

Death Defeated

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, some people in the United Kingdom are going to be celebrating this evening, aren't they? Where those people will be, whether they will be primarily north or south of Carlisle, will depend, won't it?
- It will depend on whether a few Englishmen who get paid, on average, about £200,000 a week can stop a 16-year-old kicking a ball into a net. Football is a strange game. It's an even stranger business.
- But football is as big as it is, in part, because through it, people get to take part in victories they otherwise never would.
- Your average Englishman would have no chance against Spain this evening, would they? Or were they to line up? And indeed, who would care if the only people the match mattered to were the ones playing in it?
- But that's not how it works, is it? People see two sides lining up against one another, and they choose their team.
- [1 : 1 9] They choose whose side they are on. And when they win, the victory does not just belong to the 11 players on the pitch, but to everyone who is on their side.
- Now, that is not just football fans being weird, I don't think. It's maybe a bit of a stretch to say being a fan of football is built into the fabric of creation.
- But there is a striking similarity between what happens at a football ground and what has been going on since the day of the fall.
- Because from then on, there has been one great battle playing out throughout history. God on one side, Satan, sin, and death on the other. They are the only players on the field.
- They are the ones who do the heavy lifting. But we watch on, choosing our side. And this evening, we will see that when we choose God's side, when God wins, we win.
- [2 : 3 0] If it was down to us, victory would not only be unlikely, it would be impossible. But what we see at the beginning of this evening's passage is that while we get to take part in the victory celebrations, it is God's victory.
- This is God's great victory. And we see this in verses 50 through to verse 56. We might have picked up, even just from our short time in Corinthians, that the church in Corinth certainly had their troubles, just as we do.
- But again, like us, they didn't get everything wrong. Paul begins this section in verse 50 by finally agreeing with them on something.
- One of the reasons some within the church seem to be so confused by Christ's return was because they were looking at the way they were in themselves then and looking at the kingdom of God as it promised to come and thinking something doesn't add up here.
- The resurrection is all very well, but what if Jesus returns before I die? That is a very real possibility for every one of us. And the Corinthians, for all their objections, were on to something here.

- [3 : 55] They were right in thinking my life as it currently is and God's kingdom are the way things stand incompatible.
- There is a fundamental disconnect between the two. God's kingdom is pure like snow. My life is about as stained as it could possibly be.
- God's kingdom is like unfading gold that never spoils, perishes, or fades. My life is like a banana that's already started to brown before you even buy it.
- They are chalk and cheese, aren't they? Holy and sinful, eternal and perishable. And now Paul is saying the two are coming together.
- And he begins in verse 50 by agreeing that the way things are at the moment, that wouldn't work. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But here is Paul's very simple declaration in verse 51.
- [5 : 03] When Jesus comes again, everything will change. Look at what he describes there in that verse. Listen, I tell you a mystery, he writes.
- 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, and we will be changed.
- The focus thus far in the chapter has been on the resurrection of the dead. But Paul says here, do not worry that the living will be left behind.
- Death is not necessary to enter the kingdom of God, but change is. The perishable will become imperishable. The mortal will be clothed with immortality.
- There is a moment coming when everyone and everything will change. That moment is coming. The dead and the living alike, all those who have put their trust in Jesus, will be raised imperishable.
- [6 : 14] And there is one great word to describe this that Paul uses there at the start of verse 51. A mystery. We can say what the Bible says.
- But beyond that, there is not much else for us to add. Because the details of how it will happen on that day are indeed a mystery.
- But don't let our lack of understanding dampen your certainty that that day will come. And we see here that while the details of how are a mystery, the big picture, sort of landscape portrait of what will happen is wonderfully clear.
- Because as God clothes us with immortality on that great but mysterious day, death will be defeated.
- Verse 54. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.
- [7 : 33] Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?
- Where, O death, is your sting?
- Those words which were initially spoken in judgment against God's people are now spoken in glorious triumph over our greatest enemy.
- They are words that are met with a beautiful silence. Where is your victory? Where is your sting?
- Questions that will be met with silence because there is no victory. There is no sting. Death is defeated forever.
- [8 : 37] For God, in his great victory, removes death's power once and for all, and he removes its sting, which, verse 56, is sin.
- For good, they are gone. That is the reality which awaits our resurrection bodies. It will not be more of the same on repeat forever.

It will not be rerun after rerun of this life, like a tired old TV show doing laps on late-night television. Our bodies will be ours, but it will be an existence entirely unlike this one.

There will be no sin. That means, as Wilma read earlier from us in Revelation 21, there will be no evil, no tears, no pain, no anguish, no grief, no sadness, no mourning, no illness, no pain, no death, none of it, not a bit of it, forever.

Every painful moment in your life, even if it wasn't the direct consequence of your sin, was the consequence of sin's existence in this world.

[10 : 39] Perhaps the most painful moments of all have been when death itself has reared its most ugly head.

death and sin will be gone forever. forever.

not only will they be gone, their effects will be undone. The dead will be raised to life, and the life we live shall always, always be without sin's presence.

just think for a moment of the frustrations you've had even this very week. No more.

you will never again fall out with someone. there will only ever be peace in the home.

[11 : 40] death's cruel plans will never haunt you.

you will never become unwell. your body will never fail. you will never become weak.

you will never be ashamed or angry. you will never get frustrated. you will never be unsatisfied. nothing and no one will ever let you down.

you will always, always live in peace and harmony with everyone around you. we will always love the people around us and delight to be with them.

we will always take pleasure in our work and rejoice in our rest because sin and death are not there. because God has defeated them once and for all.

[12 : 52] when the trumpet calls on that mysterious day, it will declare to all creation here in this great battlefield going on from the beginning of time, there is one victor here.

and he alone is God's. and all those who are with him, everyone who is on his side, all of us who hope in Christ will get to join in that victory.

it will become ours. ours. And so, in response, there is only one place to begin, isn't there?

And that is with praise and thanks to God. our second point this evening follows Paul's words in verse 57.

We're in light of this glorious truth on that great day. what we can and must say is thanks be to God.

[14 : 09] Thanks be to God. We give thanks to God because while we benefit from his victory, we recognize that it is he who has won this battle for us.

we will be resurrected to life everlasting because God reached out in love to those who were his enemies. We give thanks because he became the friend of sinners by giving his one and only son to die on a cross.

his blood is what washed away our sin and satisfied God's wrath. Because of what he has done, we are promised perfect resurrection bodies raised with Christ and raised like Christ.

To bodies that are imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual as we saw this morning. And he gives us that victory now.

Yes, there is a day coming when death will finally be defeated once and for all. But even now, even today, death's sting has been removed, hasn't it?

[15 : 26] For the sting of death was sin and the power of sin was the law. But thanks be to God because he has dealt thoroughly and completely with the problem of sin already.

By becoming obedient to the law and becoming its curse for us. We brought sin and death into the world. He defeats sin and death and calls us to take part in his victory.

So thanks be to God because we are merely spectators watching from the sidelines. He alone has given this great hope.

He gives us victory over death in and through Jesus Christ, not because of our works, but because of his grace. To him alone belongs glory and praise because he has done all this for us.

Paul's first response is rightly one of praise. His second is one of exhortation to his audience.

[16 : 37] And we see thirdly, our faith in response to God's victory. He closes in verse 58, you'll see there, by urging the Corinthian church to therefore, first of all, stand firm.

stand firm in their faith. Because of the hope, the sure and certain hope, the gospel gives them beyond the short years of this life.

I don't know if you remember where we began last week, where we met the Corinthians at the start of chapter 15. Do you remember their situation?

This church was floundering, floundering under the pressures of their age. They lived in a world that denigrated and mocked their beliefs.

they were tempted to compromise, to start accommodating the world's beliefs into the church, pressurized by a world that held no regard for the possibility of the resurrection, surrounded on all sides by a world whose morals stood at odds with the Bible's teaching.

[17 : 57] That is the situation the Corinthians faced 2,000 years ago and the temptation was to buckle, to concede some gospel truths here and there.

Maybe it would make things a little bit easier. But Paul says, stand firm. Stand firm because it is all about God's word.

Stand firm because it is all about Jesus. Stand firm because it is all about grace. Stand firm because Christ Jesus really did rise from the grave.

And so stand firm because you one day will be too. And on that day, stand firm because sin and death shall be defeated forever. Stand firm because you want to make sure you are on the right side of that victory.

In order for this hope to be our hope, we must stand firm. We must stand firm. Believe in the gospel with all of your heart and live out the gospel with all of your life.

[19 : 11] Defend its truth. Withstand the pressure to compromise and this glorious hope of a day where sin and death shall be defeated and you shall be raised to everlasting life will be certainly yours.

yours. But only if you hold tightly onto your faith. That was Paul's warning to the Corinthians.

Be willing to lose everything else in your life. but do not be willing to lose your faith. Hold onto it tighter than anything and this glorious future is yours.

And the pains of this world that we will suffer for holding onto the gospel, they will so, so quickly fade away. What is 50 years in comparison to eternity?

What would 5,000 year old you think of the five minutes of mocking you had to endure in this broken world? What would they think of the day or the week or even the year that was made miserable by people opposing the gospel?

[20 : 23] It does not make the present easy but it's so obviously worth it, isn't it? That is the life Paul lived. This is the gospel he lived in light of, one that gave him hope, not just for a few years of this life but promised him eternal life.

That was why he was so ready to suffer for the sake of the gospel. We saw it back in verse 31 and 32 of this chapter that he faced death every day.

He fought wild beasts, why? Because he knew what was waiting for him and so he stood firm. That's why he can say so boldly in his letter to the Philippians, for me to die is gain.

Of course it is. Read this chapter again and look at what's on the other side. A body that is imperishable, powerful, and glorious that will last forever.

I'm not sure how much thought we really give to what eternal means. When Jesus says God sent his son so that whoever believes in him would have everlasting life, what do we think?

[21 : 51] What do we imagine? Maybe I'll make it past 100. I mentioned 5,000 year old you a moment ago. Probably jump at the thought a little bit.

It sounds really weird, doesn't it? 5,000 years. But eternal, eternal means there will be a day when 5,000 years is nothing.

Nothing. Our lives here and now are like the first millimeter of a ball of string that stretches not just for meters but for miles.

And it is an eternity where sin and death will be no more. Pain will not exist. Suffering will have no home. You will be you but raised imperishable in power and glory.

You will live like Christ in his image forever, enjoying a new creation with a universe to fill and explore to work but there will never be a bad day. To praise God and you'll always want to.

[23 : 02] Therefore, Paul says, stand firm because the days are short and the future is so gloriously long. Stand firm.

firm. He understood better than anyone the trials, the suffering that Christians can and will face in this life. He knew the temptation the Corinthians would have faced to buckle under the pressure but he also knew better than anyone that it was so, so worth it for what awaited him on the other side.

So stand firm in your faith brothers and sisters because this resurrection life is ours so long as we believe and hold fast to the gospel.

Paul calls on the Corinthians to stand firm in their faith and then secondly and following on to give themselves fully to the work of the Lord knowing that their labor is not in vain.

We won't spend long here because we've already touched on it to some degree but knowing what awaits us in the future should not only strengthen us to endure the present it should change how we live in the present.

[24 : 23] Paul encourages us to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord there. Fully, right? There is nothing narrow or restrictive about which part of our life the resurrection hope should shape.

The Christian life is not one for Sundays leaving us to get on with the rest of our week. It is one which can and should affect change in everything, everywhere, every aspect of our lives.

Abounding in the work of the Lord means living for Him in everything we do. That does not mean that everyone should work full-time for the church but it does mean doing whatever God has given you to do with eternity in mind.

Honoring God by giving our best, living for Him by looking for opportunities to share this resurrection hope with others. Trusting God by enduring persecution and speaking this truth boldly in spite of the potential worldly consequences.

Be wise but be courageous because what you do now for the Lord is something that will not be in vain. There is no such thing, no such thing as wasted effort when it comes to gospel work.

[25 : 52] There are a few things more frustrating other than when you pour hours, maybe weeks into something only to find it was all for nothing.

It's an annoying feeling isn't it? Brothers and sisters, that is every piece of our lives that is not lived for the Lord.

One day we will turn and find that they were all worthless. worthless. Every moment lived for our own gain and pleasure will disappear and we will never reap the reward we thought we would of all the hours of labor poured into it.

But not so with the Lord's work. If we do it for him, if we seek to bring glory and honor to Christ through it, no matter what the task, whether it's running a business, stacking shelves, looking after the children, sorting the accounts, making coffee, teaching, training, learning, whatever it is, if you seek to honor the Lord through it, that labor will not be in vain because what is done for the Lord will last as long as you will.

Forever. Forever. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men because there is a resurrection coming when all that is good will remain and if we work for the Lord now, we will look back and create satisfaction at work well done even if we cannot see the good fruit from it now.

[27 : 46] So stand firm in your faith and give yourself to the work of the Lord because what is coming will infinitely surpass whatever trials will face you in the present.

So let us just finish by bringing together all that we have seen in this great chapter. Remember, it begins with the gospel.

before we get to the hope of the resurrection, we must begin at the cross. We were reminded that it was all about God's words.

It was all about Jesus and it was all about grace. This hope that we have been dwelling upon these last two Sundays, none of it exists apart from the grace of God, Jesus Christ, revealed to us in his word.

We must believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried and raised according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to many.

[29 : 04] And so because of those witnesses, we can be confident in the bodily resurrection of Christ. The disciples saw him, they sat with him, they touched him.

Jesus really was raised from the dead. If we do not believe that, we believe no gospel at all. But Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

He rose again as the first fruits of many to reign over all, and so we shall rise again too. even those who have been buried for years, for centuries, their bodies too will rise again, for they are like seeds in the ground ready to be called to life.

And when we are raised, we will be raised not only physically, but in the heavenly image of Christ, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And on that day which is coming, on that day which is coming, death and sin will once and for all be defeated.

They will no longer hold any power over anyone or anything. Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?

[30 : 25] And so we will live for eternity, forever and ever. in a new creation where no stain of sin, no pang of death will ever enter in.

But all will only ever be good for all time and beyond. That is what awaits us, brothers and sisters. That is what we are waiting for.

that is our gospel hope. Thanks be to God. And let us stand firm in our faith for it is well worth standing firm in.

Whatever it might cost us in the short term, there is nothing that can compare to the promises that accompany life in Christ. May every one of us hold dearly onto this glorious truth.

And may we encourage one another to live for the Lord until he returns or calls us home. Let us pray.

[31 : 46] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.