



1 Corinthians 15:50-58
Victory Through Jesus

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength 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 brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

What gives a person the will to continue a difficult struggle, to continue a hard fight against tough odds? Hope. Hope for a successful end to that struggle, hope of relief, hope of victory, hope for a brighter future.

For instance, we read in 1 Samuel 11 that Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged the city of Jabesh Gilead, telling the people of that city that he would let them live if they surrendered but that he would put out their right eyes. They asked for seven days during which they would ask for help from the men of Israel, and if there was no answer, they would surrender. You see, if they knew there was no relief force coming, then there was no hope. Eventually after a prolonged siege Nahash would starve them out or reduce their defenses and his men would sack and pillage the city and they would be far worse off than if they had just given in and lost their right eyes at the beginning.

As it turned out, Saul gathered the men of Israel and sent word that he was coming to help, and so they were gladdened and enabled to hold out long enough to see Israel victorious. Hope in the assurance that deliverance was coming made all the difference. They may not have been able to see the army of Israel or hear it marching, but the message that it would come was enough for them.

Now, brothers and sisters, we may not live in a walled city surrounded by Ammonites, but as Christians we live in a world filled with tribulation and evil, and one could be forgiven for feeling as though the enemies of God's people were once again pressing in on every side. To listen to the news it seems like every day another wall or bulwark falls and the enemy presses in a little more, until we see the evidence of the inroads of evil not just in our society but in our denominations, and our families.

What can give us hope in times like this? Well before I answer that, let me make an observation.

Your great enemy the devil, is desperately wicked, but he is not stupid. He's shrewd, and he can be patient. What he doesn't want is for you to place your trust in a real hope, he wants you to put your trust in something that will ultimately prove to be baseless. He wants you to have a false hope, so that when that hope is dashed, you will have no hope of victory at all, and will simply surrender.

Let me give you a sobering example of how He goes about doing that. In the late 19th century, the Devil and his allies, the World and the Flesh, managed to persuade the much of the mainline church to lose confidence in God's word and God's work. They ceased to believe in things like the inspiration of scripture, the deity of Christ, the atonement, and the resurrection, and even the grim reality that the man and the world is fallen. Instead he got the church to believe that man was basically good at heart, that society was getting better all the time, and that instead of putting our hope in the return of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and the establishment of the eternal kingdom. He persuaded men to believe that they could build the kingdom here on earth. That we could create a moral "Christian" utopia where all men were good to one another and did the right thing all the time. Thing was, strive as we might, it just never happened. And then the first world war broke out, and after four years of "Christian societies" tearing one another to pieces in a grinding and nightmare of mud and blood, we lost all hope in building a kingdom here and now. And so their hopes dashed, the European (and many American) churches surrendered to the Devil's agenda, they said in essence *"ok, put our eyes out we'll do your bidding."*

I fear that we are in the process of repeating part of that error, and having failed to create a Christian society by political means, many Churches are being capitulate again. A lot of our modern theologies seem to be nothing more than rationalizations of the sad maxim, *"if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."*

But Paul didn't tell us, that our hope for the struggle would be found in an eventual Christian victory in the culture wars. Paul didn't write and say you'll gain the victory through politics, and legislation and joining forces with Zorastrians and Pharisees and other people promoting "morality." Paul has been arguing to the Corinthians that they need to persevere in the preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, that it was the very doctrine that they had been dismissing - the resurrection that was at the heart of their great hope of victory. Now in these verses he fleshes out that hope, he starts off with a logical answer to their misconceptions and then that logic "catches fire" as he contemplates the glory of what is to come.

Paul tells Christians that while their physical bodies will be raised on the last day, that those bodies will be changed. *Yes*, he says in verse 50, this flesh and blood body as it now is, full of corruption, subject to all the effects of sin including death and decay **cannot** inherit the kingdom and dwell in the new heavens and the new earth. But as he has said, in the resurrection, our bodies will be changed, we will be raised with incorruptible bodies that have been made anew. In the glory that is to come when Christ returns, it won't just be our souls that will be made perfect and sinless, it is our bodies as well. The effects of the fall will be removed from every part of us and we will be fit to dwell in the new heavens and new earth.

This is a mystery, says Paul, and by that he means something that we couldn't figure out by ourselves, we can only know because Christ has revealed it. We shall not all sleep, and by that He means not all Christians will die and rise from the dead. When Christ returns on the last day, some Christians will still be alive here on earth, but their bodies will also be changed, and that change Paul says, will

happen in an *atomo* that is the smallest possible unit, barely a moment, literally an eye blink. Please notice that this won't be something that happens in secret: **1)** it will come with the sound of heavenly trumpets and **2)** both the dead shall be raised and the living shall be changed at the same time. There will be no *secret rapture* – *in fact the dead are raised just before the living are “caught up together” with them.* That this is the case is even more evident in 1 Thess. 4 -

1 Thess. 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Elsewhere Jesus says his return will be like a massive stroke of lightning going from East to West.

Have you ever considered that the power of Jesus is so great that our death is no more than sleep to Him? At his coming Jesus will awaken us. Our bodies will rise from their slumber in death. I have difficulty waking up from a nap, but for Jesus awakening our bodies from death is nothing. Just as surely as he “awakened Jairus daughter” he will wake us up on that day.

Truly death will be swallowed up at that moment, it will be shown to have been disarmed and the power of hell and the grave, all the things that seem so imposing will be as nothing.

For you see as it says in verse 56 what makes death so awful is *sin*. You see while death is a result of sin, it can do no more than usher someone into the presence of God, but what makes that a fearful prospect is sin. How can a sinner stand in the presence of God? We have all gone astray, we had all broken God's law: ***Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.***

To be brought by death before God in that guilty state is a terrible thing indeed. So many of the people who glibly say they “tried to live a good life” will find their mouths shut and themselves guilty of countless violations of the law.

But Paul wants us to know that those who have had their sins paid for by Christ, and for whom HE has kept the righteous requirements of the law, have nothing to fear.

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

For the believer death can only usher us into the glory of heaven. You have nothing to fear from it, its power over you has been forever broken by the victory of Christ on the cross.

So while for the unsaved and unbelieving death and judgment day will be truly a day of despair, a day when all hope is abandoned forever and they are ushered into eternal punishment. For the believer it is a day of victory in Jesus.

Therefore for the faithful missionary who labors tirelessly and sees few converts, the pastor who continues to preach the whole counsel of God even as the megachurches who capitulate to the culture drain his church of people in a manner similar to the way Walmart drives the mom and pop stores out of business, the Christian family that loves the Lord and lives a profoundly counter-cultural life even though their neighbors, coworkers, and sometimes even relatives pour out their disapproval on them, the humble Christian soldier who shares his faith with others and is ridiculed as a result, all of them should take heart. Their labor is not in vain in Christ, they are laying up treasure in heaven, using the talents God has given them, and someday they will find that nothing they did for Christ is wasted or lost.

Because his is the victory, and even if they lose their life in his service and become martyrs, they are still more than conquerors. Their sacrifice is like the sacrifice of Captain Nathan Hale in September of 1776.

Twenty-one year old Nathan was well-equipped to make this moral decision. Born in central Connecticut in 1755, he was reared in a Christian home. His father Richard Hale was deacon in the local Congregational church and his older brother was on the way to becoming a pastor.

Caught and sentenced to die as a spy he urged those watching the execution to be prepared to die at any moment and said 'I only regret, that I have but one life to lose for my country.' You see on two different levels he realized his death was not in vain. First if America won its freedom his sacrifice would not be in vain, but also as a Christian, he realized that death was but the gateway to heaven. His tutor Eneas Munson Sr. concluded his ballad *To the Memory of Capt. Nathan Hale* with these words

I Have ever aimed to tread that shining road That leads a mortal to the blessed God. I die resigned, and quit life's empty stage, For brighter worlds my every wish engage; And while my body slumbers in the dust, My soul shall join the assemblies of the just."

What gives the believer hope? Rev. 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."