

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (NIV)

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

55 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you made the dawn of this most holy day shine with the glory of our Lord's resurrection. Grant that we who have been raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. Alleluia. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Sermon Text:

Victory is one of those concepts with the ability to motivate us. We like the way it feels to be a winner and we dread the stigma that comes with defeat. It's true whether we're in a fight for our country, our lives or just playground bragging rights. We want to be victorious. As the women were approaching the tomb that first Easter morning, victory wasn't on their minds. Somber, saddened, grieving they were going to the tomb to finish that which was done so hastily before the Sabbath, they were going to the tomb to deal with the dead body of their Jesus. All their hopes had been pinned on him. He was going to be the Messiah, the fulfillment of all scripture. He was going to make them, and all of Israel with them, victors again. All that seemed to change as He was whipped and beaten, hung on a cross of shame, murdered for the very hopes they had placed on him. Heavy hearts, defeated dreams were traveling to the tomb that morning. Death seemed final, undefeatable, victorious. The women aren't alone. Death has a finality and a sense of defeat that accompanies it but even this foe can be and is defeated. The Apostle tells us how in our Second Lesson this morning and it's a truth that runs straight through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

“What does it take to defeat death?” Listen again, *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable,*

and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality....

As Paul talks, victory over death, imperishability, and the kingdom of God, heaven, are linked. And there is good reason for it. In heaven, death is not allowed. In heaven perishability, the decay of the body which we have grown so accustomed to whether it is the aging, injury, or sickness is banished.

Why? Paul explains himself as we read on in our lesson. He says, *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law*. All of this decay and death, in which we live are all attributed to sin, defined here as a failure (small, large, and everything in between) to keep the law of God.

In short, as Paul describes what it takes to get into heaven, He says, “You must be PERFECT!” This is the only way because if we are perfect, then the law can’t point to any one sin, miniscule as we might think it to be. If the law can’t point to any one sin, then sin loses its power and death disappears. “No death” means “no decay”, so then we would be imperishable, immortal and therefore, capable of entering heaven.

Ah, but, then there is the conundrum for Paul links mortality (death) and decay to us. Do you remember how he so bluntly began our lesson? *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*. By virtue of our birth into this world born of flesh and blood we are already failures. Paul has already stressed this point to the Romans, *sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12).

Condemned, children of sinful lineage, often we prove that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Each so called “mistake” is proof, anytime we “bend the line” of the law of God, we have missed the mark of perfection that God has set for us and proved the dismal truth. We are not immortal, we are not imperishable, our sin has made us destined for death and slaves to the decay we desire to avoid.

But what does that mean? It means we have funerals and face pain. Adam and Eve were not supposed to know toil, pain or death but as soon as sin entered the picture all of those things became necessary parts of life. It means day in and day out we will see those side effects of sin in the people around us and in those we love. It means physical death will stalk us like animals and tear us away from those we love.

It means that on our merit and by our nature, we don’t get into heaven. Because we are imperfect, because we don’t fit the requirements of the club, we can’t get in, not on our own, not with any of our labor. Isaiah penned the terrible words, *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away* (Isaiah 64:6). God will not overlook it just this once, decay and death cannot be in heaven nor can those who are afflicted by it.

Terrible words indeed, no wonder the women approached the tomb with heavy hearts, hopes dashed, grief on display. But it didn’t take long for things to change early that morning. New hope and amazing joy would overcome the somber attitudes and send the women running with news to the apostles. We can hear it in the overriding tone of the words of our lesson and the rest of the story which Paul presents as he celebrates the victory which belongs to us all.

Notice how Paul talks throughout our lesson. This is not a letter of defeat is it? He talks about a mystery, a change, clothes that we will wear. He says that those who are dead, those who

decay will be changed, raised, clothed into and with immortality and imperishable. How can this be?

Paul tells Timothy about this mystery. Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: *He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory* (1 Timothy 3:16). Who is this one who embodies the mystery of God? Paul told the Colossians, *the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.* ²⁷ *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:26,27).

The requirements are met in Christ Jesus. Our lesson says it doesn't it? *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* How? Well follow Paul's line of thought. *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* Jesus has fulfilled the law for us. He was perfect when we couldn't be. The writer of the Hebrews told us that, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin* (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus faced the punishment for our sin, *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world* (1 John 2:2).

Law fulfilled, sin paid for, there was only one enemy left. Jesus faced it head on. On the cross on Good Friday we heard his cries we saw him die, but now there is Easter! And Paul's triumphant cry can be heard, *"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

The answer to the questions is simple. It is gone! The women found an empty tomb because death could not hold our Savior. No Sin, no decay, only perfection, He rose and with that truth comes the victory cry. Death is DEFEATED!

This cry applies not only to Jesus Christ, but to all people. What did Jesus tell Mary and Martha at the grave side of Lazarus? *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this* (John 11:25,26)?" Or consider the promise given to the disciples before Jesus had died. He told them, *Because I live, you also will live* (John 14:19). HE IS RISEN and because he is you too will rise, death cannot defeat you!

Paul then says, "this isn't just your soul either". No, *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* Jesus will return in all of his glory and on this day the victory of his resurrection will be evident to all. All people will be raised and all who have the gift of faith will stand finally perfect in the sight of the law, nor sting of sin, no decay, no more death only heaven, only victory for all eternity!

The announcement is so amazing that it left the women dazed and confused. The same would be true of the disciples, but as they slowly came to the understanding of everything that the empty tomb meant for them and all people the joy was uncontrollable. Paul says it bubbles over into confidence and a desire to share this message with everyone. *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.* What a message the risen Savior carries with Him, **"DEATH HAS BEEN SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY."** And that victory is ours! Amen!