



As most of you know, I’m not a very athletic person, and I’m not very coordinated when it comes to playing sports. So, if someone were to ask me, what’s my favorite thing to play, I say bowling. The reason is not because I’m great at bowling, but it’s because most people I know are not great at bowling either! As a result, we can simply enjoy the game and I don’t have to feel like the only loser on the team.

Even as I say that, I reveal something about myself that I think is evident in all of us. We have an innate desire to win (or at least, to not fail). Whether you’re extremely competitive or not, I imagine there are certain things you want to excel in or not fail in. And, when you feel like a failure in that area, you can be discouraged for a while.

Honestly, I think this desire for winning is innate within all of us, and this reality is brought up in 1 Corinthians 15. Towards the beginning of the chapter, Paul states that if there’s no resurrection, Christians are to be pitied the most. If the resurrection isn’t true, we’re the real losers in the world because there’s no eternal hope – even though we live lives of sacrifice and worship of Jesus. But Paul, by the Spirit’s insight, shares with us how the resurrection changes everything. Even if people might think we’re the losers or refuse of the world, the reality is that anyone who turns from their sinfulness and turns to Jesus – who took our sin on himself – is actually victorious! Christians are victorious. Do you know that, Ventura? Do you feel that and know that as the reality? Or, have you believed the lies of your flesh that your life is pointless? Do you wallow in self-pity or in worship of the One who rose from the dead?

As we come to the end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul culminates with a chant of victory – defying all the enemies of God, even our greatest enemy, which is death. Nothing will conquer us because Jesus has conquered all. Therefore, the main idea of this sermon is: **God gives eternal victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

I know the last few Sundays may have been difficult for some to grasp. We’ve definitely resonated with Peter’s words that Paul can sometimes be hard to understand, but I think in coming to these final 9 verses, we’re going to have utter clarity, and I pray that all of our hearts will rejoice with the mantra Paul quotes in these verses. I pray that our hearts are so affected that our lives are changed to worship God in all we think, will, and do. I also pray that if you do not trust Jesus that you would be compelled to draw close to him and trust him as your Savior and God. So, before we go any further, I’m asking that you pray silently and ask God to work in your heart as we study this text today.

With this main idea, we’re going to settle on the idea of victory and ask three questions: Why do we need victory? How do we get victory? What does victory look like? So, let’s get into the first question:

1. Why do we need victory (v. 50)?

Read verse 50 with me: ⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.¹

When Paul uses the phrase “I tell you this. . .,” he’s emphasizing a point. So, we should listen up here. As I said last week, Paul agrees with the Corinthians, and the Greek philosophy, that said that our bodies cannot enter the heavenly realm. But that doesn’t mean no bodies can enter into the heavenly realm. Last week, saw how God creates bodies for various environments and so this body is like a seed for our future heavenly body.

You see, the Greek Philosophers, and some in Corinth, were going too far. They thought because our current bodies couldn’t enter the heavenly realm then no bodies could. But the reason these bodies won’t enter the heavenly realm is because these bodies were made from dust. These bodies are also broken and frail. So, the problem isn’t having a body, and I could enter Heaven if I just get rid of this. The problem is greater. We need a miracle. We need a body to match the heavenly realm. How can we get that?

Paul continues by saying that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” Paul is actually using both Jewish and Greek terms here. “Flesh and blood” and “kingdom” was clearly Jewish. The terms “perishable” and “imperishable” were Greek terms related to temporal and celestial. Either way, Paul is emphasizing that the entire world – Jew and Greek – need victory. Meaning that we’re in a losing game right now. Why? **Because we are in a perishing body that will die.** Perishing bodies can’t last for eternity. So, you and I need new bodies. Do you realize that?

In some ways, I think we all know this, too. In our Western world, we’re enamored with this physical body. Look back 100 years ago and see pictures of people in their 40’s and 50’s, and you’ll think they looked old. Look at people today and you think, “They look like they’re trying to be a teen.” We have so many make-ups and creams to prevent wrinkles and aging. Then we have all sorts of diets in order to supposedly be “healthy,” but it’s advertised that you’ll look amazing if you just do this or that diet. People seem panic-stricken when they see a gray hair or when they look at themselves in the mirror and find more things sagging. What surgeries can we get? How can we reverse the curse?

Now, listen, I’m not against eating healthy, people dieting and exercising. But this can sometimes be like a religion for people. Guilt and shame come when 2 pounds are added to the scale. So, your penance is whatever the exercise regime tells you so that you don’t have to feel the guilt again.

Are you trying to fight against the curse or do you recognize that while bodily exercise profits little, godliness is of greater gain? Did you know the person who was very healthy and beautiful according to this generations standards will end up in the ground or urn just like the person who just went along with life? You can say, “Well the other one was happier or healthier or whatever else,” but the reality is that death beat both! And that’s the point of Paul here. I can’t help but wonder if people are trying to cheat death and deny the curse instead of admitting the curse and living for God’s glory no matter what the curse brings to their lives. Flesh and blood, and the perishable, will not inherit the Kingdom of God, which is imperishable. Don’t waste your lives focused on flesh and blood. You can’t save yourself. You won’t be saved that way. Set your mind on things above because it’s from there that you can receive the miracle that you need – a body that inherits the imperishable Kingdom.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:50.

So, we see *why* we need victory. We're in a losing battle with our bodies. If we are alone in our battle against death, death *always* wins. We go to the grave, our bodies turn to the dust of the earth. Now we can move to the second question:

2. How do we get victory (vv. 51-53, 57)?

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² 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. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.²

Clearly, the only way we can get new bodies is if God does the work, and in Paul speaking in the passive, he's emphasizing that God is the one actively giving us the imperishable, immortal bodies. So, in verse 51, he starts with, "Behold! I tell you a mystery." The word "mystery" in the New Testament referred to a truth that was concealed in the past, but is being revealed in the present age. And "Behold" isn't a common word for us today. I wish modern translations would use something else like, "Listen carefully" or "Pay attention here!" What he's about to say is *extremely important*. This victory will come someday.

Paul goes on to say that not all will sleep, but all will be changed. Those sleeping are those who are dead. So, Paul's saying that **God will change believers (both dead and living) in a moment, a twinkling-of-an-eye moment, at the last trump**. The dead will rise imperishable, and then those who were not dead will rise changed, too.

The phrase "last trump" was Jewish lingo to refer to the final day when God brings in his Kingdom. So, there will be a day when all this brokenness will *end*. The Greek word for "moment" refers to the smallest measurement of time, and "twinkling of an eye" emphasizes how quick this will all happen! Talk about a miracle. As soon as God raises the dead and the living to be with him, they are changed. It'll be so fast, we won't have time to think about what's happening! What a glorious day to ponder. This perishable body must put on the imperishable. This mortal body must put on immortality.

When Paul uses those phrases, he's showing a connection that still exists between this body and the next – like a seed and a plant. But he's also showing the complete change. Believer, you will be imperishable and immortal. I remember when I was very young, I used to wonder, "In Heaven someday, will it be possible for there to be another rebellion like Satan or Adam and Eve?" These words even answer that for us. To have imperishable bodies necessitate that they'll never suffer the effects of death. Death comes to those who sin. We will never sin. We will be eternally secured in a new home.

And why does this happen? Look at verse 57: ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.³ **Because God gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** Flesh and blood does not inherit the Kingdom, but in a few moments from now, we're going to celebrate communion. What does communion represent? Jesus' flesh and blood. Why? Because his flesh and blood being torn and spilled out reminds us that Jesus took the punishment that humanity deserves for their rebellion against God. We are born sinners – which doesn't mean we're all as wicked as we can possibly be in our actions – but it means we're all born not wanting to love, worship and commune with God. As a result, we

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:51–53.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:57.

commit various types of sins. But Jesus came to truly rescue us by giving us victory over death and sin. As one man put it, “The imperishable one became perishable on our behalf. The immortal one became mortal on behalf of the sinner he wanted to save from the sting of death” (Um, p. 285).

Ventura, I want you to ponder verse 57. I want you to ponder the hopelessness you would have if you did not have Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Doesn't Paul's words, which are so simply, ring resoundingly in your ears? The word “thanks” sounds so insignificant, but hear the words “Thanks be to God who has given us victory!” Oh, Lord, thank you! Will you thank him right now? I want to give you a moment to respond to God. If you know Jesus alone saves you by his grace alone and you can't save yourself, then you should rejoice daily – and we ought to pray that the Lord continues to enable us to be grateful and grow in gratitude. But right now, take some moments to pray prayers of gratitude to the Lord.

We have an undefeated enemy: death. But God will give believers new bodies to enter the heavenly realm all because of the victory he's given us in Jesus! Now, we move to the final question:

3. What does this victory look like (vv. 54-56, 58)?

⁵⁴When 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.” ⁵⁵“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁴

Verse 54 starts with “when,” not “if.” The physical resurrection is not a question. It's a reality. The Corinthians who have been doubting the physical resurrection are being brought to the original teaching they received. This *will* happen. And, Ventura, we need to hear this, too. Sometimes we can get so focused on the here-and-now that we forget our lives are part of a much bigger story – not just a story that lasts 70-80 years, but a story that spans from eternity past to eternity future! The perishable puts on imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality. When that happens, Paul states that certain promises in the Old Testament will finally come true.

Listen to the mantra: **Death is swallowed up in victory.** This will happen in the future. But, listen carefully now. There is not one person on this planet today, not one of the 7.6 billion people, who will not die – unless Jesus returns before then. This word picture makes me think of blue whales swimming through the ocean and sucking in the creel. To us, death is our great enemy. To Jesus, death is as weak as creel.

Paul continues to quote the Old Testament by asking questions in verse 55: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The word for sting refers to a type of poisonous sting. And then in verse 56, Paul explains what the poisonous stinger is. It's sin. And the power of sin is the law.

This is some theological shorthand coming from Paul. You want more on the law and sin, go read Romans 6-7 this afternoon. But, let me quickly explain here. Death is like a scorpion, but if there was no sin in this world, death wouldn't exist. There's no stinger. But Death's weapon was sin, and every human has been stung with sin. Then God gave his law to the world – and whereas the law is good and reveals to us God's good and holy standards, it also reveals our sinfulness – which we seek to ignore and suppress. So, the law ends up condemning us more because we continue to suppress the truth about God.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:54–56.

But Paul says here that someday God will give us immortal, imperishable bodies – and in that moment *death* will be swallowed up. Since death is swallowed, that means sin and the law’s condemnation are completely gone, too.

Again, this all comes because of Jesus! I love how Garland puts it, “[Death’s] venom has been absorbed by Christ and is drained of its potency so that the victory over death now belongs to God and to God’s people who benefit from it.” There’s nothing you can do to gain victory over death. Jesus has already done it! Now, we await new bodies to enter into the Kingdom to come.

At this point, you think it would be a great time to end, but Paul has one final statement to end this chapter. It’s verse 58: ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. ⁵

Something that staggers me about God’s work through Paul is the patience of our Lord towards his children. Think of all the wrong behaviors and beliefs of those in Corinth – and even that some in Corinth are denying the future resurrection. But God doesn’t give up on them. Paul also doesn’t say, “Forget it. I’m going to Philippi where they are way more spiritual than you.” No. He ends this chapter calling them “beloved brothers.” Beloved is “dearly beloved.” He loves them dearly and they are family in Christ. Ventura, may we have this attitude towards one another always. We have a wonderful example in this book of Paul loving and sacrificing for the Corinthians so that they would be sharpened and strengthened in the Lord.

He’s living out the example that he’s calling the Corinthians to. Paul’s revealing what resurrection (victorious) living looks like. **Live out the future victory now.** But what does that mean? In actuality, verse 58 is specifically calling the Corinthians to gospel-living that sacrifices for people and for the church. We are to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the mission that Jesus has given us to be disciple-making disciples!

To “abound in the work of the Lord” and to “labor” recalls various passages in 1 Corinthians. And in 14:12, to “abound” was connected to building up the church. All the issues Corinth has been dealing with, regarding loving and sacrificing for one another, being truly Spirit-dependent versus dependent on themselves, would be answered if they were reminded of the gospel again. The same is true for us.

May we be a people who constantly rehearse the good news of Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the grave to set us free! **God gave us eternal victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if you and I know we’re victorious, let’s live the victory we have been given. Let’s look forward to our future hope and let’s dearly love our brothers and sisters, while proclaiming the gospel to the world around us. Don’t give up. We’re victorious!**

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⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:58.