

Challenges Christians Face

Mystery and Victory

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Rev. Freddy Fritz

April 15, 2012

Mystery and Victory

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

The Corinthian Christians were very confused about what happens to Christians after they die. The entire 15th chapter of *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* is an explanation of the resurrection. He concluded the chapter with a victorious promise of resurrection for the Christian. Let's learn about this in a message I am calling, "Mystery and Victory."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58:

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 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. ⁵⁴ 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."

⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

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

⁵⁸ Therefore, 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. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

Introduction

Someone has written:

There is a preacher of the old school but he speaks as boldly as ever. He is not popular, though the world is his parish and he travels every part of the globe and speaks in every language. He visits the poor, calls upon the rich, preaches to people of every religion and no religion, and the subject of his sermon is always the same. He is an eloquent preacher, often stirring feelings that no other preacher could, and bringing tears to eyes that never weep. His arguments none are able to refute, nor is there any heart that has remained unmoved by the force of this appeals. He shatters life with his message. Most people hate him; everyone fears him. His name? Death. Every tombstone is his pulpit, every newspaper prints his text, and someday every one of you will be his sermon.

Thomas Gray wrote, “The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power and all that beauty and all that wealth e’er gave await alike the inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

As far as human power, beauty, wealth, and glory are concerned, that truth applies to Christians as much as to any others.

But the hope of the Christian is not in such things, which he knows will end at the grave.

The hope of the Christian is expressed by the epitaph Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself, engraved on his tombstone in the cemetery of Christ’s Church in Philadelphia: “The body of Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms. But the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the Author.”¹

That is the hope of the Christian and the message of 1 Corinthians 15!

The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians was written to correct many errors that the Corinthian believers had embraced.

¹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 441-42.

One of the errors that some of the Corinthian believers had embraced is that there is no bodily resurrection for Christians. Chapter 15 is Paul's teaching regarding our bodily resurrection.

Paul concluded this chapter with a powerful affirmation of a promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

Lesson

So, in our lesson today we learn about the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

Let's learn about this as follows:

1. The Situation Requiring the Promise (15:50)
2. The Secret Associated with the Promise (15:51)
3. The Suddenness of the Promise (15:52a)
4. The Signal Introducing the Promise (15:52b)
5. The Schedule of the Promise (15:52c-53)
6. The Scriptures Predicting the Promise (15:54-57)
7. The Strength Derived from the Promise (15:58)

I. The Situation Requiring the Promise (15:50)

First, notice the situation requiring the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

Why is it that Christians need a resurrection body? Why can we not simply use these same bodies that we now have?

Paul said in verse 50: **“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”**

Our present bodies are **perishable**. They are fit to live in this present world, but they are not fit to live in the coming world.

One reason for this is because our bodies are sinful, and the Bible teaches us that nothing sinful can enter into heaven. So, God, in his great mercy and grace, will give us new bodies that are no longer sinful and that are fit to live in the coming world.

II. The Secret Associated with the Promise (15:51)

Second, notice the secret associated with the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

Paul said in verse 51: **“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”**

The word **sleep** is often a euphemism for “death” in the New Testament. Paul is saying that not everyone will die. When Jesus returns again there will be many Christians who are still alive at that time. And they will not die.

But, everyone, whether those who have died or those who have not yet died, **shall all be changed**. Every Christian at the time of Christ’s return, whether dead or alive, will receive a resurrection body.

III. The Suddenness of the Promise (15:52a)

Third, notice the suddenness of the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

Jesus will return suddenly. And when he does those Christians who have died will have their spirits reunited with resurrection bodies. And those Christians who have not died will also be changed and receive resurrection bodies. How fast will this happen?

Paul said in verse 52a: **“. . . in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. . . .”** As fast as it takes for you to blink your eye, that is how fast it will take to receive new resurrection bodies!

IV. The Signal Introducing the Promise (15:52b)

Fourth, notice the signal introducing the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

Paul said in verse 52b: **“. . . at the last trumpet.”**

Commentators are divided over the meaning of **the last trumpet**. It seems to me, however, that it is the **“last” trumpet** not

because it is the final in a series, but because it signals the end.

Jews understood a trumpet to warn of the approaching day of judgment (Joel 2:1), to announce the coming of the Lord (Zechariah 9:14), and to summon the people of God from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 27:13). In the present context, **the last trumpet** is simply the victory sound of the end as dead Christians are raised back to life in new resurrection bodies!

V. The Schedule of the Promise (15:52c-53)

Fifth, notice the schedule of the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

A. *Dead Christians Will Exchange Their Perishable Bodies for Imperishable Bodies (15:52c)*

First, dead Christians will exchange their perishable bodies for imperishable bodies.

Paul said in verse 52c: **“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable. . . .”**

Here Paul is talking about dead Christians whose bodies are reunited with their spirits. These bodies are, of course, resurrection bodies.

B. *Living Christians Will Exchange Their Mortal Bodies for Immortal Bodies (15:52d-53)*

And second, living Christians will exchange their mortal bodies for immortal bodies.

Paul said in verse 52d: **“. . . and we shall be changed.”**

Paul is speaking as one who expected to be alive when the Lord Jesus returned. Those who are living when Jesus returns **shall be changed**.

And so Paul concluded in verse 53: **“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must**

put on immortality.”

VI. The Scriptures Predicting the Promise (15:54-57)

Sixth, notice the Scriptures predicting the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

The idea of a bodily resurrection for Christians did not originate with Paul. No. Paul got it from Scripture.

Paul said in verses 54-55: **“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?’”**

Paul quoted from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. Even though his quotation is not precise, these were unmistakably his references. His point, though, is clear: because the resurrection bodies of Christians will be imperishable and immortal, death will never again affect them. Death will never be able to destroy or plague our resurrection bodies. Instead, Christians will live eternally, free from the worry of physical deterioration and death.

Then Paul said in verse 56: **“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”** Basically, Paul was saying that **sin** inflicts its **sting of death** through the **law**. The **law** shows us our **sin**, and the result of our sin is **death**.

“But thanks be to God,” said Paul in verse 57, **“who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Our final and ultimate victory is when we receive glorified, resurrection bodies!

VII. The Strength Derived from the Promises (15:58)

And seventh, notice the strength derived from the promise of a bodily resurrection for Christians.

This is so typical of Paul. He never set down theological principles without also giving practical application.

Paul said in verse 58: **“Therefore, 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.”**

Listen to how *The Living Bible* puts verse 58: “So, my dear brothers, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord’s work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted as it would be if there were no resurrection.”

And listen to how *The Message* puts verse 58: “With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don’t hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.”

The point is: Christian, get busy in serving Jesus!

Are you active and involved in a ministry of the church? You should be. It is one way to demonstrate that you belong to Jesus.

Conclusion

Now, everything that I have said about receiving a resurrection body after death only applies to you if you are a Christian.

If you are not a Christian, you need to receive God’s forgiveness and grace. But how do receive it?

Let me share with you a story I read this week in David Rowe’s book titled, *I Love Mormons*. David tells a story about a couple named Dave and Jan Castro who attended a class he was teaching on “How We Got the Bible.” They had been married only a few years, and both were medical professionals. Dave had made a profession of faith when he was about eight years old at camp. He had fallen away, but for the previous few years he wanted to follow God more seriously again. Jan was a life-long Mormon. She and Dave had agreed to visit each other’s churches in a search for the truth. That is how David Rowe met them. Here is the story:

For an opener, I like to use a simple prayer exercise we do as a group even though it leads each one into very personal prayer

in silence. . . . As prayer leader, . . . I guide them into a piece of imagery: “Picture yourself holding the handle on a piece of luggage with your hands. Raising them up a couple inches, physically clench them around that handle. In the brief time of silence that follows, recognize that luggage as a weight in your life that you’ve been carrying, like an unconfessed sin, a worry, perhaps a broken relationship you mourn, whatever. Ask the Lord to show you what he wants to. As we are silent now, picture a label on the side of that luggage that names your particular weight, your burden. Then in faith simply release your grasp, and see yourself dropping it into God’s lap, remembering he tells us in his Word to cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you.” After a generous moment’s silence, I then tell them to continue in prayer, eyes still closed, . . . to picture themselves, in another time of silence, asking for and receiving a gift from their Lord to replace the burden they just released—for example, a gift of peace to replace their worry, a gift of reconciliation for a broken relationship—because Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount to ask our Father for his good gifts, knowing he loves to give them even much more than earthly fathers do. I tell them to use the silence to see themselves receiving the gift and thanking God for it. Finally, after more silence, I conclude with a prayer of gratitude, and we sing a song.

After this opener, my practice is to dismiss the group members for a two-hour time of solitude, during which they are to observe a rule of silence, are free to wander about the grounds or sit in a room, and are to seek the Lord in prayer. I give them resources to use if needed. I also offer to listen and intercede for any individuals who wish to visit me in the glassed-in front office.

You guessed it: in came Jan Castro, only minutes after the solitude began. She’s a shy person and had to kick herself to do this, but right away she said she’d had a powerful encounter with God and thought I ought to know about it. Now at this point let me interject something: usually people who come in to talk about that opening exercise name some small- to middle-weight issue like concern over a cross word they uttered at their mother-in-law or worry about a job interview. With Jan, I was about to have my soul rocked, and I mean something in the range of 6.0 on the spiritual Richter scale.

She began by offering her initial misgivings about the experience because “the vision that came to me didn’t exactly fit the

Challenges Christians Face

images you described.” That’s when I got my first clue: if my suspicions were right, God himself had taken hold and was doing something much bigger than either of us anticipated. I reassured her it was fine if the vision didn’t fit and asked her to continue.

“When you told us to picture a piece of luggage, what came to me was not like an overnight bag or suitcase with a handle but a very clear picture of a huge, brown burlap sack. It was filled with slips of paper that had rules and laws on them and also listed my ‘works.’ And instead of holding it by a handle, I was under it, holding it up with my hands and arms outstretched, and stumbling beneath its weight.” Now she *really* had my attention, but this was nothing compared to what followed. “You told us to ask God to show us what it represented and see a label on the side, so I did. I looked up, and in large, black, bold letters on the side of the bag, I read the word ‘MORMONISM.’ Actually, I tried to change my thought into something like a sin that you were talking about, but the image wouldn’t go away, so I decided to stick with it. It represented, I knew, a burden I’d carried—not just for some short time lately, but for my entire life. In fact, everything in my life was tied up in it—religious commitments, activities, values, family, raising children, *everything!*

“Anyway, you told us next to just let go of it and give it to God. I tried, but I couldn’t do it! In my vision I found myself trying to push it away, but it wouldn’t release. My hands were stuck to it as if they were superglued! Next I tried lowering it to the ground and kicking it with everything I had, but all this was still useless. I actually made up a mountain in my imagination after that, and I tried to kick it down the hill—but it just wouldn’t go anywhere! I really wanted to let go, but it was like letting go of my whole life. I was stuck.” Here she chuckled a bit at the slightly embarrassing oddness of this image, and I permitted myself to chuckle with her just a little.

“Then it came to me,” she continued. “Just like all my life I’d been trained to ‘take responsibility’ and do things in my own strength, I was even trying to do this ‘letting go’ in my own strength—but its hold on me was so strong I couldn’t overpower it!”

By now I was flabbergasted. What to do? I wasn’t even sure how to counsel her.

Fortunately, God took care of that too, for Jan continued: “It

came to me like a small voice that I should just ask God to take it away by *his* strength, *his* power. So I did, saying, ‘Okay, Lord, you take it,’ and the instant I prayed that, the entire sack floated away into the sky like a feather caught in a strong updraft! I mean, it just rose up into the clouds and disappeared like it was nothing!”

My jaw dropped.

“Then you told us to receive some gift from God to replace the burden we had just released,” she continued. “The only thing that came to me in that moment was, this was the time I was to invite Jesus Christ to *personally* come in and take over my life—something I had never done but was the only thing God wanted me to do, right then. So I did. I asked God to fill my emptiness and *felt Jesus enter my heart*. The feeling was so powerful that I knew it was real. I had no doubt that it was his love. It felt like he put his arms around me and held me like a little child on his lap, and I knew that he had come into my life and that I had been ‘born again’ to a new life in Jesus Christ.”

. . . . At the end of the day, we regathered in our large group to share what we’d seen and heard God do. I had urged Jan to push herself a bit, overcome her shyness, and share this story with the group. When she did, I watched with profound joy as her husband, sitting next to her, began to cry. Thus began their new life in Christ together. Through the years I’ve followed them as they joined a Christ-centered, Bible-based church, became leaders, and went on mission trips yearly to serve Jesus with their medical skills and more among poor people in Central America.

I *still* marvel. At our precious Lord’s workings, my soul fixates with wonder. I weep as I write.²

How do you become a Christian? You receive Christ personally by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus. You submit to him as your Lord and Savior. I invite you to do so today.

And when you do so, you too can be assured of a promise of a new resurrection body after you die. Amen.

² David L. Rowe, *I Love Mormons: A New Way to Share Christ With Latter-day Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. word.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. word.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. word.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: word.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank you that his resurrection guarantees our own resurrection.

Father, there may be someone here today who wants to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Will you grant that person the gift of faith and repentance? Enable that person to trust in Jesus and to turn from his or her sin. And grant an assurance of salvation that will never fade but last until the glorious resurrection body is received.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve the risen Jesus Christ!