

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. It's good to have you here on this Thanksgiving weekend in which we move from a Thursday of Thanksgiving and feasting to the first Sunday of Advent and the arrival of our Lord.

Today we are going to be looking at 1 Corinthians 15 verses 51 to 58 and we have come in this text to the conclusion of the body of the letter.

The opening words are intriguing. Behold, I tell you a mystery. Like many people, I enjoy a mystery. I've been known to spend my summer months reading them and in particular an author by the name of Ellis Peters.

But mysteries are wonderful books which bring one to some complete understanding by the time you're finished. In other words, one of the great things about the mystery is when it is no longer a mystery.

[1 : 14] Many people are returning to church today in search of mystery. I hear it on the streets. I am going back to church.

There's something in it that has mystery to it. And I appreciate the mystery. I wonder how they would like the Apostle Paul.

He seems to always be blowing the doors off any hinges of mystery. In chapter 2, he claimed to come proclaiming the mystery of God.

Straight to the end was a man like Paul. Chapter 4, he was the steward of mysteries who was faithfully revealing them. Chapter 14, he uses the mystery of God, the mysteries of God, as those who are speaking in tongues.

And his preference, of course, is edification. Give me something concrete. Something I can understand. Something I can know. Advent itself is an enlightening of that which had been hidden before.

[2 : 33] And so it doesn't surprise us when we come to the end of the body of the letter that Paul is more than willing to put you on your feet and tell you again. Behold, I tell you a mystery.

I want to make something known to you. I want you wondering, contemplating, questioning. And what does he want known?

On the day of the Lord, we will all be changed. Take a look at the way 51 through 53 read.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. 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.

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. The first division of our text, on the day of the Lord, we shall all be changed.

[3 : 43] That is a revelation. The interesting thing about it is the instantaneous nature at which it will come.

In the original language, it reads with this staccato-like rolling phrases upon phrases. You'll see it there in 52. In a moment. In the twinkling of an eye.

At the last trumpet. This suddenness. Paul's argument on the basis of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is that you and I, all humanity, will share in a resurrection.

And just like the resurrection of Jesus on the third day, wherein his body was re-knit and life was given, and he walked forth from a grave, you and I and every man and every woman who has ever lived on that day will be changed.

Instantly. Instantly. We're used to change. But it's gradual. The way we mark change in science, or in our social structures, or in our political systems.

[5 : 01] It's gradual. It's slow. It's painstakingly slow. Not so here. After you and I are long gone and in the ground, if he waits that long to return, at that trumpet sound, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, without any gradual process taking place, you will be changed.

The speed at which it will occur will undo everything we know about how things change. Not only the speed is interesting, but the state into which it ushers us into.

Look at the way the verses speak of it. We will therefore be raised imperishable. Immortal.

Everything we have in our lives today perishes.

Had fresh bananas on the dining room table just a short few days ago. Returned after Thanksgiving break. Well, they're only ready for banana bread now.

Everything perishes. I've now arrived at the glorious age of 52. My face is falling. Lines are emerging.

[6 : 30] The body is slowing. As it is with me, so it is with you, so it is with all of us. But not so on that day.

We will be raised imperishable. There will not be any longer a depleting nature to our existence. In fact, we will be given immortality.

Have you considered that? Immortality for every human being? Ceaseless existence in a resurrected state of the body.

Either to the glory of God and in the presence of his name. Or away and banished forever. Paul reveals the mystery.

We will all be changed. He moves on and speaks about what it means. 54 and 55.

[7 : 32] He moves from speaking about what will happen on that day.

And the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. He moves from speaking about what will happen on that day.

In which we will be changed. To indicating what it means. Namely that through the Lord we shall have victory. Victory.

Victory over death. You can see it there in verse 57. He gives us victory. But the preceding phrases from Isaiah and from Hosea.

Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh death, where is your victory? He's given us the victory over death in Christ. The end is not the end.

[8 : 36] When they lay our bodies in the ground. It can only be spoken of as a beginning. Death one day will be vanquished.

Death was the consequence of sin. Law made that known to us and held us under its grip. Death was the consequence of sin. But because the Lord Jesus Christ has walked forth from the grave. You and I will walk forth from it as well. All those who believe. Through the Lord we shall have victory.

Then he arrives at the concluding moment. The final application of the body of his letter.

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.

[9 : 34] On the day of the Lord you shall be changed. Through the power of the Lord you shall have victory. And in the Lord your labor, even now, is not in vain.

I'm amazed at this concluding line. It has some wonderful ironies to it, doesn't it? Be steadfast. Immovable. And then with this little twist. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. In other words, the first two phrases almost give you the image of somebody looking at you and telling you, don't just do something, stand there.

And having stood there, they now turn it all on its head. Don't just stand there, do something. Be steadfast.

Immovable. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. One of my favorite verses in all the scriptures. Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[10 : 49] To be steadfast is literally, or wouldn't be, to be convinced. To be seated, in a way.

He used the same idea in chapter 7, in verse 37, where he was speaking of one who was betrothed to be married.

But whoever is firmly established in his heart, well then let him do what he says he's going to do.

He's settled in his mind. Be settled in your mind on the resurrection of Christ.

Be immovable. Don't abandon that belief. Abounding. You might say, excelling.

Always excelling in the work of the Lord. Just as he had said in chapter 14, strive to excel in building up the church. So knowing this, knowing that you will one day be changed instantaneously into an imperishable and immortal state.

[12:06] And knowing that that change will be the consequence of death being relinquished over us forever and the victory won. I ask you tonight, what are you doing with your life?

Excel in the work of the Lord.

Excel in building up the body of Christ. All of us go to bed at night with dreams and aspirations for the future. Your future. This should be your dream.

This is your aspiration. This is your task in Christ on earth. To be fixed in mind on the truths of the gospel.

To be immovable on them. And to be excelling in building up the work of Christ in the world. For all of that labor is not in vain.

[13:12] And oh, how many things I've given my life to over the years that are in vain. But nothing done for Christ and his church and his people will be without return.

None of it will be vanity. All of it will have meaning. And so the letter closes. The final application. And it's wedded to that initial aim.

Chapter 1, verse 10. He wanted them to be of the same mind and the same judgment. He wanted them to be unified. But not unity for unity's sake.

The gospel unity that this letter brings propels gospel productivity in the work of the Lord. And so as you go tonight and you consider your state in life and what you will do with your life whatever you do give yourself to the work of the Lord for the return will be everlasting.

Our Heavenly Father as we look tonight at your word briefly and we again find the mystery laid aside for things made clear help us to live in light of this change that is coming this victory that is ours and may we labor for that rest until it arrives in Christ's name.

[15:00] Amen. Amen.