

“Victory is Near!”

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Once again the annual spring ritual of hope begins. The dedicated Toronto Maple Leaf's fan wonders 'could-this-be-the-year'? Any Leaf fan under the age of 55 looks to his elders – those 65 and over and asks The Question: “Is it true dad/grandpa that the Toronto Maple Leaf's won a Stanley Cup?” To which those of us who can still remember reply, ‘Yes, son/grandson, it truly has happened. Last time was 1967 when they beat the Montreal Canadiens before expansion. As a matter of fact the Leafs have won the Cup 13 times in their history, second only to Montreal's 24 Cups.

By the time August rolls around when the hockey playoffs end and you come down to the final game and in the final minute when the game is usually decided and each other's fate is all but sealed, you look at the two player benches and the difference is stark. The smiles, hugs and slaps on the back of the winners who can taste victory only seconds away while the losers bench is somber, heads down, eyes looking at the clock dejectedly, knowing the end is near and hope is gone yet again.

Knowing you're going to win or lose changes your entire outlook doesn't it? Here in 1 Cor. 15 Paul has been elaborating extensively on the victory that we believers are already assured of. Our victory over death is guaranteed. Even though our bodies age and show the weariness and wounds of time's limitations and hardships, God says don't believe the mirror, don't listen to the 'voices in this world' saying you can buy some more time, believe in my Word which says you will live even when you die. The best is yet to come.

The fact that we will have new bodies after death was an issue, and some Corinthians could not wrap their heads around it. When you die, you die and your spirit goes to one place and your body to dust, said the philosophers. Not true, Paul says. How do you know Paul? Jesus. Jesus clearly died and Jesus clearly rose from the dead. And everyone who places their hope in Jesus will also get a new body after they die. Modelled after the original, but built with everlasting materials made for an eternal new world. This has been the whole point of Ch. 15. If Jesus didn't rise, we won't. But if Jesus did rise and receive a new body so will His followers.

Paul wraps this up in vv.50-58 telling us a little more about how it will happen. First he reminds us that it's not this body that goes into eternity,

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

If you died in a fire or if your body was destroyed in a war or if you are cremated are not things to worry about because God doesn't need our physical bodies to give us eternal/spiritual bodies. He will create us out of nothing just as He created this world out of nothing, with. New bodies for a new environment. But now he does tell us something new;

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.

Paul says it will happen at the same time for all (living or dead) of Jesus' followers, the church. We're going to change. If we're going to win, if we're going to change then let's

Live Expecting to Change **(15:50-53)**

A lot of people dwell on the past, wishing they could relieve their best years. If you're a believer in Christ your best years are ahead of you; painless, worry-free, debt-free, death-free. We need to live forward looking. We need to live victoriously. We will change, so let's live knowing that is coming. Paul reminds us that

We need to be transformed to be in God's presence (v.50)

We need new bodies to finally be with God. But we should know that already because you can't get into God's presence without being spiritually transformed first. We have to first acknowledge that we don't deserve to be in God's presence because our sin separates us already. We can't even be with Him because all have sinned and fall short of His glory. I think Paul was using Tabernacle terminology here. The glory of God was behind the veil in the holy of Holies. No Israelites were allowed in God's presence except the High priest once a year. You had limited access because God allowed a mediator between You and him.

But when Jesus came and died for our sins, what symbolic and visible act happened the moment He died? The veil was torn in two from top to bottom. The holy of holies was 30' high! The veil was apparently as thick as two hands together! God was saying something. Believe that Jesus died for your sins and you can now have access into God's presence. The Holy Spirit comes into us to dwell here assuring us that we will get to God one day. But when that happens we need to be transformed physically and spiritually. And when that happens Paul says it will be

Instantaneous and glorious (vv.51-53)

The word mystery means that which had not been revealed beforehand. Now we know this is how it will happen. We will be altered, made different than what we presently are. "In a moment", is the word we get 'atom' from. An atom means something so small it can't be divided [even though they have split an atom]. When linked with 'twinkling of an eye' refers to a moment in time so tiny you can't measure it. The blink of an eye or the speed at which your eye moves from one spot to another.

At the last trump. This passage and 1 Thes. 4:16 I believe are the same. There Paul says,

¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

People have argued that the last trumpet must refer to the last trumpet of judgment in Rev. 11:15 but I disagree. Neither 1 Thes. 4 or 1 Cor. 15 are talking about judgement but when believers (the church) go to be with Jesus. He meets us in the air. And Paul clearly teaches in 1 Thes. 4:13-18 that our being caught up happens prior to the Day of the Lord judgment of God which he describes in Ch. 5. There are many trumpets used in Scripture to describe various gatherings. Perhaps the best example of this trumpet is found in Ex. 19:19 when God told Moses to lead the people to meet with God and God blew a trumpet blast that got louder and louder. But

Paul's concern here is that it will happen and when it does it will happen instantaneously by God when he determines.

It's the last trumpet for the church simply because it's the last time we'll live in these limited earthly bodies. Our time with God in sinlessness forever will never stop after this point.

⁵³ *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*

This is our great hope. Final freedom from life's sin-caused limitations. This is what God says will happen. And with everything God says will happen we need to

Trust God Explicitly **(15:54-57)**

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*

Paul quotes Is. 25 and Hos. 13 here to remind us God already told us this would happen. Do we believe God's Word that death itself will be no more one day? Believe it. Believe

That death itself will drown (vv.54; Is. 25:8; Rev. 20:14)

Isaiah 25 is a prophecy about the ultimate end when we spend eternity in God's presence and sin will be no more.

⁶ *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*

⁷ *And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.*

⁸ *He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.*

When you see terrible tragedies of death and destruction on the earth, when you stand beside the grave of your loved one; trust God explicitly that He has spoken and one day death itself will be swallowed up. That's what we're told will happen in Rev. 20 at the final judgment.

¹³ *The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.* ¹⁴ *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.* ¹⁵ *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*

We know death will be removed one day but for now it still exists and unless Jesus returns to catch us in the air we will still experience death. But Paul encourages again with another Old testament quote in Hosea 13:14 to tell us

Death's sting has been removed (vv.55-56)

The prophet Hosea preaches a strong message of judgment against the Northern kingdom of Israel, who will be defeated by Assyria and taken into exile. In Ch. 13 Hosea gives some of God's strongest words and yet in the middle of judgment he holds out hope:

¹² *The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record.*

¹³ *Pains as of a woman in childbirth come to him, but he is a child without wisdom; when the time arrives, he does not come to the opening of the womb.*

¹⁴ *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues?*

Where, O grave, is your destruction? "I will have no compassion,

¹⁵ *even though he thrives among his brothers. An east wind from the Lord will come, blowing in from the desert; his spring will fail and his well dry up. His storehouse will be plundered of all its treasures.*

God always mixes a message of judgement against His people with an olive branch of hope. In spite of judgment God would bring them back one day. And in Ch. 14 the path to salvation from death's pain is through forgiveness. This is why Paul quoted Hosea 13 because repentance and forgiveness result in taking the sting out of death. Since the Law points out how we sin and we understand sin leads to death, then when we repent of our sins the penalty the Law says sin has, no longer affects you. Because sin has been dealt with and you have asked for forgiveness. How?

Death is overcome through Christ (v.57)

⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We thank God because He sent Jesus to die for us. Victory over death is available through faith in Jesus Christ. The fear of death no longer has a grip on us. Jesus defeated Satan's trump card on the cross. Hebrews 2:14

¹⁴ *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—* ¹⁵ *and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

While we will physically die and it might be with pain, that will be the worst it will ever be for us. Because at the moment of our death, we will be free from the penalty of death and free from sin forever. If we have placed our trust in Jesus, not in ourselves.

For me, that is always a question that really reveals whether you know Christ or not. When you and I die will we be with God and why? If we start our answer by saying 'Well I think I'll be there or I hope I'll be there or I've lived a pretty good life ...' you're in trouble. All those reflect a lack of trust in God and failure to confess you are a sinner, separated from God already and trusting in yourself, not Jesus. If you think you can defeat death's penalty based on your own merits, that means you don't believe Jesus' death was sufficient to pay for your sins. It shows you think you're a better Saviour than Jesus. The only way your sin can be paid for is through a perfect human sacrifice. Since we're not perfect, we can't save ourselves. So if you don't know where you'll be when you die, you need to confess your sins and place your trust in Jesus, now. Paul also said in 2 Cor. 6:1

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Great theology results in great living. Paul ends this chapter on a practical note. It's like saying to Paul, 'Thank you Paul for great teaching on how we receive our resurrected bodies and I'm looking forward to that in the future, but what practical implication does this have for me now?

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.

Be Encouraged in Serving the Lord **(15:58)**

Since our future is secure, so is our present. There are many temptations and many human excuses not to serve God but Paul's emphasis of future hope should result in present joy in serving God.

Don't deviate from faith in Christ (v.58a)

"Let nothing move you" means don't go left or right. Don't let circumstances shake you; let truth keep you steady. James 1:5-7 says similarly,

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Why are we sometimes committed and other times not? Perhaps we haven't really understood we are to give our life for the One who gave us His. Or as Jesus said, 'We haven't counted the cost.' Yes, difficulties still happen to believers and until sin is eradicated, they always will. But God controls the circumstances of life and always has a purpose for them. Paul says Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Stay strong. God is with us. Let nothing move you because your future and present are secure.

Don't be discouraged in serving the Lord (v.58b)

"Give yourselves fully" means go above and beyond. The less we serve God the less joy we'll find in life. Many Christians under serve the Lord because they are over-committed to this world. Every new thing we take on in this world is another step away from serving God. We think it doesn't matter. We think it won't affect our eternal rewards. I don't fully understand how God's rewards work – and it doesn't affect our salvation – but I do know that we will be rewarded for the things done in this body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

We can't lose when we serve Christ. It's not in vain. Is. 55 reminds us that every time we share God's Word it always accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. We get discouraged because we confuse God's purpose with our desire or even our motive for sending it.

Paul began this chapter reminding us of the gospel saying in 15:2

² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

And he ends reminding us that when we serve God none of that is in vain. Receiving our own resurrection one day through faith in Christ, reminds us that none of this is in vain. This is the best way to use God's gift of life. We will have no regrets in eternity for having given our lives to the One who gave His for us.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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