

# Victory over death

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Preacher: Chris Lowe

[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, thank you. Here's the question we asked at the start of this series in 1 Corinthians 15. We asked, are you wasting your life? Are you wasting your life by serving Jesus Christ?

! 4. Time is short and life is precious and you've only got one shot. We're born, we live, we die, there are no second chances, you can't go back and start again. This is it.

This life. And following Jesus is such a big thing. It's a massive life decision to follow him, shaping what you do with your time, your cash, your everything. Being a Christian takes effort and work and commitment. The question is, are you wasting your precious life by serving Jesus? Could you imagine getting to the age of 90 and looking back over your life?

You think of the costly decisions you took when you were younger as you served Jesus. You turned your back on that relationship. You restricted your sexual experience. You refused to go along with society around you and you felt like an outsider whom people laughed at.

Look back over your years and think of the hard work and effort you put in. The 2000 church services you attended when you could have driven to the beach. The Sunday school sessions you sweated over. The thousands of pounds you gave. How you worked through church arguments and fallouts.

[ 1 : 40 ] How you prayed and worried for your children as you battled to help them know God. Think back over your life and your evangelism, we call it, sharing the good news of Jesus. Think of all those hours spent praying for neighbours and colleagues and friends and classmates. Think of every new initiative as you tried to get to know people around you after Covid. Think back over every high stakes conversation with a friend as you urged them to turn to Jesus. Can you imagine the tragedy of looking back age 90 over a life of Christian service and realising it was a waste? All that Christian work and labour, a vain, useless, empty waste of time.

Waste of time. How terrible that would be. It's not like that. In 1 Corinthians 15 we said over this past month Paul writes to convince us that a life spent believing in Jesus and doing the Lord's work is not in vain. It really isn't.

That's what verse 58 is saying right at the end. Do you see this? Therefore, in the light of everything I've just said in this chapter, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. Okay, ask this morning, why is it not a waste of time to give yourself to the work of the Lord? It is because of the resurrection of the dead. It's because of 1 Corinthians 15. That's what we're thinking about this morning. We spent a full month in this one chapter and there's so much in there, but the big idea of 1 Corinthians 15 is there in verse 20. Look back to verse 20. Do you remember this?

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. This is what it looks like. We did this a few weeks ago. Look, apples and little people. First, you've got to know that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

[ 3 : 58 ] This is the gospel laid out in verses 1 to 11, that 2,000 years ago, the man Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, was buried, and then he was raised from the dead on the third day. He was made alive bodily. The witnesses touched him and talked with him and ate him, ate with him.

First, Christ was raised. First, Christ was raised. But secondly, says Paul, the resurrection of the dead, this wonderful miracle, is not just about Jesus back then.

Because, verse 20 again, he is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Like the first fruit apple from a tree at harvest time, his resurrection guarantees a bumper harvest to come.

That every living person who believes in Jesus Christ, every person who belongs to him, will be made alive in the future, when Jesus comes.

So significant, this is all of life. You and I sin, and we will die. But we will not rot in darkness, we who are in Christ.

[ 5 : 13 ] For as our saviour was raised bodily, so will we be. What Paul's talking about here is not a nice little bonus add-on for religious people in life, the resurrection from the dead.

Rather, verse 20 onwards, this is God's great plan for his world. This is what God is doing. He is acting in his world to overturn the curse of death through Adam.

He's acting to destroy death through Jesus Christ and to restore humanity, you and me, to life, to him. Last Sunday, verse 35 onwards, we spoke of the resurrection body we will have.

Because this stuff we're talking about, it is hard to imagine, is it not? Talking about me, dead, buried or cremated, disintegrating.

And then somehow me, woken, raised bodily, standing and breathing. Can I really believe that? Paul says, yes.

[ 6 : 25 ] God will act in power. He will give you a resurrection body. Like a naked seed sown and buried in the ground from which a plant comes to life.

So it will be for you. And for millions upon millions of people. Because, verse 49, just as we have borne the image of the earthly man.

Just as we've spent our lives like the man Adam. In these decaying, dishonourable, weak, dusty bodies. So shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

Jesus. Us, raised from the dead with new, undying, pure, restored, Holy Spirit filled bodies. This is true.

It will happen. Well that's verses 1 to 49 in about six minutes. Now this morning, in verse 50 onwards, Paul, I think, simply celebrates what will happen on the day Jesus comes.

[ 7 : 29 ] Just let me tell you how it's going to be, he says. Listen to this. So let's follow it through together. Verses 50 to the end, at the end of this chapter.

First, on the day of resurrection, the day when Christ comes, we will all be changed. We'll be changed.

And that's verses 50 to 53. Look. I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

That's true. Our ordinary, decaying, sin-scarred bodies are not fit for God's kingdom, for his restored world. 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.

[ 8 : 32 ] For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. Twice here, do you see that? We will be changed and transformed.

I was thinking about this earlier on this week. This teaching, what Paul says here, it speaks so clearly and wonderfully into a society like ours, which longs for change and transformation.

I've put it down over there somewhere. I enjoy a herbal tea called pucker. It's called Feel New Organic, it says on it. Someone bought some for me. Listen to what it says on the back of this little organic tea that I have.

I copied it down. Prepare to reawaken with a cup of organic delight. Gentle, yet purposeful, leaving your body as sweet as the fennel seed within.

Aniseed and lush cardamom bring your cup alive to shrug off the old and embrace the new. Savour these herbs to add a touch of transformation to your day. It's a really nice cup of tea.

[ 9 : 40 ] Why do they write that nonsense on the back of tea bags? They write it on there. Well, I've bought it. They write it because it wants to be, they want to sell it. And we want to be changed.

We do. Just this week, I've kept seeing Facebook ads. I think they may be targeted because I clicked on something at some point. For Tribe Training Cambridge. A high intensity 28 day body transformation challenge.

Are you up for it? That will sell. Because we want to be changed. Knowing all of us that we're decaying.

Think of the money and time spent in our culture on defying ageing. Take more exercise. Buy younger clothes. Get better skin cream.

Have plastic surgery if you can. Oh, you look so young. Thanks. We want to be changed. And books and apps will promise you personal transformation.

[10:44] Kick that habit. Shrug off your past. Grow more effective. And dodgy websites will promise new wonder drugs to deal with your weakness and your fatigue.

Because we want these bodies of ours to be changed. And yet, at the same time as longing for change, our world is shot through with such despair.

Because we're perishable. And forgive a line of poetry. Beauty sliding from the bone leaves the rigid skeleton.

So what happens? We will decay and die. And pucker tea and skin cream and self-improvement apps and wonder drugs will not change that.

It just won't work. But Paul says here to Christian believers, do you see this? We will be changed. We will.

[11:43] What everyone longs for here in the Christian gospel. In verse 51 says Paul, we will not all sleep. There will be some who are still awake and alive when Jesus comes.

We won't all be asleep in death. But we will all be changed. We won't change ourselves with a bit more effort or a new app.

We will be changed by God. And verse 52, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. It won't be a 28-day body transformation.

In just a blink, you'll be transformed. At the last trumpet, the trumpet announces that God is on the move.

He's acting. Because the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. You are meant to see that in your mind's eye.

[12:45] This isn't a church building. When Christians used to be buried in a churchyard around a church building, that burial ground used to be known as God's acre, God's field.

The place where the seeds of dead perishing bodies were sown. Imagine God's acre and in the ground that which is left of us.

And then the trumpet sounds and in a flash the dead are raised imperishable. We will be changed. For verse 53, the perishable must be clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

Think of yourself. You're decaying, sin-scarred, weak, naked body. And in an instant now, raised and clothed, you'll no longer be able to decay.

You're imperishable. You will no longer be subject to death. We will be immortal. We'll be immortal.

[14:01] In our new, pure, Christ-like bodies. That's our future. We who belong to Christ. You know when you meet someone, maybe you turn up at church and they've had a new haircut or got some new clothes and you say to them, you've changed.

Looks good. Imagine us looking round at one another on that day in our new imperishable bodies. You've changed.

You look radiant. When together, utterly transformed, we will be fit for the kingdom of God.

It's not fairy trail. It's not make-believe. It's true. It will happen. On the day when Christ comes, firstly, we will all be changed. Secondly, know this.

God gives us the victory. That's verses 54 to 57. Let me read these verses. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

[15:09] On that day when everyone who belongs to Christ has been raised and clothed, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

And that is because on that day, death, the last enemy, will have been defeated for good. In our society, we're so aware, are we not, of death as an enemy.

It's not a nice thing. Death brings our lives to an end. Death takes loved ones and friends from us. Death leaves widows and widowers and orphans and grieving parents. We imagine in our society the grim reaper, a black-robed figure with a scythe who will chase us down and cut us down.

And we cannot cheat death. And we cannot escape death's strong clutches. Death is an enemy and it's terrifying. Yet on the day that you and I stand clothed in immortality, death will have been beaten.

[16:25] And swallowed up and defeated for good. And so in verse 55, Paul taunts death.

Look at this. Verse 55. Where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting? You're beaten. You can't hurt us anymore.

Paul's saying, like, think of death as a snake with venomous fangs ready to bite into you. Or think of death as a scorpion with a poisonous stinger in its tail ready to have you.

The sting of death is sin, says Paul. The stinger that death uses to hurt and kill us is our sin.

Our sin that is shown up for what it is through God's law. But, verse 57. Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:31] As Jesus died on the cross, the poison of our sin went into him. He was stung for us.

He died for us. For our sins. Then he was raised victorious over death. And so for us whose sins have been dealt with by Christ, death is now like a snake without teeth or venom.

Or a scorpion without a sting. There is nothing to fear anymore. There's nothing to fear. This enemy death can no longer hurt us or defeat us forever.

For raising us from the dead and clothing you and me with immortality, God gives us the victory. He gives us resurrection bodies. He gives us victory.

I think again you ought to picture the joy of that. The celebration of that moment. On that day he will wipe every tear from our eyes.

[18:39] There will be no more death. The enemy is gone. Or mourning. Or crying. Or pain.

Because the old order of things will have passed away. Victory complete.

And death gone. Thanks be to God, says Paul. Thanks be to God on that day. And you're meant to feel the note of celebration here.

For all who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and trust in him. On the day Christ comes, we will be changed. As God gives us the victory.

And so. Come now finally to verse 58. We've had five Sundays in 1 Corinthians 15.

Here is the so what. Imagine that. Everything that Paul has said. What will happen for us. After five Sundays, so what? Paul says now in this final verse, knowing these things.

[19:43] Knowing that Christ has been raised from the dead in history. And looking forward to the day when our Lord's work is finished. When all who are in Christ are made alive and changed with resurrection bodies.

As you look forward to the day when death is destroyed. And millions and millions of Christ-like, never to die again men and women gather round God's throne victorious.

So what? So what for us here and now? Verse 58 says two things. Here it is. Stand firm. And give yourself to the Lord's work.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

Because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. First so what? From 1 Corinthians 15. Stand firm.

[20:48] And immovable. That is, in our lives we must plant our feet firmly on this gospel. This gospel of Christ.

Who died for our sins and was raised bodily. This gospel of Christ who will come and give you resurrection life. Believe it. Stand firmly on it.

Never let a day go when you don't. Trust in Jesus Christ as your saviour. Serve him as your risen Lord. And never, ever be moved from that.

Never be moved from him. As a Christian believer, at some point you may feel the pressure to stop believing this silly stuff about resurrection.

You may well face tragedy in your life. Or terrible disappointment. As you get older, go downhill and get weaker. As death maybe feels more real and coming.

[21:51] Don't despair. And don't give up your faith. Stand firm in Christ. And let nothing move you.

Because this is the one gospel that will save you for eternity. Only in Christ can you have certain hope for life and death and beyond. Stand firm, says Paul.

Will we? The second so what in verse 58. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

What is Paul talking about? We should know that living as a Christian believer impacts all of life. It impacts everything. As you work as a teacher or administrator, a care worker, a computer person.

You're to please the Lord in how you work. And we're meant to cook and eat and grow flowers and make music with thanks to our God. You're meant to love your neighbour as yourself.

[22:55] You're meant to care about the planet and the climate. This is God's world. We belong to him and everything we do now is to please him. But in 1 Corinthians, the work of the Lord is something so much tighter than that.

The work of the Lord here, sharing the gospel of Jesus and serving the church, his people. On the handout, I've put a couple of verses. In chapter 16, verse 10, Paul writes, Paul's work, proclaiming good news of Jesus and serving the church, that is the work of the Lord, which Timothy also does.

And others do too. In 16, verses 15 and 16, a bit further on. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labours at it. You see, at our point in history, 2000 AD now, our point in history between the past resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of the dead, there is one great lasting work for us all to be involved in.

[ 24 : 37 ] And that is the work of proclaiming Jesus Christ to a dying world and building up those who belong to Jesus.

Playing our part in God's great plan to see millions upon millions of people come to believe in Jesus and grow in Jesus and die in Jesus and then be changed as they and we rise from the dead victorious.

That is the Lord's work. That is what he is about right now, all around the world. And he calls us as a church to join in, knowing that this labour in the Lord is not in vain.

It is not in vain to take all the energy and time that you have and to give as much of it as possible to speaking about Jesus Christ and serving Christian believers.

Because the fruit of our life given to that will last for eternity. It will. So imagine a couple of things with me.

[ 25 : 55 ] Could you imagine, at the Jubilee picnic in a couple of weeks time, you meet someone from Orchard Park, you've not met them before. He's a regular guy like you.

And he's decaying and dying in his sins. And you get chatting, you get to know each other, you spend time together, you become friends. And after a bit he asks you about your Christian faith.

And you share the gospel, you talk about how Jesus came and died for our sins and rose again. Wonderfully. After a year or two, your new friend turns to Jesus Christ.

It's a miracle. And then he moves away from Orchard Park and you lose touch and you think you'll never see him again. Could you imagine now meeting that man again?

Beyond the resurrection. Can you imagine him running up to you? The same guy. But now he's been changed. He's imperishable.

[ 27 : 02 ] And he says to you, I'm here. It's me. When we lived in Orchard Park, you met me at the picnic on the Jubilee and we became friends and you spoke to me about Jesus.

And now look at me. I'm immortal. Will we give ourselves together to this work of the Lord, sharing the good news of Jesus wherever and with whomever we can?

Or think of St John's Orchard Park. This group of people who believe in Jesus. Who are destined for eternal life. Who are commanded to stand firm.

And then you and me, moved by 1 Corinthians 15, devoting ourselves as much as we're able to the service of the Lord's people.

As you're able with the time you've got. I'll sweat over those Sunday school studies for those children. How it will be worth it when I see those same children risen from the dead on the final day.

[ 28 : 12 ] I will throw myself into knowing and caring for these brothers and sisters. I'll encourage them and pray for them. I'll do all I can to serve them with the gifts that I have.

So that together we will keep going and keep growing and stand firm with faith in Jesus until we die. Why would you devote yourself to these people around you?

Because this is the work of the Lord. The people sitting either side of you are in Christ. And they're destined to be immortal.

You and me. And when we have made it through, we who live now. When the end comes and we will have been made alive and resurrected.

We will turn to one another. In our new, restored, Christ-like bodies. We will spot one another amongst the millions upon millions around the throne.

[ 29 : 18 ] And we will walk up to one another and with unimaginable joy we will say to one another. However, our labour in the Lord was not in vain. It was not in vain.

This is 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15 says to us, let us not waste our lives. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who can raise you from the dead.

Stand firm in him. Look forward to the resurrection of the dead on the final day. And give yourself, give ourselves to the work of the Lord.

Because we know that our labour in the Lord will not be in vain. It really won't. And let me lead us in a prayer.

Let's pray together. I tell you a mystery.

[ 30 : 19 ] We will not all sleep. But we will all be changed. Our Father, we thank you for this almost unimaginable truth.

And reality of how things will be for us. And for all who place their faith in Christ. How almost unbelievable that we will be transformed and our mortal bodies clothed in immortality.

Our Lord, we look forward to the day when in our new bodies, pure and holy, we will bear the image of the heavenly man, Jesus Christ.

We look forward to the day when death has been swallowed up in victory and your plan is complete. Our Father, in the ups and downs and the stresses and quick decisions of daily life, make us those this week, this year and always.

Make us those who stand firm. Help us put down roots in the gospel of Jesus and not move from our faith in him. And grow in us a giving of ourselves to your work.

[ 31 : 45 ] Increase our boldness to speak about Jesus Christ to those who are dying. Give us energy to see those around us, brothers and sisters, and to devote ourselves to them.

Make us full of the work of the Lord in our lives, we pray. And help us know that our labor for you is not in vain, we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen.