to give you everything that he deserves.

That's the resurrection. It's a glory beyond imagination. Jesus Christ gives you everything that he has purchased. Now, let me be practical. Secondly, finally, that means that we have today a hope of a holistic glory.

Death has been defeated. We have the hope of a holistic glory. Very practical. Think today about your problems. Does anybody today have fear in their life right now?

Does anybody in the room today have unmet longings in your life? Hopes and dreams that have never been fulfilled? Does anybody today have guilt and shame?

[21 : 05] Does anybody in the room today have struggle with things that you know are wrong but you can't put away? Does anybody today come with burdens decisions that are plaguing you?

Does anybody in the room today come with an addiction? An addiction of any kind? Does anybody in the room come today with a relationship in your life breaking down right now?

Or a relationship that broke down a long time ago and it's never been repaired and you don't feel like it could be? Does anybody come today with heartache? Do you have heartache today? Are you coming thinking about and fearing your own physical death?

Do you have that kind of heartache in your life right now? The gospel Paul's argument is this Jesus Christ made your problems his problems when he went to the cross all of your problems became his problems and he died bearing their weight under the weight of their guilt every bit of problem that you have became his at the cross in the middle of history and we could say that's good news let us pray no don't stop there second question does anybody here today have physical problems?

Do you got joint issues? Is your gut digestion system not working quite like it used to? Right? Anybody facing a diagnosis in the room anybody struggling with their body in some way beauty is fading and death is coming and Jesus Christ when he went to the cross he made your problems his problems but he didn't stop there when he was raised to glory when he was raised your sins were cleansed and forgiven forever but at the same time he promised in that moment that he will deal with all your physical problems as well do you think do you think today that Jesus Christ came to deal with your guilt and your anxiety and your heartache but he didn't but he didn't come to deal with your bad gut Jesus Christ came to deal with every bit of it he came to deal with the heartache and the sin and the guilt and the shame the addiction in your life and he came to deal with your joints the gospel is holistic the hope today the change that he brings is holistic in the gospel and if you don't know that today if you don't think like that you're thinking like a Greek philosopher not like a Christian the gospel that comes is holistic in his death and in his resurrection he took every bit of the curse upon himself and he was raised to defeat every bit of death even the curse of the body let me say it practically illustratively

[23 : 59] I don't know if you've seen the film The Betts Feast it's one of the great movies of the 20th century one of the great Christian films we might say won an Oscar but in The Betts Feast there's this village this Danish village and in this Danish village there's these Christian pietists a sect of Christians that have moved away from the city they live by themselves out far away from everybody else and they're very committed to not enjoying any physical pleasures any sensual pleasures at all so it's a very bland lifestyle they say one must not enjoy food one must not enjoy color and so they wear very bland clothing they eat the same meal every day very bland meals and one day while they're in the midst of that cycle of working and praying never enjoying life in any way this French woman named Babette shows up and she's from Paris and she's run because of the revolution that's happening in Paris and she's come to this pietist community and she asks them for room and board and they say you know we can't pay you we can't afford this but you can work for us so she says walk and cook so she cooks she makes their meals and after all they do for her they give her a place to live they love her so she says

I want to pay you back I want to show my appreciation I want to make one great meal for you and so she starts to bring in all this food from Paris because she has connections and the people of the community the congregation they start to see it and they say boy we're not going to be allowed to eat this this would cause us sin the sensual pleasure that would come out of this food would cause us to sin against God and so they gather together they have a congregational meeting and they decide alright we don't want to shame Babette so what we're going to do is we're going to eat the meal but we're going to be sure that we never express any enjoyment and so they do that they come to the meal they come to the meal and it's a wonderful meal and you know they say we're committed we're not going to say that we even liked it for a second we're not going to ever show that because that would be a sin and you know what happens they take the first bite right and I won't tell you all the movie but I will tell you this because it came out a long time ago alright so sorry but Babette just happens to be a master chef from the city of Paris and they take the first bite and you start to see you know they're struggling they're fighting against the light right and now you've got to go watch it okay don't let your

Christianity be tied up in Greek philosophy like that know that God loves the physical he made it and in the resurrection he says I came to deal with every bit of the problems of your heart and I came to deal with every bit of the problems of your body and I'm going to do it and Jesus Christ is the first fruits of the great harvest that is to come and so let me finish with this the resurrection hope is for today it's for right now we don't have to wait the resurrection matters for this very moment let me tell you three ways it does and I'll just list them and be done okay number one in verse 58 at the very end he says at the very end of the passage therefore my beloved brothers and sisters be steadfast be immovable abounding always in the work of the Lord knowing that your labor is not in vain now he says here that because of the resurrection because there is a life that is to come you can die in this life but the most important way to die is to die to yourself so everything you do when you die to yourself and you live for Christ in this life

Christian your labor is not in vain it will matter forever so he says be steadfast be immovable die to yourself let the resurrection matter for you right now by giving up your hopes and your dreams that are selfish ambitions and live unto Christ holistically live for him every single day he's saying to us that living for self is very very boring but dying to self and living for something like resurrection life is thrilling it's a purpose that's far far better number two as you face death in this life and all of us are maybe you've you've had an experience recently that's brought the reality of death a little closer to home to your heart that the tombstone is coming here lies it's on the way right and so we've got to prepare for that and so as you face death today the resurrection matters right now for you verse 56 he says the sting of death is sin a little bit hard to understand that verse but the sting the word for sting here typically references a scorpion stinger and so he's saying here the sting the sting of a scorpion you think the scorpion gets on you hopefully that'll never happen to you but the scorpion gets on you and it gets you with the stinger right and he's saying death is like the end of that stinger that goes in but the real sting of death is sin what is he saying he's saying the real problem is the poison what's the poison it's sin he's saying sin drives the power of the stinger sin drives the power of death just like the poison drives the power of the stinger and that means what is he saying he's saying if it were to be the case that sin has died, then it could also be the case that death will die. If the real power of the scorpion is in the poison, not the sting itself, then if the poison were to go away, then the sting would be far less. Right? So he says the sting of sin is death, but if sin has died, then death is going to die. You see what he's saying? He's saying that means you Christian today can right now say, death, where is thy sting? All that's left is just that little prick.

I have to pass through that. It hurts. Yes. But I can say there's no poison left there. I will pass through this and I will come into resurrection life. I will come into hope.

[30 : 28] Right? You can say, death, do thy worst. The lower you lay me, the higher he will raise me. The far, the farther you take me down, the better I will get. Third, finally, I'll close with this. However, finally, this is not automatic. Okay. So you can read chapter 15 and you can come and see all these amazing Easter promises. And you could say, you know what? I'm a Christian, but that list of problems, addictions, heartaches, anxiety, fear of facing death is still very alive for me.

And that's true. And it's because Paul, Paul is not telling you that when you become a Christian by faith in Christ, it's like putting, uh, putting your money into a vending machine, you know, where you press the number of thing you want and you press the button and then out comes the, the, the bar, the drink, the water that you were looking for. It's not just that you become a Christian and all of a sudden out comes the fearlessness. You become a Christian and you press the right buttons. And all of a sudden out comes the ability to face death and say, death, where's thy sting?

Right? It's not automatic. And this whole chapter, you see, this whole chapter is an argument. It's highly philosophical. And I, and I think one of the things he's trying to tell us in that is he's saying, if you want the power of the resurrection to really get down into your soul, you've got to think, you've got to do theology. You've got to rehearse the gospel and the truths of the gospel over and over and over again, every single day. You've got to come back every single day and look at it again and again and again. You've got to bring the gospel and think from your head down into your heart all the time. If you really want to stand and be able to say in verse 56, thanks at the end of your days, the sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God for I have victory in the Lord Jesus. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for victory in Jesus. And we now come and ask that you would bring the words of the gospel from our head down into our hearts, that we would be helped to think, think, think that we would have the Holy Spirit come now and drive these truths so deep into our soul that we could say today, death, where is thy sting? Thanks be to

God. I have victory in Jesus. So Lord, as we, as human beings face death in this life, we long that the Holy Spirit would grant us the beauty of resurrection hope. We pray that in Jesus name.

Amen.