

Lesson 46: “Resurrection Victory”**1 Corinthians 15:50-58****Craig Crawshaw**

This week Paul answers the first of two questions asked of him in verse 35 – “How are the dead raised?” Let’s begin by reading the Scripture together.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (N.A.S.B.) *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O 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 brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Now we have just read the passage in the New American Standard Bible version – called the N.A.S.B. Sometimes I find it helpful to paraphrase a passage in my own words to help me better sort out its meaning. So let’s read this version of the Scripture, which I call the C.U.P. version – the “Crawshaw Unauthorized Paraphrase.”

C.U.P. (Crawshaw Unauthorized Paraphrase):

Now I tell you this, fellow believers, that the human body is not fit for the heavenly kingdom, because a body which is perishable could never survive a never-ending eternity. So I reveal to you the mystery which has been withheld for so long – that not all believers will have to die, but we will all have to be changed. This transformation will happen instantaneously – like the blink of an eye. It will happen when the voice of Jesus, like the sound of a trumpet, will call us home at His coming. That is when those who have died as true believers will be raised up with new, eternal bodies. And then we who remain will be changed as well.

Why? Again, because our present body is only for temporary use, and since it is mortal it must become immortal. When this amazing transformation occurs, the prophet Isaiah’s futuristic prophesy will have come to pass: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

And at this thought, I join in praise with the prophet Hosea in shouting, “Where is the victory of death? – it no longer exists! Where is the stinger of the grave? It has been removed!” You see, the reason death stings, is because we are sinners, and death brings about judgment. And the reason sin has power, is because pending judgment and final recompense is part of God’s law.

But thanks be to God, who has given us victory over this second death of judgment. And this victory is all because of our Lord Jesus Christ!

So fellow believers, it only makes sense that the proper response to all this must be to live a steadfast life of unshakable, abundant, loving service to our Lord. And we must be confident that every effort on behalf of Jesus and His kingdom work will never ever be in vain.

INTRODUCTION

Paul frames his answer to the question “With what kind of body do they come?” in terms of VICTORY. This section is the climax to Paul’s teaching on our bodily resurrection, and it’s all about the VICTORY that we have because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now victory assumes at least two things – one, that there is an adversary to be defeated. And Paul sees that adversary as DEATH. Second, victory assumes some kind of valiant conquest to be made over that adversary. And Paul sees that conquest as a MYSTERY of transformation. Let’s examine how Paul makes his case.

THE BASIC PREMISE

First Paul begins by laying down a basic principle on which he will build his argument. We find this principle in the opening verse of today's passage, verse 50. This basic principle is: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Or as I have paraphrased it: "The human body is not fit for the heavenly kingdom." Our bodies are a good fit for our earthly condition. But even so they are decaying moment by moment. And they certainly can't last an eternity, nor are they suited for the heavenly realm. These bodies are headed for DEATH with 100% certainly.

So "Heaven, we have a problem," comes to mind. We need a big, juicy MYSTERY MIRACLE to achieve the VICTORY needed over death. We will need a new body.

THE MYSTERY MIRACLE

So in verse 51, Paul begins in poetic style: "Behold, I tell you a mystery ..." Now this is not a mystery to be solved. Rather, it is a mystery that is revealed by the teaching of Jesus, passed on to Paul. It is the mystery of complete transformation of earthly, perishable bodies into heavenly, imperishable bodies. Paul reveals that there will be some believers who will never see death (and I'm sure he believed he would be one of them). But whether dead or alive, all believers would have their bodies miraculously changed.

How quickly? – as fast as it takes an eye to blink. The Greek word used is the word from which we get our word "atom" – what was thought to be the smallest increment of in this case, time.

When? "At the last trumpet." We take this to mean the call of Jesus to all his followers when He comes to meet them in the air. In Revelation 1:10 the apostle John heard a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, and it was Jesus. It will sound like a trumpet, but it will be the voice of Jesus calling us home.

What will happen? The dead and the then living will be raised with bodies that are completely changed to be imperishable – eternal – heavenly.

This "mystery miracle" will happen at what we refer to as the "rapture" – the gathering up of all believers dead and alive when Jesus calls to meet them in the air. There is dispute as to whether this event will precede the tribulation ("pre-trib") or come in the middle of the tribulation ("mid-trib") or occur at the end of the tribulation ("post-trib"). But it will surely precede the millennium rule of Christ on the earth. And most importantly, IT WILL HAPPEN, for God has made that very clear.

THE VICTORY OVER DEATH

Poetry

Let's face the fact that death is a formidable foe. We spend most of our lives trying to avoid or ignore it. The "father of psychiatry," Sigmund Freud, wrote famously:

"And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be."
Sigmund Freud

Death is a cruel taskmaster, that seemingly defeats every foe without compromise. It is a horrid interloper into the fabric of life. It doesn't seem to belong, but be an alien in the scheme of life.

I remember standing at the bedside of my just-departed mother as her still warm body was being wrapped in a body bag to be carried out, feeling intense anger that overwhelmed my sadness. I wondered for a moment why I was so angry, until I realized I was angry at sin, and the devil that had brought sin into our world to forever pollute it with death after death after death. Behind the enemy of death is the father of lies and of death, the devil himself. Where God would bring life, he would bring death and revel in it.

Yes, death and its perpetrator, the devil, is a formidable foe, but no match for Jesus, who is the LIFE. And in Jesus' life – His resurrected life – is our VICTORY over death and the devil.

It was the prophet Isaiah who first penned these words that Paul included in his poetic revelry of victory:

Isaiah 25:8 *He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces. And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken.*

The “He” is the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, who will swallow up death for all time. And the “reproach of His people” that will be removed from all the earth is DEATH. And this is the quote that Paul uses in verse 54 to describe the miracle defeat of death at the rapture – “death is swallowed up in victory.”

Then Paul borrows from the prophet Hosea to continue his poetic revelry of victory over death:

Hosea 13:14 *O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting?*

Hosea and Paul treat death as a vanquished foe in declaring that it no longer has any “thorns” or “victory.” “Sheol” – the place of the dead, or “the grave” - is characterized by both authors as having no “sting” or ability to harm or hurt anymore. Death has been neutralized and rendered benign.

Theology

But then Paul breaks from his poetic voice and can’t resist adding a bit of theology to the argument. He points out that the “sting” of death is sin. No sin, no death. And no sin, no judgment or recompense after death. But with sin there is the terrifying expectation of some comeuppance.

And what gives sin its power? – that our sin against God is revealed in the Law of God - “the wages of sin is death” There would be no power behind our fear of death were there no just God who had stated that sin was an abomination to Him.

Then the ultimate conclusion, bringing poetry of expression and theology of thought together:

1 Corinthians 15:57 *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ that began the defeat of death, and will bring the miracle of transformation to happen for all believers, ultimately defeating death itself for all time.

OUR CHALLENGE AND ASSURANCE

It is just like our Lord to bring this glorious chapter to a close with a personal challenge to us all, filled with assurance. In our thrill in having assurance that our death is not the end, we have now a challenge for our life until that assurance is realized.

- 1) **To be STEADFAST and IMMOVABLE** - holding on tightly to our faith, not allowing it to slip away.
- 2) **Always abounding in the work of the Lord** - never growing tired, never taking a vacation from our faith, never “retiring” from service and always doing all we can (abounding)
- 3) **Remember that nothing done for our Lord is in vain** – it all counts, it is not forgotten, it all returns a harvest and never returns void

So, “How are the dead raised?”

IN MYSTERIOUS, GLORIOUS VICTORY - through Christ Jesus our Lord !