

I Corinthians 15:50-58 “Becoming Imperishable”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

But as they're going down, I'd like to invite the kids to join me up here on the steps, if you will. Kids, y'all come right up here. I want to talk to you for just a couple minutes. As you're coming up, just be careful.

There's a cross up here and there's some Lord's table is set up on those tables. So be careful not to knock that over. Can y'all just come and find a place on the steps where you can sit?

All right. Oh, I forgot something. Let's see.

Is anyone up here excited for Easter? Yes. Yeah, you are. You're going to have some fun today celebrating? Yeah.

[1 : 03] Is anyone up here hungry? Are you getting hungry being in church for a long time? I brought my lunch. So maybe I've got something I could share with y'all. Let's see. I got a banana.

Anybody like bananas? Yeah. Oh, you want? Anybody want? I don't like bananas. You don't want? Oh, it is getting a little moldy, isn't it? I don't like it.

Okay. Well, maybe not the banana. How about some bread? Bread safe, right? You want this bread? Oh. Oh. It's kind of white and green and purple and...

Yeah, it's been growing for a while. Sorry. You don't want the bread? No. You know, those things are disgusting, aren't they?

I know. I've got more for later. Secret. There's a big word for food like that. We call it perishable. Can you say perishable? Perishable.

[1 : 57] You know what perishable means? No idea. That means if you... I'm going to tell you. That means if you leave it in a bag like this long enough, it's going to grow mold like that and you're not going to want to eat it.

Okay? It's going to be yuck. It does not last. It goes bad. That's what perishable means. There are some other foods now that are called non-perishable.

You know, I found this spam. This stuff, it says you can leave it in a bag for three to five years and it will still be exactly the same as it was at the beginning. Isn't that funny? We're not going to eat it this morning, but maybe later.

We'll have to ask your parents. And then what's this? A jelly bean. You know how long I've had this jelly bean? How long?

77 years. It looks... Not even that old. No, it's not. It's not that old. But you know what I do sometimes? Do you ever find jelly beans in Easter eggs? Have you ever opened up an Easter egg from the year before and found a jelly bean in it?

[3 : 03] I get really excited when that happens because you can still eat it, can't you? It lasts a little bit longer than my yucky banana that got all moldy, right?

These last a little... But you know what? Even a jelly bean, if you wait long enough, it'll go bad too. Sometimes we say these things are non-perishable, but they really do. All these things go bad eventually.

People are perishable, right? Our bodies. Do you ever get sick? Yes. Have you ever been hurt before? Did you get a boo-boo? Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. And even sometimes people die, right? Yeah, we get bruises. We get coughs.

And even people die, right? Mm-hmm. And so that's part of the reality of what we live with. But on Easter, we talk about somebody else who died.

[3 : 59] Who died the week of the first Easter? Jesus died, didn't he? On a cross like that one? Or maybe like the one out on the grass? But on Easter, we celebrate that Jesus is not dead, but he is...

Alive. Jesus is alive. You know, that means Jesus is not perishable. He is imperishable is the big word for that.

Can you say imperishable? In the dead. Jesus rises from the dead and he will never die again. Isn't that amazing? So if we trust him, Jesus promises that we will live forever and ever with him too, even longer than the jelly bean will last.

We will live forever. Can you believe that? No. No, I know. That we will live with him forever. You know that song we sang? It's from the Bible. Did you know that?

Did you recognize that verse? For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in Jesus would not perish, not ever perish, but would live forever.

[5 : 11] Right? Did you sing that? Would have everlasting life. Are you all singing it down there now? That's really good. Jesus came so that we could live with him forever.

And that is so exciting. I'm going to read to us this morning in just a minute from a passage in the Bible that has really big words like perishable and imperishable in it.

Okay? But I want you to be able to read it. Maybe right now someone who... Let's look. Let's see if we can put the page number up here. That way the people...

Can we put that page number slide up there? Maybe. There it goes. Maybe somebody who's waiting for you to come back can get it ready for you so that you can read.

Because what is the most important part of every sermon? When we read the Bible. Okay? And so I want you to remember that Jesus is alive. And so these really big words that I'm going to read in just a minute, you're going to know what they mean.

[6 : 14] Imperishable means what? Live forever. Okay? Thank you all so much for coming up here. You can go back to your seats now and have a wonderful Easter.

Pastor Will, I want my family's trust. It's so beautiful. They're definitely perishable. Eventually. Let's make sure we all get back safely.

I do want us to read together in 1 Corinthians 15. It's Paul's letter that highlights the resurrection in this chapter that we're about to read part of.

If you've been here in recent weeks, we've been studying a letter from Peter where he uses this word imperishable a lot. And it's really important.

It's the exact same word used in this chapter. He's been using it to say what is imperishable is what is really important. It's what really has value.

[7 : 28] It's what really lasts. Pay attention to that. Let's read God's word together and then we'll talk about it for a few minutes. 1 Corinthians 15 beginning at verse 50.

This unchanging truth and hope and life. Kids, it's the part you really pay attention to. I tell you this, brothers and sisters.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery. 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. 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.

[8 : 33] Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Will you pray with me? God, we acknowledge before you this morning as we come to your word how hard it is to be immovable.

It is so hard to stand firm and to have hope because it feels like everything around us sometimes is changing. Our hearts get fearful.

Our minds get distracted. And so we need this morning, Father, to hear your voice. We need to see our Savior. We need to be filled with renewed hope by your Spirit.

[9 : 41] So would you speak to us that we might be changed and that we might have the hope of being changed forever. We ask it in your name, Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. You know, it's not just the kids who don't want to eat my moldy bread or rotten banana, is it?

We adults wish that those were the only perishable things in our world, don't we? We long for something that lasts.

And right in our faces, these past couple of weeks especially, has been the reality of death. Tragic events in Nashville, in Huntsville, events that have pushed us, just as AC was sharing how when death came into her life, pushing her to wrestle more deeply with this world, to struggle perhaps with our own mortality as it's pushed in front of us regularly.

It's that sting of death. And we hate it, don't we? We long for life that lasts, for relationships and love that lasts, bodies that last.

[11 : 13] And yet there's this problem that all of us here are faced with. We are perishable. We're all faced with the reality of death.

But even before we get to that experience, there's so much decay and brokenness in our lives. I was thinking just of the past couple of weeks of those of you just in this group of people that I've talked with and what we have shared.

I've grieved chronic pain with you. One guy even saying, I'm just ready for my 1 Corinthians 15 body now.

We'll see what he means in just a minute. I've prayed for minds and bodies battling addiction.

You're enduring the darkness of depression, some of you.

The sadness of miscarriage at one end of life. Of dementia and prolonged loss at the other end of life.

[12 : 25] Just the general grief of aging. Of aches and pains and broken bones and bodies just wearing down, right?

Just as bananas rot, bodies decay. Relationships shatter. Death intrudes. I don't know how you feel it personally this morning, but all of us are faced with this problematic and painful reality that we are perishable.

And it's problematic because we feel this sense. I know you feel the ache of this. We feel the sense that we shouldn't be perishable.

We weren't made to be perishable. We try to avoid it. We fight desperately against it. We want to last. Perishable is not the way we were supposed to be.

You know, God sees the same problem too. This passage opens by clarifying the problem of our condition. Look at verse 50.

[13 : 34] Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. There is something that lasts.

The kingdom of God. The imperishable. But problem. You and I can't be there. Not with our perishable bodies.

Death and decay and crying and tears are not welcome in God's good home. Man, that so encourages me.

I hope it does you. To know that God's not okay with those things. That He longs for things to last the way that I do too. Isn't that good to know?

That gives me some light in the darkness many days. But it also highlights the fact that I, as I am now, don't belong there in God's home.

[14 : 39] Not as we are, we don't. It highlights that we have to be changed. That the nature of eternity, of heaven, of an ongoing personal existence, like we long for, is such that we have to be radically changed if we're going to be a part of it.

There has to be change if we're going to be there. And I think about that reality and I feel my own body. And I look at the world around me and I think, all right, change.

Yeah, I could do with some change. I'd sign up for that. Where do we start? What does that look like? Well, some people will tell you these days not to bother with that. That there's no hope beyond this world.

That this world itself is all perishing anyway. It's on its way to being burned up and forgotten. To quote some scientists expressing this increasingly common view, the ever-expanding sun transformed into a red giant will engulf the planet, melting away any evidence that ever existed, and sending molecules and atoms that once were earth floating off into space.

The end. So don't worry, right? Just accept that you and everything else are perishing. Just embrace it.

[16:01] After all, nothing lasts anyway. History will all be forgotten. All of these things will happen, but none of us will exist to realize it. So just don't worry. Y'all, my heart, honestly, not just my hopeful heart, but my grieving, hurting heart longs for something more, tells me that there's something more than that.

So when God says there's something that lasts, I'm listening, I'm in. Tell me what that looks like. If there's any chance that we could last, I want to know it.

I want to know what that would be like. What would have to change for me to be a part of that, of something that really lasts? Paul has good news.

Verse 51, he says, Behold, we shall be changed instantaneously.

The dead raised imperishable. We shall be changed. This, friends, is the wonder of becoming imperishable.

[17:13] Kids, you remember that word? Imperishable. It's part of the promise of Easter. It's the reason that a bodily, not merely a spiritual resurrection, is so vital and hopeful that one day, all who are united to Jesus by faith will have resurrected bodies like our Savior.

He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, Philippians 3 says. We don't know everything that means for our bodies beyond that, the promised glorious transformation from perishable to imperishable.

But just think about the resurrected Jesus for a second. There were things still the same about his body. It was still Jesus. They recognized him. He ate.

He talked. The wounds from the cross and his hands inside were witnessed and felt. It was Jesus. On the other hand, he was changed.

He started doing things like passing through locked doors and showing up unannounced sometimes. Sometimes recognizing Jesus took a moment, even for people who knew him and loved him really well.

[18:34] Our passage has already talked about our resurrected bodies. Look at verse 42 with me for just a minute. I just want us to marvel at the wonder of this.

They will change how? What are some of the things we learned? They will change from perishable to imperishable. That means no more failing eyes.

No more confused minds. No more disability. No more sickness. No more pain.

In fact, when you think about your body, when you look at your body, there will be no more shame at all associated with it.

Can you imagine that experience? Imperishable. They'll change from dishonor to glory.

[19:40] Radiant. Hopeful. Vibrant. From weakness to power. Our bodies will have energy, capacity beyond what you know.

That durability that we all need more of now. They'll change from natural to spiritual. This may be the most amazing change of all because how is it, if it's a body, how is it spiritual?

Does that, how does that even work? Do you know how we sometimes say the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak? You said that before? It would have been like Jesus' disciples in the garden when he asks them to pray and they want to pray with him.

The spirit is willing but what happens? They fall asleep. You ever fallen asleep praying? You're in good company, right? They wanted to pray with Jesus but they were tired.

Their bodies were failing. Our natural bodies grow weary, don't they? And lustful. And greedy.

[20:51] And lazy. And distracted. You know what that feels like? That happens so easily to our bodies now, doesn't it?

Not to our spiritual bodies which will stay right in step with our renewed longings for God's design, for everything good.

Everything good that crosses your mind and your heart, your body will eagerly support. Can you believe that? What would that experience be like? And they will be imperishable.

These wonderful changes will never fade. It's really hard to wrap your mind around, isn't it? But it's true. As real as the bodily resurrection of Jesus first attested by the women, then eyewitnessed by the hundreds.

See, only when our bodies are transformed like this, only then will it be true that death is swallowed up in victory once and for all.

[21 : 57] Only then can we safely taunt death. Today we still face that three-headed monster that this passage talks about, don't we?

Death. Death. A state we can't avoid. Sin. A stain we can't remove. The law. A standard we can't meet.

Oh, no! We're stuck! There's a problem. We don't know how to deal with this. As much as we might want to change our current condition, as deeply as we long to put on the imperishable, we simply aren't able to master the monster, to measure up to the law, to deal with sin, to avoid death. We can't manage it. How will we finally be able to last? How can the perishable ever become imperishable?

It's been a really important question people have asked for a long time. Mankind has for a long, long time been seeking out answers to that question. Centuries ago, it was the fountain of youth that we searched for.

[23 : 16] More recently, we've invested in cryogenics, right? You can be frozen and then hopefully one day, decades into the future, when technology improves, you can be awakened to further life.

There's one way to hope. Perhaps we settle for chasing after living on through our kids or our fans who think we're wonderful and that's what living on will be like.

God says you don't have to settle. For figurative life. There is one way for the perishable truly to become imperishable and you don't even have to deep freeze your body.

It's simpler than that. The imperishable became perishable to make the perishable become imperishable.

Let me say that again. The imperishable, Jesus, became perishable. He went to the cross to make perishable people like us become imperishable.

[24 : 27] That's verse 57. The simplicity of this good news. How does this change happen in us? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Y'all, this is the one and only hope of biblical Christianity. I offer it to you in the name of Jesus.

Jesus masters the three-headed monster that we couldn't master for us.

In his perfectly obedient life, he meets the law's standard. He always does his father's will from the heart, loving even his enemies.

In his undeserved death on the cross, he removes the stain of sin by taking that shameful curse upon himself. Kids, do you know how a honeybee loses its stinger?

Have you heard this before? How is it that a honeybee can't sting anymore? You know, when a honeybee stings someone, the stinger gets stuck in them, right?

[25 : 31] And so the honeybee dies, doesn't have its stinger anymore. That's what Jesus did. The sting of death is sin, the Bible says.

And Jesus on the cross takes our sin on himself and receives the sting of death. And it stays in him, if you will, so that death no longer has any sting.

Jesus removes that sting. This is the death of death. It loses its sting because Jesus mastered the monster we couldn't deal with. And then on Easter, his glorious resurrection, right?

He rises from the grave. He avoids the bonds of death, bursting them, rising never more to die, defeating death once and for all.

It has no more sting. Jesus mastered all three heads of that monster that we couldn't. The standard that we couldn't meet, the stain that we couldn't remove, and the state we couldn't avoid.

[26 : 35] He achieved the victory over all of them, and now he shares it with us. He invites us to enter in, and he gives us victory because he has conquered.

Because he lives, what? What are they saying? All fear is gone. Why? Because I just pretend there's nothing bad out there anymore? No more fear?

I won't fear? I won't fear? No, because I know he holds the future. So whatever might come, and however dark it may be, my best days are always ahead of me because I trust the one who lives forever and has conquered all the evil that will come against me.

I want you to hear me clearly. If you trust Jesus, but you're hurting in the face of death right now, I think that's many of us.

One day, you will taunt death. Not today this way, but one day you can mock death.

[27 : 42] Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? You will taunt death like the little boy who has fallen again on the ground, beaten and bloodied time and again by the bully until his big brother shows up and chases the bully off once and for more, and you'll get up and say,

yeah, and never come back.

You didn't chase him away. Your older brother came and standing with you gives you victory. You can taunt death with impunity and it can't touch you ever again. If you trust yourself to Jesus, you don't have to find the fountain of youth to battle your whole life to stay young or healthy or figure out how to perfect cryogenic freezing.

You can stop stressing on that. You will be changed instantly. Just like that, remade forever by the God who made you at first, imperishable.

Oh, we long for that. Don't you want to be made and experience what it's like to be imperishable? We're not there yet.

[29 : 14] The only way for us to become imperishable is to trust the one who perished in our place, lives with us forever, transforms us into his image so that we are made new and fit to be with him for eternity.

Won't you trust Jesus today to do that for you? Then, if you will trust Jesus, though you feel like a rotting banana today, as painfully perishable as they come, you will be imperishable.

Like the gospel, the word of God, like the precious blood of Jesus, like your inheritance, God himself, you, your renewed body, imperishable.

Now, that is a hope worth holding on to and sharing with others. The imperishable became perishable, that whoever believes in him, today, you don't have to go do anything else, that whoever believes in him would not perish but live imperishable.

The imperishable became perishable. To make the perishable become imperishable.

[30 : 38] That is the unimaginable and undeserved reality that God wants you to remember today, to celebrate at this table.

See, knowing how hard it would be for us to feel his love, to believe promises like this at times because of the noisy world we're in, because of our perishable bodies that would struggle to believe, he gave us this meal and he invites us to join him at this table forever.

To remember his death. He perished so that we eternally would never perish.

He is changing us so that we can share this meal with him, not just today and a little taste of it, but forever with him.

This morning is a foretaste of eternity where Jesus, our Savior, promises he's waiting to eat and drink with us in his Father's kingdom. And in the meantime, he meets with us by his Spirit to comfort us, to strengthen us for the world in which we live now.

[31 : 57] Knowing that he would be leaving them soon, Jesus sat with his disciples at the Last Supper and he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to them as I, ministering in his name, give this bread to you.

And he said, take, eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And the same way, after supper, he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it, all of you, because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. But as often as you eat the bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Not your own death. You're going to have life forever. But you proclaim that your hope is in his death until that day.

We see at this table the body and blood of Jesus, our Savior, given for us that we would be united to him, not only in his death, but especially today in his resurrection to imperishable life with him.

[33 : 14] We come as broken sinners to the Savior who through his broken body heals us once and for all. If that's not your understanding of what's going on here, if your story is not one of hope in Christ alone for your salvation, we're really glad you're here.

We would invite you not to receive these elements this morning, but rather to receive Jesus himself. To trust in him. As we celebrate this sacrament, we would still invite you to come up to the tables with us if you would like.

To pray with us. We'd love to pray with you. Or to observe what's going on. You're also welcome to stay right where you are, and that's no problem at all. But even more than that, I'd urge you to consider Jesus.

Consider eternity. Consider the longings of your heart. Consider if your existence and the things you feel match with what your heart longs for.

Consider the invitation of Jesus to come to him and to find forgiveness and hope and an offer to change you forever into what you long to be.

[34 : 38] This is indeed the Lord's table. It's not Southwoods. It's not the Presbyterian churches. So if you trust Jesus, if you are united to him by faith, he invites you to come and eat and drink and celebrate the eternal hope that you have, eating food that will never spoil and will always satisfy.

Let's pray and we'll come together. Jesus, thank you for what you have provided us here. A meal that continues to remind us that you give us eternal hope.

That we get to celebrate both your death and your resurrected life today is such a joy. So through very common elements, bread and juice, would you do something very uncommon in our hearts? Would you grow faith? Would you bring healing where we're grieving? Would you give us boldness where there's fear?

Would you help us to trust you and rejoice in you today and every day? Do that work by your spirit, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.