

Life after Life after Death – 1 *Corinthian 15:50-58*

Introduction – Jesus was given His messianic kingdom when He was exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-36, Dan 7:13-14). Paul declared that the course of this kingdom will be exactly what was prophesied throughout the Old Testament (1 Cor 15:25, Psalm 110, Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:9, Dan 2). Christ is overcoming all opposition during the course of His present reign, this Gospel Age. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death, which will be accomplished by our future resurrection from the dead at the second coming of Christ (1 Cor 15:26, 51-56). And this future resurrection, our future resurrection, is now described for us in this passage.

A Necessary Transformation (vv50-55) – The resurrection of all the dead will not be the ultimate Hollywood-style, morbid experience. This will not be a time where the dead will simply come back to life. That is because “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption*” (v50). The seed does not come forth as a corrupt seed, but as a transformed flower (vv42-43). “*flesh and blood*” is shorthand for our fallen, corrupt material bodies, subject to the guilt of sin and the curse of decay and death. So then, Paul shows us a mystery. We shall not all sleep (meaning not everyone will have died), but we all shall be changed (v51). And so, again, it is not simply that the dead will come back to life; rather all, those who have died and those who have not yet fallen asleep, will be changed. (*btw – 1 Thess 4:13-18 is describing this same event and not a rapture before the final resurrection*). When the trumpet sounds, in an instant, we shall all be raised incorruptible (v52).

This is a necessary transformation for our present “*flesh and blood*” cannot carry the weight of glory which will be given to us. We will not be raised and given incorruption. We will be raised incorruptible (v52). And it is not just that we *will*; we *must* put on incorruption and we *must* put on immortality that God’s Word be proven true: “*Death is swallowed up in victory*” (vv53-54, Isaiah 25:8, Rev 21:4). It is with this kind of certain future hope that Paul joins Hosea in taunting death and the grave in the present (v55, Hosea 13:14).

The Sting of Death, the Strength of the Law, and the Victory of Jesus (vv56-57) – Once again, hear the Gospel in these words. Death hurts because we deserve to die. And the power of this hurt is intensified because of the law which is sin’s strength (Rom 7:7-11). Looking to our works, we know that we are under the curse of God, but God took the curse we deserved and placed it upon Jesus (Gal 3:10-13). And so yes, there is this sting of death. And the law leans our corrupt, stony hearts deeper into sin and death. But if you confess faith in the One who was cursed for you, you are justified by faith in that same One who declares His justification by His resurrection from the dead. Your justification is in Him because your sin was placed in and dealt with by Him. “*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

A Flyover of the First and Second Resurrection – The passage before us is not discussing what John refers to elsewhere as “*the first resurrection*” (Rev 20:5-6), where he describes those reigning with Christ during the Millennium. The first resurrection is the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:20-23) and all who are in Christ partake of this first resurrection, those on the earth (Eph 2:5-6, Col 2:12), and those who are in heaven (i.e. Rev 20:4, the twenty four elders representing the church and including those who had been martyred during the present time John was writing). The first resurrection can be likened to the First Death (Gen 2:16-17) where the day that Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit was the day of their spiritual death; a death we all now share in (Eph 2:1).

But there is a second resurrection, a bodily resurrection that takes place on the Last Day when “*there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust*” (Acts 24:15). Jesus used the term “*resurrection*” in these two different senses in John 5:24-25, 28-29.

Therefore, those who believe in Christ are now partakers of the first resurrection and because of this “*the second death has no power*” over them (Rev 20:6). Instead, they reign as kings and priests with Christ over the earth (Rev 1:6, 20:4) until the Last Day. Revelation 20:7-15 begins with a short and defeated final attempt to overthrow the reigning church, and then corresponds to 1 Cor 15:50-57 and the Second Coming, but deals particularly with the resurrection of the dead who had not been a part of the first resurrection.

Practicing Resurrection Life (v58) – We should see resurrection motifs all around us. We are to see seeds-to-flower and practice resurrection. We all go to sleep and then come back to life and practice resurrection. In Christ, we put off the deeds of the old man and put on the character and work of the new Man and practice resurrection. Finally, we labor not in vain (v58), practicing the resurrection. This has enormous practical application for the unsung hero, the faithful but unseen works done in the name of Jesus, and the quiet but hopeful bearing of the trials God has brought you. We labor not in vain.

For those who are in Christ, there is life after death. There is the peace and rest and unending joy in the presence of the Lord (2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:23). Your sins are paid for, your life has been redeemed. You have nothing to fear in death. But listen for the trumpet. For there is also life after life after death. This will be your vindication, your resurrected body and the consummation of all of creation which has groaned with you for the Lord to make all things right. This will be the great and ultimate marriage of heaven and earth, of the wedding of the Bridegroom to His church-bride, the completion of the “*victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Dave Hatcher – September 15, 2019