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Sermon Series - The Weak, Foolish, and Victorious Cross
Sermon Title and Text - "Your Labor is Not in Vain" - 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Sermon Points:

1. Our Transformation (vv.50-53)

2. Our Triumph (vv. 54-57)

Application: Hope-Filled Work for Another World (v.58)

Corporate Prayer:

Lord, help us not put all of our energy in working for the reward of this life. Instead, let us look to the day when we will rise with Christ and be transformed. And, let us live this live in light of our triumph in Christ. Indeed, Jesus has fulfilled the law on our behalf and taken the curse of sin on our behalf, so that we give him all of the thanks for our resurrection hope. Death has been defeated, it has no sting and it has no victory over those in Christ, and so instead of fearing death and living for this life, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and abound in his work because we know it is not in vain.

Our Transformation (vv.50-53)

Last week, in verses 35-49 Paul explained how our resurrection bodies will be different than our current bodies to some who couldn't understand how Christians could hope in the resurrection of their bodies that looked so weak on earth. From perishable to imperishable. From dishonorable to glorious. From weak to powerful. From a body controlled by a sinful soul to a new body totally controlled by the Spirit of God. These bodies will still be our bodies but uniquely fashioned to enjoy the glory of God forever.

In verses 50-58 Paul transitions to talk about our sure transformation and the triumph of Christ that secures it.

Look at verse 50 with me first:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Now, the phrase "flesh and blood" here does not mean that we won't have bodies. Instead the phrase is used in 4 other places in the New Testament and it simply has the idea of our natural state as humans. It has to do with our natural mortality. We will not live forever in these "flesh and blood" bodies, instead they will certainly die. And bodies that will certainly die one day cannot inherit the everlasting Kingdom of God. Something mortal cannot inherit something that goes on forever.

And then he says, the perishable cannot inherit the perishable. Something wearing out and being corrupted cannot inherit something never wearing out and without any corruption.

So, Paul starts by again stating the problem that was probably floating around the church at this time. How can these corrupted, flesh and blood bodies be resurrected to some kind of eternal life? They are not worthy and they will not endure. How could you have any kind of hope in *that*? And if that philosophy floating around is right, then Christians are foolishly hoping in something not worth hoping for.

Look at verse 51:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

In other words, our bodies will change. And this change will occur for those who die and experience the full mortality of these bodies, but this change will also occur for all who are still alive when Jesus returns.

Paul expands on that in verse 52:

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.

Paul makes three things clear in this short verse.

First, the dead will be raised and changed, no longer will those bodies be in the ground decaying, but instead they will be raised up in glory and imperishable to never experience corruption again. And even those who are alive in Christ and simply experiencing the effects of corruption of earthly bodies while alive will be immediately changed.

Second, this change will happen instantaneously. A “moment” was a word for the shortest amount of time possible, and the “twinkling of an eye” was a phrase for the quickest glance at something you could imagine. So, Paul is trying to show them that this transformation will not happen over some long period of time. Instead, it will be an instantaneous experience of transformation to take in and dwell in the glory of Christ.

Third, Paul is signaling that this will happen on the “day of the Lord” when Jesus returns to do away with all evil, sin, and suffering and to finally establish his Kingdom forever with his people. That is signaled by the picture of the trumpet being sounded here. This is the day when Jesus will deliver the Kingdom to his Father (v.24).

The day of the Lord was a theme throughout the Old Testament and was often signaled by a battle trumpet being blown to signal his coming, listen to Joel 2:1:

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near.

This theme of resurrection transformation on the day of the Lord gets picked up by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

The Lord will come with a cry of a command and sound the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise with imperishable bodies and then the ones still alive who are in Christ will be caught up together with them and will always be with the Lord.

Verse 50 stated that we could not inherit the kingdom of God with these perishable, mortal bodies. Verses 51-52 tell us how we will be changed. And verse 53 restates that this was absolutely necessary for our hope:

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

This concept of “put on” is the idea of being further clothed. In other words, just like the disciples could recognize Jesus in his resurrection body, but it was more glorious, so it will be with us. We will “be further clothed” with this imperishable, immortal body to enjoy the glory of God forever.

Because this transformation is certain, we will certainly inherit the kingdom of God and dwell with God forever.

Our Triumph (vv. 54-57)

So, now, we move from the necessity and certainty of our transformation to see what triumph is behind this transformation.

You see, the philosophers of the day who had all these theories about our bodies and the afterlife were missing one key ingredient in their thinking: the reality of that the world we live in is defined by and destroyed by sin. And when you don't think of sin defining the world and all suffering ultimately coming because of the way sin has infested the world, you don't think of Jesus and his death and resurrection as the answer that could turn the tables on everything. But, that's just what Paul says here, that because sin is the underlying problem for man that leads to all suffering and death, if sin can be defeated, so will death.

Look first at verse 54:

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."

So, when this certain transformation happens, what God has promised all along will come true for those in Christ. Death will be swallowed up in victory. Paul is quoting from Isaiah 25:8 here. Isaiah 25 is a picture of the last days, when the Lord returns for his people. Let me read to you verses 5-9:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

In this picture God is swallowing up the "shadow cast over all peoples" that is the shadow of death. In other words, death is always overshadowing things. Always lurking in the background. Always whispering to us in every brokenness and every suffering. Always reminding us that it's coming. Always reminding us that it is our enemy and that it always wins. As tears of sorrow flow, death whispers its reign. As our hearts are anxious about sin and suffering, death whispers its reign. As we spend time trying to squeeze as much joy out of things that only last in this life and spend money and time on these same things, death whispers its reign. As relationships are ruined, death whispers its reign. And sin and Satan laugh in their stranglehold on man through the fear of death.

But, in this picture in Isaiah 25 that Paul quotes, death does not reign. God reigns! Here, we see none of the lack that we experience in this life. No lack of joy. No lack of fellowship. No lack of the presence of God. Full joy. Full fellowship. The full presence of God feasting with his people. Here, we are set free from the fear of death. Here, we see that God will swallow up death for his people. Here, we see there is a better feast coming than anything this life can offer with perfect fellowship. Here, we see God stoop down and wipe away every tear ever cried. Here, we see that as Christians we don't live for this life alone, but we wait for our Savior to come and finally swallow up death and finally save us. Here, we see that the shadow of death has been removed, our suffering and sin will ultimately be defeated, and we can truly rejoice without the hovering shadow of death to corrupt every joyful moment. Death is swallowed up in the victory of Christ. Jesus has the final, victorious laugh over sin and Satan. But, how?

Let's talk about how this victory, how this swallowing up of death happens in verses 56-57 and then we'll circle back to 55:

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. (v.56)

So, why does Paul say the "sting of death is sin?" Normally, we think of it the other way around. We think, "The ultimate way that sin and Satan sting us is they bring death." But, that's not what Paul says and Paul doesn't say that because that would be far better news than what he does say. You see, if all that sin and

Satan could do is kill us, then perhaps it would be worth living a life of sin and then simply going to our graves. But, it's far worse than that.

Yes because sin entered the world, it brought with it corruption, suffering, and death. Sin has ruined everything and that ruin in some ways seems like it culminates in death. But, not when you realize that reality is not ultimately about THIS life but eternal life. What Paul is saying here is far more serious than simply dying because of sin. Paul is talking about being condemned by sin *in* death.

You see, the reason death will be infinitely painful; the reason sin is the sting to mankind is because it condemns men to eternal punishment apart from the presence of God. The sting of death is the sin that condemns man as guilty in the heavenly courtroom. It is the moment when the books are opened, the sins of man are seen, and they are justly condemned to eternal hell. Sin is the sting of death because in death men must face the wrath of God for their sins and our God is a consuming fire.

And why does Paul say the power of sin is the law? Because the reason men are condemned for sin is the Law of God. Sin is not subjective. We don't get to determine if we have sinned or not. God is holy, holy, holy, and when Isaiah saw his holiness as he saw the Lord seated on the throne in Isaiah 6 he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, objectively that he was a sinful man who dwelled among a sinful people. And that holiness is expressed in the Law of God that shows us the holiness of God. Listen to Romans 3:19-20:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

In other words, deep down, every person is held accountable to God by the law and ultimately will cover their mouths because they know they have broken his law over and over again, which means our sin is not just "silly" or "subjective" or "no big deal" or "fun" it is treason against the law of the Almighty King of the Universe. Every time we sin, we break the law of God and are guilty of treason.

Therefore, the sting of death is our sin because it condemns us in the courtroom of God and the power behind that condemnation of sin is the law of God that lands on us with full force. We deserve to have the whole book thrown at us. It is objective. There is no wiggle room to escape. There is no case to make. We stand guilty of sin with the full force of the law behind that verdict destined to feel the full force of that condemnation when our sinful bodies surely wear out and die sooner or later. Look at verse 57:

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then, picture the courtroom as we stand ready to bear the condemnation that comes from death's sting of sin and as we stand with no case because of the law of God, God himself makes a way! He sends his Son, Jesus, the God-man. And he gives us victory over this sting of sin and this power of the law. How?

Jesus takes the full-penalty of the law on our behalf. Jesus bears the sting of sin. Jesus takes the condemnation on our behalf. Suddenly, the judge stands in the courtroom and says, "I will give you my perfect Son, he will live a righteous life to fulfill this law, the life that you clearly have not come close to living nor even desire to live most of the time. Then, he will die for you, and he will bear the sting of death, sin on your behalf. And you, traitor, you sinner, you lawbreaker, you will go free."

And just then, you think he's done talking. You think the judge has just done the most amazing thing you can think of. And with tears of joy flowing down your face, you say, "Thanks be to God who set me free." But, he's not done talking yet. He has someone else to talk to. Look at verse 55, which is a quote of the Lord from Hosea 13:

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

Death and sin and Satan have been sitting in the courtroom eagerly awaiting their next victim and eagerly awaiting your eternal death sentence but are now even more excited to conquer the Perfect Son. Then, the judge of the universe turns and looks at them: "And, O yes, Satan, Sin and death. Perhaps you've forgotten Hosea 13. My Son lived the perfect life and committed no sin. My Son did not give in to your temptation, Satan. So, yes, he will bear this penalty, but this is the beginning of your defeat. Death, you cannot have him forever, because your sting, sin, has no hold on him. Therefore, he will pay for sins, and then he will rise to conquer you death. Do your best now Satan, because your time is short and soon you and death and sin will be thrown away and swallowed up for good. Death where is your victory now? Death where is your sting now?"

And then he looks once more at you. "Not only will you go free, but by his substitution I will bring you into my family. I will give you a Helper to begin to help you fight the power of sin now. And I promise, just as my Son will be raised up I will raise you up as a son with him and give you a glorious body like him someday so that not only are you free from penalty of sin now, but one day, you will be free from the presence of sin in MY very presence and the presence of my Son to see our glory on full display. In my presence there is fullness of joy and at my right hand are pleasures forevermore. Go now, my child and live a life worthy of the sacrifice of my Son. Go, my child and proclaim the name of my Son to others and this eternal life you've received will be theirs if they will also trust him. Go and tell them what you've seen here."

Satan, death, and sin walk away defeated. And you simply say, "Thanks be to God who gives me the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Application: Hope-Filled Work for Another World (v.58)

Look at verse 58: *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

First, Sojourners Church, hear the word "beloved." You who are suffering. You who are caught in sin. If you are in Christ, if you have trusted in his death and resurrection, you are loved by God and therefore have entered into the love of a blood-bought family here. We love you and we are eager to walk with you and help you fulfill this verse. We know you're hurting in suffering and we know you're ashamed of your sin. Hear that you are loved here because God has first loved us in Jesus.

Second, Sojourners Church, know that in Jesus, your labor is not in vain. In Jesus, by the Spirit, every fight against your sinful impulses is not in vain. In Jesus, by the Spirit, every time you have someone look down on you as you share the gospel, it's not in vain. In Jesus, by the Spirit, every time you fight for a God-honoring marriage or to completely spend your single life for a single passion of making Jesus known, it is not in vain. In Jesus, by the Spirit, every moment you endure suffering, clinging to Jesus by what feels like a shred of faith until your fingers are bleeding, the painful endurance is not in vain. In Jesus, by the Spirit, your generosity in times of financial hardship and your giving of time in busy seasons of life for the sake of the body of Christ is not in vain.

Third, Sojourners, be steadfast. Keep going. Don't give up. Full life is coming. Keep pressing on. Don't get off course. Keep going to the word. Keep praying. Keep saying the gospel. Keep fighting sin. Keep Jesus before your eyes and keep following him wherever he asks you to go.

Sojourners, be immovable. Don't be pushed off balance by suffering, suffering is not your identity, Jesus is your identity. Don't get pushed off balance by worldly pleasures and treasures like comfort, promotions, money, houses, vacations, popularity, Facebook likes, prestige, or the sexual culture we live in. Don't wallow in shame. Stand up to shame by the blood of Jesus and begin to fight sin again.

Sojourners, abound in the work of the Lord. Wake up seeking to see Jesus, savor Jesus, and then spread Jesus. Wake up amazed that you have total victory in Jesus and live to make that victory known. Be energized by the sure hope of the resurrection to not live this life for yourself or for this moment but to live for the day when you will inherit the Kingdom of God and hear by the grace of Christ and the help of the Spirit hear the

