

# 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[ 0 : 00 ] Okay. A couple of pieces of business before we get started. First of all, it's hot. Second of all, there are ways to deal with that. One is if you're not sitting in a fan zone and you need a fan, get up, move to a place where you can feel the breeze of the fans in the sanctuary.

Secondly, if you are dying of heat, there is cold water in pitchers downstairs as well as a water fountain in the back with cups. Go avail yourself. Don't feel like I'll be offended. I am telling you all this because my hope is that you will be able to pay attention and hang in there because we have a wonderful passage to look at this morning. And so if you need to go downstairs, it is slightly cooler down there. And there is a speaker down there. Please be respectful of one another who may be listening to the sermon while you're down there. So those are your options. And as I have an 87 point outline here for you, we're going to... No, I'm kidding. I'm kidding. We're going to look at the passage. We're going to be looking at 1 Corinthians, continuing our series, and we'll be looking at that in just a minute. I also want to just say on a personal note, it is good to be back. Thank you to the church for giving me a leave in the month of July. It was a good break. It was good to be with my kids and good to step away from some of the daily demands of life and ministry.

It is interesting though because what I experienced during my leave has helped me think about what we're talking about this morning in 1 Corinthians. As I was on vacation with my family, my mom has developed some new health issues that are a little more significant than they have been. She's 80 years old as of January and is the most remarkably vibrant and active 80-year-old you would know. And so facing this is the first time when we've really had to wrestle through with her, how she's doing. And as we've had to face in a new way with the family, two of the great unchangeable realities of human existence, and that is that we are getting older and that one day we will die. It's not a very happy topic to talk about. In fact, we're not very good at it. One of my readings for this week was a book called *Being Mortal*. It is not written by a Christian. It is not from a Christian perspective, but it is a remarkable book talking about how much our society and our culture does not like to face or to talk about. And in fact is ill-equipped to face and to talk about the realities of aging and of death. As a matter of fact, I want to read to you a passage. He is a surgeon. He is the son of two doctors. And he realized as he entered into his practice how ill-equipped he and the medical system that had trained him was to actually help people face and walk through some of these issues.

So he says, this is a book about the modern experience of mortality, about what it's like to be creatures who age and die, how medicine has changed the experience and how it hasn't, and where our ideas about how to deal with our finitude have got the reality wrong. As I pass a decade in surgical practice and become middle-aged myself, I find that neither I nor my patients find our current state tolerable, but I have also found it unclear what the answer should be, or even whether any adequate ones are possible. He's exposing what's a reality for us in our culture and often in our own lives, that we don't really know how to face the end of life.

He goes on and talks about how the whole medical system right now is primarily trained to help fix things and make you better and prolong your life. And that's good and right. That's what they should do.

[ 4 : 33 ] But in doing so, it hasn't always equipped us as a society to think about how to face the end well.

One more side note before I go on. I'm really thankful that in our congregation, we have some resources of people who know how to think about these things well. John Dunlop and Lydia Dugdale are both physicians who in different ways have been thinking through these things, not only from a human perspective, but especially as well from a Christian perspective.

John's book, *Finishing Well to the Glory of God*, is worth your read. Whether you are 65 or whether you are 16, it is worth your read to think about what does it look like to face these things well.

But the challenge is very real. Think about how in our culture things have changed. In 1945, most people in America died at home. According to the statistics in the book, 17% of people died at home in 1980. He said there's been a swing back since then a little bit. But think about how much that changes. How many of you have actually seen a dead body? How many of you have seen someone die, walked through that? Some of you have. Some of you haven't.

But we live in a culture that wants to ignore it as much as possible. As probably many of you know, as I walked with my late wife Brandy through the last three and a half years of her life, we faced these questions. We faced the questions of how do you live knowing your probably going to die, but not know when? How much do you focus on living for today and making the most of it?

[ 6 : 29 ] How much do you prepare for what's coming ahead? How do you face the end? How do you navigate the feelings of hopelessness and of hope that swirl in your heart? How do you walk through those things?

We weren't particularly prepared for that. It wasn't on our plan when we got married to be facing what we did.

We were unaccustomed to the process, unfamiliar with the questions, ignorant of the patterns, and we were unprepared. Now, I'm sure some of you have walked through this process already with someone you love.

Maybe some of you are facing this process yourself. You're feeling the aging and thinking through, how do I walk through this well? Some of you may not be there yet. Maybe you haven't walked through it, but you're starting to see that it's more downhill than uphill from here in your life.

Some of you, my guess is, have never thought about it at all. That was true of me for many, many years. Until my dad passed away, it didn't even cross my mind.

[ 7 : 55 ] Even when some of my really good friends had loved ones die, I didn't have any clue. How do we face aging and dying and death?

What do we do with that? Well, friends, that's what our passage this morning speaks to, I believe. And it gives us a mind-blowing picture of what God has done for us and how we, who know Christ, can respond to these questions.

And so, in light of that, we're going to look at 1 Corinthians 15, verses 50 through 58. If you want to turn there in your pew Bible, what's the page? I forgot.

9.62. Page 9.62. We're going to read this together, and then I will pray, and then we will continue.

1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 50. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 50.

[ 9 : 31 ] 1 Corinthians 15, verse 50.

4, amen. 4 ■■■■. 3 Corinthians 15, verse 50. 5, zodiac Christians. 5, verse 50. 5, verse 50. 6, verse 51. 6, verse 50. 7, verse 31. 7, verse 51. 8, verse 51. 8, verse 50.

6, verse 51. 5, verse 51. 10, verse 51. 11, verse 51. 11, verse 51. 20, verse 51.

Let's pray together. Lord what sweet and precious words These are that speak to our hope And Lord lay for us Channel markers Lord through the dizzying currents And the bewildering winds of Death and dying Lord thank you for these channel markers These points of reference That can lead us through well Lord I pray this morning you would give us Your grace to hear your word Lord to know the hope That you have given us in Christ Lord I pray for those who are here this morning Who are exploring Christianity Lord that they would hear Lord of the great hope That is for all Who are joined with Christ In resurrection and eternity Lord I pray That you would help us in this heat To sustain and endure

Lord I pray you would give us ears to hear What you have to speak to us this morning By your spirit Through your word We pray in Jesus name Amen As we come to this passage this morning I want to remind you of the context Paul has been writing to the Corinthians And in the church in Corinth And in chapter 15 He has come back to After 14 chapters Of a lot of ethical instruction This is how you ought to live This is how you ought to be He comes back and he reminds them He says now I want to remind you Of what is of first importance This is the very core Of the Christian message This is the very core of the gospel That Jesus Christ Died for your sins And was raised from the dead He wants us to have that central It is Christianity is not about Being a good person

[ 12 : 27 ] Christianity is not about About performing well in the world It's not about improving our society It's not about all of those things In fact it's not about us First and foremost at all It's about what God has done For us in Jesus Christ That he has come And by his death And by his

resurrection He has wrought a work In the world A work of redemption That changes everything He then goes on In verses 12 through 34 To address a question That seemed to be swirling In the Corinthian context Which is But I don't think That the resurrection That doesn't make any sense to me And maybe you understand that Because in our scientific world People who die are dead That's very sort of Tautological right?

People who die are dead That's all they do And this idea of resurrection Seems very odd to us And so he attacks this idea And he says No, we who are Christians Must believe That there is a resurrection From the dead Because Christ Has been raised from the dead And there is good evidence Historically To know that that is true There is good effect To remember that That resurrection Changes everything Then he goes on In verses 35 Through the end of the chapter Which is the last We're reading the last part today And he shifts from the question Of can there be a resurrection Or not To what kind of resurrection body Would it Is it going to look like?

What does that really look like? We're unfamiliar with this idea Of a resurrected person So what does it really look like To be raised from the dead? And let me just say My brothers who have preached On this for the last four weeks Have done a wonderful job And if you have missed out On the last four weeks Please Go to our website Sign up for the podcast Download the messages Listen to them There is much That I will not get to say About Jesus Christ And his resurrection today Because they've already said it With much more eloquence Than I can summarize So go back and read those Or listen to those And be blessed by them But at the core of it This section How Paul responds to that is Oh what will the resurrection body Look like?

Well It will look like Something more glorious More fitting More right More heavenly More ideal Than you could ever imagine Nick used the analogy Last week of If you look at an acorn And think of what A beautiful oak tree is like We in our mortal bodies Right now Are that ugly little acorn And what is coming to us Is this picture Of abundant beauty And glory Beyond what we could imagine And that leads us To our passage this morning And in our passage this morning Paul gives us two more Key perspectives About the resurrection And what it means For us today How Christ's resurrection And his victory over death Means that we too Can face death And live life With certainty And with hope

So we're going to break it down We're going to look at three sections The first one is The hope of a coming transformation The second one is The present reality Of Christ's victory And the third is The exhortation To draw on that strength To live lives now In light of the future resurrection So that's what we're going to look at This morning First one Verses 50 through 53 Excuse me He starts out by saying this I tell you this brothers Flesh and blood cannot inherit The kingdom of God Nor does the perishable Inherit the imperishable The Corinthians It seems like we're thinking This This flesh This ugliness With all of its warts And And And And extra pounds And And all the other things That I have And And the The ugly elbows And my misshaped nose This thing This mortal body This thing that's decaying How can this

[16:57] Be a part of eternity How can this Be a part of God And his kingdom How is it possible That that is true Imagining that is like saying A two year old Is able to fly An F-16 Or a cricket Should be able to pull The queen's carriage Through the streets of London It just doesn't make sense It doesn't fit This mortal body Isn't fit For the future That is to come And Paul says Oh no Oh no friends Your imagination Is too small This mortal body You were right This mortal body Cannot inherit Those things But this mortal body Isn't going to inherit Those things Because God Is going to do something In us In the resurrection That is wonderful Look with me Verses 52-53 Or 51-52 Behold I tell you A mystery And a mystery Isn't some esoteric thing

It's simply something That wasn't known before But now In light of the resurrection Of Christ Is now known And revealed to us I tell you a mystery We will not all sleep Which is a metaphor For dying But we will all Be changed In a moment In a 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 This is the great hope That he's pointing us to Yes of course This mortal body Won't go to heaven But what God Has done for us In Christ Means that For all who are in him Who are joined With Christ in faith There is a day That is coming In the future Where this will be Transformed Where this flesh In blood Will be transformed Not into a spirit That doesn't have A body And not into a zombie Or a walking dead Or some other Modern conception Of what it might be

To come back From the dead Friends The greatest sense We have Of what that Imperishable And immortal Body Might look like Is from the Accounts in the Gospels Where we see Jesus Risen from

the Dead And he's real And he's physical And he eats bread And he touches people And they can touch him And he speaks And yet There are things In the gospel Account That don't make sense He seems to be able To go through walls He seems to be able To suddenly appear And disappear And you know what Friends I have no idea How to put all that Together I'll be honest With you I don't know What this body Is going to look like But it will be Imperishable And it will be Immortal And all the things That we think About our bodies Now We don't realize How deeply We have Presumed on that It will all be Changed

And we will be Fit For heaven And it's not A process It's not an Organic Or developmental Thing where we Suddenly move Slowly from this Mortality To an immortality Did you see How Paul describes it It's going to happen In a moment In a twinkling Of an eye At the last trumpet And the trumpet Is picturing Christ's triumphant Return Where he comes Back to the earth To establish His reign fully And it is not Going to be A process It will be Instantaneous He will come And we will Be transformed Into something That we've never Seen before And can only Begin to Imagine Friends This is better Than prolonging This life This is better Than simply Seeking to get The most We can Out of this Mortal body And then Dying Like the Existentialists Say This is better Than fluffy Clouds And cherubim On hearts What we have Waiting for us In this Immortal And imperishable Body Is going to be An existence That will be More glorious Than you could Ever Imagine We will be Fit For God's Kingdom We will be Fit For His Presence There will be No shame There will be No guilt There will be No weakness There will be No getting Old And no getting Tired But we will Live With Him Forever In the Richness Of His Presence And His Glory And we Will be Fit for

[ 21 : 59 ] That Because of The resurrection From the Dead You know It's Helpful To think About this I don't know If you've Thought about This And I've Shared this I think Before But you Know One of Things That's Reality Is That Good Theology Is really Helpful And in This Light Good Theology Has been Particularly Really Helpful For my Kids After Brandy Died I brought Them Out to The hospice To see Her Because I Wanted them To see The body That was Left behind I wanted Them to See that Her spirit Was no Longer There I wanted Them to See Death But I Wanted them To see That in Light of All the Things that We had Talked About With Them Over The Years Leading Up To That How We Talked With Them About Heaven How We Talked With Them About This Hope And This Passage That That That body Though It Failed Will

Be Raised One Day And It Will Be Glorious That Brandy That Brandy Will Immortality And Imperish Ability That She Will Be Transformed And You Know What It's Helped My Kids A Lot To Know That That's True They Don't Fear Death They Don't Fear Talking About Her They Don't Wonder What Happened To Her At Least They Never Told Me That They Do Our Good Theology Is Helpful As We Navigate These Things Paul Goes On And He Says Not Only Is It True That As We Are Caught Up With Christ In This Resurrection We Will Be Changed But He Also Then Goes On To Say In 54 Through 57 He Says That When This Happens We Will Connect To A Victory Over The Greatest Enemies Of Humanity Paul Back In Verse 26 Of Chapter 15 Has Said Death Is The Last Enemy I Don't Know If You Have Thought About It But How Much Of Our Life Is Driven By The Fact That We Are Only Here For A Little Period Of Time How Much Of Our Life Is Shaped By The Fact That We We're Going To Put

On These Things And He Says But When We Put Them On Then It Shall Come To Pass What Was Said Death Is Swallowed Up In Victory And He's Quoting From Isaiah 25 And It's A And So And He's Saying Of And And And So Being Swallowed Up Like A Little Shadow Is Swallowed Up By The Brilliance Of A Bright Sun As It Breaks Over The Horizon So Too Death Will Be Swallowed Up By The resurrection of Christ on that day. In fact, Paul is so confident and so joyful about this that in the next verse, he actually turns to a taunt. This is how we ought to read verse 55.

Death, where is your victory? Come on, I don't see it. Where is it? Jesus rose from the dead. I don't see it. He's taunting death. It's fascinating. What he does actually is, he's quoting from Hosea 13, and in Hosea 13, it's actually a summons. It's in the context of a judgment against one of the nations that's been oppressing God's people, and it's a call for death to come and exert its sting and exert its power on those people because they have been disobedient to the Lord. And so Paul is acknowledging that humanity has always seen that death has had a sting and has had a power over humanity. But he now, rather than quoting that and inviting that, he is now taunting that power. He's saying, death, we thought you had that, but you don't.

[ 26 : 46 ] You don't have that power anymore. The sting of death is gone because death has been swallowed up in victory.

And then in typical Pauline writing in verse 56, he takes a little excursus into his great theology of salvation, right? Because as we understand from the scriptures, death has come from sin. Sin entered the world, and because of sin. Death. The first man, Adam, sinned, and so we all inherited that sin, and because of that sin, we all experience death, and there is no escaping that until Jesus rose from the dead and death was defeated. And it talks about how Jesus defeated that.

This, he talks about how the power of sin is the law, because what the law does, that is the regulations about how we ought to live in light of God. Simply demonstrate for us that we can't do it. That's what the law does for all of humanity. It says, you will never be good enough to make it to God on your own. You will never be able to put on imperishability by being a better person in this world. You will never be able to put on immortality by trying harder or doing great things in this world.

The hope that you have is that there is one who has done these things for you. Jesus Christ came, and he lived a perfect life that fulfilled the law in every way. And then he offered himself up, not needing to die for his own sins. He offered himself in our place, taking the penalty of sin, which is death, upon himself, and therefore satisfying the requirements of the law. And so suddenly we see that Jesus has swallowed up death in victory when he rose from the grave.

Friends, join with Paul and with me in verse 37. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the great hope, not just that Jesus has risen from the dead, but for all who have put their faith in him, who are trusting in him for their salvation.

[ 29 : 29 ] We gain that victory too. We will be with him. We will be raised up with him to this newness of life and this eternal life that will be greater than all.

Some of you are familiar with John Dunn's great poem, Death Be Not Proud. I almost brought it to quote to you, but it's a little tricky to work through. And I thought I'd save us some of the 400-year-old English. But I did find an updated version where someone, a contemporary songwriter, has turned it into a song that I think, and the lyrics capture what John Dunn is saying, but with a little more modern English.

So let me read her version of it to you. This is the taunt, this is the attitude of those who get the victory in Christ. Death be not proud, though the whole world fear you. Mighty and dreadful you may seem, but death be not proud, for your pride has failed you. You will not kill me, though you may dwell in plague and poison. You're a slave to fate and desperate men.

So death, if your sleep be the gates to heaven, why your confidence? Friends, it is so hard for us to wrap our mind around this truth that death will one day no longer shape our lives. Death will one day no longer be the end point which defines everything that we do.

But when we are raised with Christ, who has won the victory over death, friends, there is nothing left but praise to God and taunting that old enemy that we were so afraid of once, but not anymore. Finally, having put forth to us that we will be transformed as we are caught up with him. He who has won the victory so that we no longer need to fear death but can be filled with thanksgiving. Paul then says, therefore, how do we live? Therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[ 32 : 16 ] He says, because we know these things about death, we can face it honestly. And how do we live in the meantime? How do we live in light of that? Two things. One, be like the rock of Gibraltar. Don't be like a beach ball on the edge of the shore that is pushed by every wave of fear about death. Don't allow yourself to be pushed around by our culture that tries to ignore death, by our culture that tries to minimize death, by our culture that tries to give platitudes to make us feel better without actually addressing it. But recognize that in the gospel, in the resurrected Christ, you can be a rock of Gibraltar where the waves of death. Be steadfast and immovable in light of death. Don't let it rule you and don't let it fear you. But instead, do what? Always abound in the work of the Lord. Rather than the prospect of death causing you to go into your shell and simply shrivel up and succumb to it.

He says, no. Face the reality of your death and then go and abound in the work of the Lord. What does he mean by the work of the Lord? I think it could be many things. It could be simply what he started the chapter with, which is his own ministry of proclaiming the very core of the gospel. Certainly, this is a work of the Lord that we would share this hope with others. That we would not have to be confused and without hope in the face of death, but that we would have these anchor

points that can help us navigate even the greatest questions of life. But you know, I also think that Paul wrote this at the end of his book, this letter to this church, to say, this is what's going to fuel all the other things.

When I told you to embrace humility and weakness and brokenness in your leaders and not pride and arrogance and a dismissive and self-exalting attitude. When I told you to think about how you control your bodies, in the way you live out your sex life for the glory of God, how you manage yourself and your relationships with one another in the church, how you navigate your culture and the questions of idolatry and your freedoms, and how you are called to love one another well, how you worship, and how you exercise your spiritual gifts. These are all, in Paul's mind, the abundance of doing works for the Lord.

As we follow his instructions and all that we've been teaching on in 1 Corinthians, Paul says, abound in these things because there is a future and there is a hope that we have.

I don't need to exalt myself and be self-promoting and self-exalting because one day I will be changed into imperishability and I will be in glory with him.

[ 35 : 50 ] I don't need to do that now because he will do that for me. I don't want to use my body to live in patterns of sin that lead to death when I have been saved for a life that will be eternal and more satisfying and more glorious than the greatest of physical pleasure in this world.

I don't want to use my freedom to try to give my life meaning in this era, in this age, but I want to lay it down as a servant for others because I know that one day I will have the greatest freedom of all, freedom from sin and freedom from death. All this because Christ has won the victory. And he finished it saying, abound in these things because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Friends, recognize that the resurrection of Christ is the most important thing that has ever happened in the world. It is the turning point of all history. It is the centerpiece of all Christian theology. It is the thing that gives us hope and makes our life not vain, not empty, not fruitless. We may or may not see the fruit of our labor. We may or may not see the good results of our attempts to follow God's instructions on how we ought to live.

But friends, we will not live in vain in Christ because we will not die, but we will be raised with him imperishable and immortal. And what a great hope this is. You know, last week as I was sitting in the pew listening to Nick preach on this glorious hope of what our bodies will look like, I actually had a picture in my mind. I had a picture of Brandy, how she might be sipping the best cup of tea that she's ever had. How her body and her life are renewed. And like a seed that turns into the lushness of a garden. All, all of the beautiful things that she was in this world and all the best of who she was to us, to us, and all the weakness and all the suffering and all the pain that she endured, those things are like a little seed that have now burst in glory for her.

And I think, I want to hold on to that hope for her because it means I don't despair for her. For me. Because it means I don't want to give up. And for you. Because I pray that you too will pray that God will help you to see what God has prepared beforehand for you. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him are called according to his purpose. What a great hope we have in Christ. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for this hope. Thank you that Jesus is risen from the dead. Lord, we pray that you would help us to come awake.

[ 39 : 41 ] And Lord, to live in light of this great hope. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to close our time together by singing a great hymn. I don't know if you've noticed, but all of our songs this morning have touched on and brought forth the centrality of the resurrection of the dead and the hope that it brings. So, we will sing. You'll hear the echoes.

Thank you.