

---

*“Death Defeated”*

*1 CORINTHIANS 15:54-58*

*APRIL 9, 2023*

*PASTOR BRIAN SMITH*

*WILDWOOD CHURCH*

*EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS*

---

## AT A GLANCE

Where, O death, is your victory? Where is your sting? It is gone forever because Jesus has defeated death! The celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is more than religion. It is restoration of what was lost in the Garden of Eden, victory. Do you hope in Christ for eternal life? If so, the resurrection ought to prompt you to steadfastness and Gospel activity. If you do not, we would love to help you find hope in Him!

## INTRODUCTION

“There can be no sting in death when a person is a Christian, for Christ has taken out that sting. There can be no victory in the grave, for Christ will one day empty the graves and bring forth His own in resurrection power...In Christ we have life and hope!” - Warren Weirsbe

In Christ we have life and hope! Yes, and amen! He is risen! Good morning Wildwood! Turn in your bibles to 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, page 962 in the bible in the chair in front of you.

Death is man’s greatest enemy. It was man’s greatest enemy when Paul wrote letters to the Corinthians in Greece. Try as we might, no one can evade it forever.

Death was introduced to humanity in the Garden of Eden at what we call the “Fall of Man.” Adam and Eve were created in the image of God; created to live with God forever, to bear offspring and fill the whole earth with the glory of God through fellow image-bearers.

However, God gave Adam and Eve one rule, *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”* Genesis 2:16-17

The enemy of man, the devil, slithered his way into the garden and deceived Eve who took some of the fruit and ate it and she gave it to her husband and he ate it.

The Lord told Adam, “Eat of that tree and you shall surely die.” And death did indeed come. As a result of the fall, man died twice. He died spiritually, being cast out of God’s presence, and he died physically.

But even as He was punishing our ancestors for their sin, the Lord promised that it would not always be this way. Death would not always have the final say. Death would not always be victorious.

No, in Genesis 3:15 we read the very first promise of a rescuer; one who would certainly defeat death on our behalf, even if at great cost to Himself. God cursed Satan saying, *“he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* Genesis 3:15 We find the fulfillment of this promise, in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 and He is God's solution to man's problem of death. It is because of Jesus' death on the cross and His being raised from the dead that you and I have cause to celebrate this morning. Let's read our passage this morning and then jump in verse-by-verse.

**“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 brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

**Verse 54** begins, **“Death is swallowed up in victory.”** What we must remember is that death is not simply physical. The bible makes it clear that in our natural state, we are spiritually dead.

Speaking to the Colossian church, Paul reminded them, *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh...” Colossians 2:13*

Likewise the Ephesian church, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...Ephesians 2:1*

Satan deceived Eve with a technicality. Technically, they would not instantly die – physically – if she ate the fruit. What he refrained from telling her is that she has a spirit, too. And when God said you would surely die, He meant spiritually. And that did happen instantly. To be sure, physical death would come later.

Death has come to us and though we live, we are spiritually dead. But the message of the resurrection tells us there is much more to the story!

Colossians 2:13 says, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh...” It continues, *“God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.” Colossians 2:13*

And that passage in Ephesians 2, it goes on, too, *“You were dead in your trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” Ephesians 2:4-5* Death is defeated! Amen? You were dead in sin. You have been made alive in Christ!

Granted, death is still very much a reality in our physical world, even for believers. But there is a death that leads to life and a death that leads to death. The death that leads to life is the ending of a physical life of a born-again believer. The believer has eternal life, Jesus said. *“Whoever believes has eternal life.” John 6:47* That's present tense.

Though the body dies, the spirit of the believer lives and one day, their bodies will also live again. This is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and it is the broader context of this passage in 1 Corinthians 15.

The Christian conviction is that Jesus will return for His Church and the dead in Christ will rise first. Our physical bodies will be glorified, made perfect, just as Jesus' physical body was glorified in His resurrection.

When Jesus returns, He will resurrect our earthly bodies and they will be changed into something glorious! Think of an acorn that goes into the ground. When it comes out, it does not come out as an acorn, but as an Oak tree!

So it will be of our physical bodies that have died and are buried and that will be raised in the resurrection. And these bodies will never be subject to death or decay or aging. These are going to be eternal. It is for this reason that Paul exclaims, “Death is swallowed up in victory!”

Perhaps you are skeptical about the resurrection. That’s exactly why Paul wrote chapter 15. You’ll see his logic if you read the whole chapter. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Jesus is resurrected. And if Jesus is not resurrected, then we are still in our sins and our faith is futile. However, if Jesus is resurrected from the dead then our sins are forgiven, and our faith is effectual!

So, the question is, “Is He risen?” The clear and consistent witness of the first church, in the face of intense pressure, even to the point of torturous death, was, “We have seen Him risen with our very eyes.” As Paul said in 15:5-6, “...*He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time...*” And at the time of his writing this letter, he said most of those 500 were still alive.

In other words, they could go fact-check this themselves! For us, this requires faith. So, do you believe it? Chew on that this morning. Do you truly believe that Jesus was raised from the dead? That’s the claim we’re making this morning and every day! Jesus is risen!

**“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”** Those who have faith in Christ have **victory** in **death**! Why? Because Jesus was victorious in death. Jesus said, “*Because I live, you also will live.*” *John 14:19*

Without an antidote, a venomous snake’s **sting** or a poisonous creature’s sting causes death. So, this is another way of referring to death and it reminds us of the power of death. It is like the sting of a venomous serpent.

But here Paul asks, **O death, where is your victory...where is your sting?** Implied: the power of death gained in the garden is lost. At one point death did have **victory**. It did have a **sting**. Where is it now? It’s gone forever! Glory to God, praise His name!

I want you to notice that Paul is taunting death and he is doing so in the present tense. He is not merely predicting future victory over death. No, it is here and now. Paul’s point is clear: because of the finished work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, death is defeated! The future resurrection of the dead in Christ to eternal life is already done!

He says in **verse 56 The sting of death is sin**. How did we get death? Sin. Death entered through Adam’s sin. “*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...*” *Romans 5:12*

Before there was sin, there was no death. As I said previously, God created us to live forever in His presence. We had all we needed for life in the Garden of Eden. God created everything in perfection. It was man’s sin against God’s law that brought death to the created order.

Paul continues, **and the power of sin is the law**. J.R. Fausset reminds us, “Without the law sin is not perceived or imputed.” This is Paul’s point in *Romans 3:20*, “*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*”

The purpose of the Law is not to make you righteous. It is to make it crystal clear that we do not have it within ourselves to live righteously. It has the effect of magnifying sin, or giving it power, because it reveals what God expects of us and yet we do not have it within us to do it.

This is what makes the Gospel such good news! Because thankfully, on the cross, Jesus not only bore our **sins**, he also died our **death**, and endured the curse of the **Law**. As *Galatians 3:13* says,

*“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’”*

This is why Paul burst out in thanksgiving in **verse 57** **But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Gives** here literally means “continually giving.” Paul is thanking God for continually giving us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. The sense is one of continual provision, not a one-time offer. The victory over death and sin is continually provided **through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Jesus won the victory over death by fulfilling the Law and nailing our sins to the cross. Victory is Christ’s! He crushed the serpent’s head. Where, O death, is your victory? Where is your sting? It is plucked out of your hands and grasped in the mighty hand of King Jesus!

But how is it that we experience this victory over sin and death? We come to experience victory initially by faith in Him. We are justified by faith, not works of the Law.

*“By works of the Law now man will be made right with God. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...” Romans 3:20-21*

*“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” 1 Peter 3:18*

*“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21*

This is a gift given to us by God’s grace and it is received simply by faith. Beyond that initial experience of victory in which our sin guilt is forgiven, and we are forever declared righteous by God, we continually experience victory as we yield to Him.

As Paul was describing his own experience of victory in Christ to the Philippians, he described all the religious achievements and pedigree that he had in his former life. He said he counts all of it rubbish in order to gain Christ *“and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”*

Paul was brought to an end of himself and he came to recognize that everything he prided himself in was garbage. That was the initial victory by faith in Christ. But it did not end there for Paul and it does not end there for you and me.

Philippians 3:10 continues the thought, *“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” Philippians 3:10*

The Christian faith is more than a one-time experience. It is being made alive spiritually one time, but it is also being called to follow Jesus always. All of this is by faith.

Christians, I want to leave you with Paul’s exhortation to live continually yielded to Him. **Verse 58** reads, **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.**

We gather today in the great name of our Lord Jesus Christ to celebrate His resurrection from the dead and the resultant defeat of death just as God promised in the Garden of Eden. But the celebration of the victory ought to mobilize us to confident action, not tranquilize us in complacent passivity. The Gospel compels us to go to the lost and offer them the invitation of Jesus, “Whoever believes in me has eternal life.”

Resurrection Sunday, Easter Sunday, ought to be a rallying Sunday for the Gospel mission of the church. It ought to reinvigorate us to be about the Father's business because that's what compelled Jesus. He calls us to go into the highways and byways and beat the hedges and compel people to come into the Kingdom of God!

Which leads to my final thought this morning. This is for those who may have come today thinking you don't really need what Paul has described in 1 Corinthians 15:54-58. You might have come because it's your tradition. You might have come because someone you care about invited you and you thought, "Hey, why not?" You might have come because this is where you come every Sunday morning.

But if you've come this morning thinking you do not really need this victory over death, I urge you rethink that. I invite you to consider the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the claims that He made. He said that no one comes to the Father but by me and His resurrection affirmed that statement.

You will die one day, that is inevitable. But once again in the words of Warren Weirsbe, "In Christ we have life and hope!"

Will you ask Him to forgive your sins today? Will you put your trust in Christ and follow Him as Lord? If you will, you can confidently say to death, "O death where is your victory? Where is your sting?" because in Christ, death has been defeated!

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 296). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 271). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1 Co 15:56). Broadman Press.

Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. (1909). *1 Corinthians* (p. 492). Funk & Wagnalls Company.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 468). Victor Books.