

Easter 2020: Victory through Jesus Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning again. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. I'll remind you what I mentioned at the beginning, which is that we'd love to be able to connect with you, and the way that you can do that is by going to our website at cmpca.net.

There will be a pop-up as soon as you go to it that gives you a link to our Connect card, or if you're already on our website, under the New Here tab, you can click the link that says Connect, and that'll give us a chance to have a record of your time with us and to be able to begin to build a relationship.

With that, we're going to jump into God's word. We're at the portion of our service where we study the Bible together, and we study the Bible together because we're convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which means that God has something to say to everyone in his word, and he promises us that his word is powerful.

It does what he intends for it to accomplish, and so we come to it knowing that he offers to speak to us. We are again in the book of 1 Corinthians at chapter 15, like we were last week, and as we come to this section, we're starting at verse 50.

[1 : 2 7] I am reminded of when I grew up. Now, many of you know that I grew up on the East Coast, right outside Washington, D.C., and one of the things that happened many times when we were growing up there is that my mom would drive us into the city, and she would take us to the National Gallery of Art.

My mom was a real lover of art history, is a real lover of art history, and so she wanted to pass that on to us as well, and it was wonderful for us to have access to that. The museum was free, as many are in D.C., and so we spent many days and many hours there, and I remember one time when we were there coming across a painting, and all that the painting had was a skull.

If I remember correctly, it was a skull that was on a table, and you might find that strange, right? Why is there just a painting of a skull? But it's actually part of a broader genre within art history, and it's a genre known as the memento mori, a reminder of death.

And I bring this up not to be morbid, but because it was a theme that people would focus from time to time on things that would remind them of their mortality. It wasn't always a skull. Sometimes it might be a clock or an hourglass.

But it was a way of remembering, no matter what's happening in this world, death is the great equalizer. It's something that comes for all of us.

[2 : 5 2] And it's something that we're reminded of, not just by pieces of art, but also by small tragedies, everyday tragedies. We're reminded of it as our bodies begin to fail.

We're reminded of it as other people around us experience death. We are reminded of it when we feel our own weakness. Of course, it's not something that just small crisis reminds us of, but that big things remind us of.

The situation that we're in in this world right now with a pandemic is a reminder to us of what's always been true, which is that we're fragile and mortal.

No matter how successful we are now or were in the past, death is as real as it's ever been. And in fact, that's the backdrop that Easter comes against.

It's what makes our celebration of the resurrection a celebration. It's that knowledge of death. It's that reminder of it. And so that's going to be our simple focus this morning.

[4 : 0 0] What is our hope in the face of death? What's our hope in the face of death? Of course, that's a question we should always be asking and be aware of, but it's something that for many of us is even more pressing at a time like this where we're watching many people die and we're reminded of the frailty of our own bodies.

I had a friend remind me recently that we read the Bible differently when we need it to be true. Of course, we always need it to be true, but it's times like this that underscore that for us, that bring it to the forefront of our minds, that we realize more now than at other times our need for comfort and hope.

And so that's why we're going to turn now to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and we're going to be starting at verse 50. I invite you to read along with me, perhaps on your phone. You may be able to easily open this passage up on your computer browser.

However you open it up, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. In other words, he has not left us alone to stumble in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 50. I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[5 : 3 3] Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. 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.

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

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. 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.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word.

[6 : 5 6] That's both a challenge and a comfort to us. We praise you that you haven't left us alone, like orphans, but that you've spoken to us.

And you've spoken to us in words that we can understand. And so we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would send your Holy Spirit to open our eyes, to unstop our ears, to clear our minds and to soften our hearts, that we would be able to see and hear and understand and believe everything that's written about you in your word.

We ask these things, not because we have earned them or deserve them, but because we belong to Jesus. And so we ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. Paul begins at the beginning of this section by reviewing simply what we saw last week.

In verse 50, he tells us, Now, you'll remember from our discussion last week, we talked about the new body and the fact that the new body is going to be connected to our current bodies, but it's going to be different.

It's going to have a different quality to it. While our old bodies are subject to decay and death, our new bodies will not be. Now, you might be confused by this phrase about flesh and blood.

[8 : 17] It might sound like Paul is telling us here that we won't have physical bodies in the world that's going to come. Of course, we spent a lot of time talking about that last week. That's not what he means.

What he means here is what he called the difference, I believe it was in verse 44, between the natural body and the spiritual body. And he actually clarifies it here for us in this verse, verse 50. Flesh and blood, perishable, imperishable.

In other words, flesh and blood refers to the perishable body. It's the body, the natural body that we have now that's subject to sin and decay. The spiritual body is the body that we look forward to.

It's the body that's powered by the Holy Spirit and does not experience sin and decay. And so it's just a reminder, as he tells us here, the kingdom of God is coming.

The imperishable are coming. That's what he's telling us in verse 50. And so what's happening with our bodies is what we prayed already this morning in the Lord's Prayer, that it would be on earth as it is in heaven.

[9 : 21] It's with that reminder that Paul jumps in and tells us what this is going to look like. In verse 51, he tells us it's going to be a mystery. And he outlines what that mystery is going to entail.

First of all, it's going to be instantaneous and it's going to happen to everyone. So we shall not all sleep. Verse 51 is referring to the fact that some people will still be alive when Jesus returns.

Some people will not. Everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ will receive this new body. We shall not all sleep. In other words, some of us will be alive, but we shall all be changed.

There will be this change in our bodies that we discussed last week that was like the difference between the seed and the fully grown grain. Not only will there be a change as part of this mystery, but it will happen instantly.

Verse 52, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. Now you might be wondering why there's a reference to a trumpet. This is a image throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament that accompanies Jesus' return.

[10 : 27] In the Old Testament, the trumpet accompanied what was called the day of the Lord. And Israel in the Old Testament understood the day of the Lord to be a reference to the time when God would come.

He would bring judgment and He would make everything right. This is refined for us or clarified for us in the New Testament in Matthew chapter 24. We're told that when Jesus returns, there will be a trumpet sound.

And so this sound of the trumpet is simply a reminder to His readers of what they most likely already know, that He's referring to Jesus' return. And that return is going to happen immediately.

It's going to happen like the twinkling of an eye. It's going to be in an instant. Now Paul is writing this to Christians and so he means this here as an encouragement to them.

But of course, there's also a warning implicit in it. When Jesus comes, as we're told throughout the New Testament, there will not be a telegraph about it.

[11 : 27] We won't know that it's coming. It will happen instantaneously around the world at one moment. There won't be a warning outside of the warnings that God's already given us in His scriptures.

And so I want you to think about it like this. We're in a current crisis, right? Had we known exactly what was going to happen right now, we would have done things differently.

If we could have seen the future, if we could have seen March of 2020 in say November of 2019, we would have prepared in a different way. Perhaps there's certain things we would have purchased.

Maybe some of us would have purchased masks that we didn't have. Maybe some of us would have purchased more toilet paper. Maybe some of us would have saved more money. There's all sorts of things that we would do if we had known.

We had some warning, right? But we didn't have tons and tons of warning. What I want to highlight in all of that though is that had we known, we would have prepared in a different way.

[12 : 28] Jesus' return will be like that even more so. Jesus is not going to return to one part of the world and then the rest of the world have a chance to watch it happen and prepare.

It will happen in such a way that there will be no preparation. At that moment, in the twinkling of the eye, the sound of the trumpet, there will be those who have faith in Jesus Christ and those who do not.

And at that moment, it will be too late. And so this passage reminds us that all of us need to be prepared for Christ's return.

Jesus walked on this earth in his first coming as a man. He ascended into heaven and he told us that he was going to come back with his second coming. And when he comes back, that's when he's going to make all things right.

That's when he's going to restore and renew the bodies of those who are believers. And that's when he's going to bring full and final judgment on the earth. And so as we're asking this question about what our hope is, as we face death, our hope is that we will be those who belong to Jesus Christ when he returns.

[13 : 37] And so we need to be prepared, all of us, for Jesus' return. And the way that we are prepared for it is very simple. It's what the Bible refers to as faith.

Faith has three parts to it. The first part, this is according to a man named Charles Spurgeon, is knowledge. It's knowledge of the facts about the gospel. The fact that we are sinners and we deserve God's punishment and judgment.

But also the fact that Jesus came, he lived life in this world, he lived a perfect life, the life that we should have lived. And then he died a death, the death that we should have died for our sins, taking God's punishment and wrath onto himself.

And he offers life through that to anyone who has faith in him. And so it's knowledge, but faith is also a belief. It's actually believing that those things are true, believing that we are sinners and we have no hope outside of God's mercy and Jesus' sacrifice.

It's even more than that belief though, it's action, it's trust. It's living our lives as if those things are true, revealing through our actions that that's what we believe.

[14 : 49] Brothers and sisters, Jesus is coming back. And when he comes back, it will be like the twinkling of an eye. It will happen instantaneously.

There will not be a warning. And so the warning is now, the call to faith and repentance is both important and urgent. Just as most of us did not see this crisis coming, we didn't know when its timing would occur.

We didn't know it was going to happen. We don't know the timing of Jesus' return. However, unlike this crisis, we know that it's going to happen. And so Jesus' call to repentance is urgent.

And so if you do not have faith in Jesus Christ, I encourage you now, I urge you to repent and believe on him, knowing that when he returns, it will be too late.

He is the one who gives us hope. And he's our only hope in the face of death. That's what we learn here from knowing that it's going to happen in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.

- [16 : 02] Paul then goes on to outline what will happen at that return. He says these words over and over. We see perishable, imperishable, verse 53. Perishable, imperishable, verse 54. Or mortal, immortality, verse 53. Mortal, immortality, verse 54. Paul's making a point. He's repeating these things over and over to hammer home what it is that we're looking forward to.

We're looking forward to God's restoration and his renewal. We face death now. If we're in Christ, we won't face it forever. We experience death now.

We will not experience it forever. Our hope in the face of death is that the perishable will be replaced by the imperishable. The mortal will be replaced by the immortal.

Paul repeats that here over and over to drive this home. That we have a hope. And it's not in what we can do, but what Jesus will do when he returns to the earth.

- [17 : 08] We have that hope because of his resurrection from the dead. And so that's what we celebrate now at Easter. Paul then tells us that this is going to happen, right?

This perishable, imperishable, mortal, immortal. And at that time, he gives us a quote here. There's going to be a saying that's going to come to pass. Death will be swallowed up in victory.

And we'll say, oh, death, where's your victory? Oh, death, where's your sting? These are quotations of Old Testament passages. And you'll remember when we were in the letter of 1 Peter, I told you at one point about the quote from Martin Luther where he said that Jesus, after his resurrection, went and thumbed his nose at the devil.

This is similar to that. It's a acknowledgement of the fact that when Jesus comes back, we will thumb our noses at death. We will thumb our noses at sickness and disease.

And that is going to mean that our bodies are restored. And that's part of the emphasis of this passage. And the body's restoration proves the victory. You'll know there's a logic to victory, which is that victory and territory come together.

- [18 : 21] If you win a battle, you receive the territory that goes with it. Jesus won the battle against death. He receives the territory of our bodies that were under the reign of death.

And so the restoration of our bodies emphasizes how complete and total Jesus' victory is. It's in that resurrection, our resurrection, that we finally thumb our noses at death.

That taunt, though, highlights something else for us. Remember I pointed out in our congregational prayer that it says in verse 54, then shall come to pass.

In other words, this is not true yet. We still experience the sting of death in some ways in this world. It is shown by those who are dead, and it's already at work in those who are alive.

It's shown by those who are dead. When we know someone and they pass, they're deceased, they die, that reveals that death still has some ability in this world.

- [19 : 31] And we also experience it ourselves, as I mentioned earlier in our congregational prayer, when we experience a weakness. I came across a story recently about a man named Mr. P in Italy, and Mr. P was being lauded for the fact that he had survived the coronavirus.

Now, there are many people who have survived, but Mr. P is special because he's 101 years old. He was born in the year 1919, which means that he was born during the Spanish flu. He lived through the Holocaust.

Now he survived the coronavirus. And he's being celebrated, right? Here's this man who's an overcomer. He's a conqueror. He's going to be able to beat death so many times.

Man, look at him. And I don't mean to devalue that. There is something encouraging and something that gives us hope about that. On the other hand, when I heard that, I thought, that's wonderful.

And Mr. P is still going to die one day. Ultimately and finally, he's not going to be able to escape death.

[20 : 41] He's not going to be able to escape that sting. He will not live forever and neither will you unless Jesus returns in our lifetime.

And so the point is this. No matter how much kale you eat, you cannot escape death. No matter how much you exercise and take care of your body, you cannot escape death.

No matter how productive you are and how much you save for retirement, you cannot escape death. No matter how wonderful of a job you have, no matter how much fulfillment you find in that, you cannot escape death.

Even if you find a wonderful man or woman who's compatible with you and wants to spend the rest of their life with you, you cannot escape death.

It is something that all of us feel the sting of. And Paul goes on to explain why that's so, why we can't escape it in verse 56.

[21 : 58] He says, the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. In other words, no matter what we do, we're all going to die and the reason we're all going to die is because none of us can defeat sin.

None of those things that I listed can conquer sin. Eating kale cannot conquer sin. Exercising cannot conquer sin. Marrying the right person cannot conquer sin. A wonderful and fulfilling job cannot conquer sin.

There's nothing that's in our power that's able to conquer sin because death and sin are tied together. Death is a result of sin.

Death is a result of our rebellion against God. The emphasis here in this passage is on physical death, but of course, death affects us spiritually as well.

It affects us as we experience broken relationships with others. It affects us as we worship ourselves rather than God. It affects us as we pursue pleasure even when it hurts and violates other people.

[23 : 01] Death is at work when we have frustration and disappointment rather than peace and intimacy. Death's at work when we have futility in our work. It doesn't always have purpose and power.

Death is at work when we use our power to push other people down rather than to lift them up. Death's at work when we use our anger to punish other people rather than to move towards reconciliation.

Death is at work. It has power. We are not able to defeat it because it's the product of sin. Only Jesus can defeat death because only Jesus is able to defeat sin.

And so that's the hope that Paul presents for us here. On the one hand, there's a sting, right? On the other hand, we'll be able to taunt death about that.

And we'll taunt death about that not because of anything that we can do, have done, or will do. But as Paul tells us here, we are going to taunt death because of the victory of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 10] That's what he tells us in verses 56 and 57. 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.

That's the victory that Jesus showed when he rose from the dead. And it's the victory he gives to anyone and everyone who repents of their sins and has faith in him.

Jesus has defeated death. Those who are in him will defeat death as well. And so that's the victory that Paul offers us.

It's a victory that's through Jesus and his conquering of death. Our hope as we face death is in Jesus. Paul then goes on to tell us that that doesn't just affect our hope but it affects our action.

He tells us in verse 58 that if we need to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because we know that in the Lord our labor is not in vain.

[25 : 20] Why is our labor in the Lord not in vain? Well, it's because God is not demolishing this world but renewing it and restoring it. And so what we do now matters for the future.

As it says here, if we do it in the Lord, if God is restoring the world, then the work that we do towards that end matters. And so we have hope in the face of death as we look to the future and we have hope in our work even now.

We have hope as we have jobs that we're pushing for what the Old Testament calls shalom, this full-bodied flourishing of the world. As we do work that's towards that end, that's in the Lord and his purposes for this world that we know that it matters.

as we're parents and we raise children who have a vision for God in this world that they have faith in him and they're looking for God's goodness and his love to be made known in this universe, we know that our work in that is not in vain.

As we enjoy the creation that God has given us, we give tremendous glory and honor to him that points to an even greater glory and honor that we'll be able to give him once he returns.

[26 : 37] And so we work and we live and we play knowing that those things are not in vain as and when they give glory and honor to God.

Paul then gives us tremendous encouragement for the future and for now. We are not just people who are looking to escape this world but we're people who love this world and love it so much that we long for God to renew it and restore it and we work now towards that hope, in that hope.

That victory then, Jesus' victory is something that gives us hope for the future and it gives us encouragement and energy now.

It's what allows us to be steadfast and immovable. What is our hope in the face of death? It's our hope in Jesus that he's coming back, that he's making all things right and that we can look and work towards that and for that even now.

It's a hope that we have because Jesus rose from the dead. And so that's the hope that we celebrate at Easter. It's not a pie in the sky hope.

[27 : 54] hope. It's not a sweet, sentimental hope, but it's a real time and space hope because we believe what we're celebrating now is that Jesus actually died and he actually rose from the dead.

And when he did those things, he defeated death and he defeated it for us. and so no matter what happens, we can have joy in Christ knowing that, moving forward together, knowing that his death has accomplished that for us and we can have faith and trust in it because of his resurrection.

In his book, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, I mentioned the Narnia series last week, C.S. Lewis, tells the story of four children who are sent to a professor's house during World War II and they find a wardrobe that serves as an entrance into another world.

It's a world called Narnia. But Edmund, one of the brothers, betrays his siblings and so it's determined that because of that, because of his sin, he needs to die.

However, there's a great lion and this great lion is named Aslan and Aslan decides that instead of allowing Edmund to die, he's going to die in Edmund's place and the great lion kills him.

[29 : 27] Susan and Lucy, Edmund's sisters, visit the place where Aslan was killed. But they don't find Aslan's dead body.

Instead, they find Aslan himself, not dead, but alive. And confused, Susan asks Aslan, she says, what does all this mean?

Aslan responds and says, it means that though the witch knew the deep magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time.

But if she could have looked a little further back into the stillness and darkness before time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the table would crack and death itself would start working backwards.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus was a willing victim who had committed no treachery and he died in our stead. And so at that moment and even now, for everyone who has trust and faith in him, death itself is working backwards.

[31 : 05] What is our hope in the face of death? Our hope is in Jesus. And if we are in Jesus, then we are able to say this as we face death in this world in the present and as we look forward to it in the future.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we confess to you that we face many difficult and challenging things in this world and perhaps nothing more difficult and challenging than death itself.

And so we thank you that you have given us a hope beyond death. You've given us a hope in Jesus who has defeated death for us and so promises that it will not sting us.

We pray that you would work that confidence and that hope deep into our hearts and we pray for those who do not have faith in you that you would use this passage now to draw them even at this moment to confess that they are sinners in need of your mercy and that you are their Lord and their Savior.

It's because Jesus is our Lord and our Savior that we ask these things. We don't ask them in our own merit or behavior but we ask them in his mighty name, the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

[32 : 30] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.