



Death, Be Not Proud
New Covenant Living Series #30

I Corinthians 15:50-58

Pastor David Sunday

May 22, 2011

This morning, we'll be looking at [1 Corinthians 15:50-58](#): ⁵⁰*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* ⁵¹*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* 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.* ⁵³*For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* 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."*

⁵⁰*"O death, where is your victory?*

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁸*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.*

Today is May 22, 2011 and if you've been following the news lately, you know what that means. [Harold Camping](#) was wrong. Jesus did not return yesterday and the final judgment did not begin at 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Camping is an 89 year old retired civil engineer who has a large Christian media network. He's been using that network to spread the message that the apocalypse would begin yesterday at 6:00 p.m. in certain time zones. He's been preaching that about 200 million people would be saved and those left behind would die in a series of scourges until the globe is consumed by a fire ball on October 21st. This isn't the first time he has made these predictions and failed. The first time was back in 1994. He said it didn't come true then because of a mathematical error but he was absolutely certain

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he got the mathematical calculations right this time and yesterday was to be the Day of Judgment.

As the day drew near, many people gave donations for billboards and 5,000 of them have been put up all over the nation and around the world. Twenty RVs have been plastered with this doomsday message and some believers actually spent the last several months warning people of the apocalypse, giving away their belongings and draining savings accounts. One family drove from Maryland to California - 3,000 miles - to be there in anticipation of the event. Sadly, this is false teaching because Jesus clearly says in God's Word that we are not to be setting dates...[no one knows the day nor the hour of the Savior's return.](#)

Some of the effects of this kind of teaching is that it gives scoffers more reason to scoff. [Second Peter 3](#) addresses this. Let me read you a few pertinent words in verses three through four: *"...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.'"*

Then he goes on to say in verses [eight through ten](#): *"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."*

So even though Harold Camping was wrong and greatly mistaken in issuing this pronouncement of judgment, the truth remains that Jesus is coming again. The

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reason He has not yet come is because the Lord is patient. He is patient with people and waiting for all those who have been chosen by God to be saved and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to reach repentance. He is a greatly merciful God, desiring the salvation of people. That's why Christ has not yet returned. He is patient with you; wishing that you would reach repentance and put your trust in Him.

Another tragic effect of this type of teaching is that those who zealously believe in this teaching become greatly discouraged. History shows that when these great expectations are raised, that when the predictions don't come true, these followers are so disheartened and disappointed that many people have fallen away or said, "We don't believe anymore because we've been so disappointed."

I just want to say to all of us as a flock that the Bible is not a code that needs to be cracked. It's not full of mathematical things that you have to figure out in secret codes. The Bible is a clear word from God, about God -- about people and about us. It's about how [we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God](#) and how God has taken the initiative to rescue sinners like us. God has become one of us. God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, became a man and lived the perfect life that we fail to live and He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins and He rose from the dead, triumphing over sin and death and hell and He is coming again to bring about a new heaven and a new earth. There will be judgment but in the mean time, God is patiently calling all people to repent in the gospel.

That's what the Bible is about. That's the clear message of Scripture. This desire for the return of Christ has always been at the heart of vital Christianity. If we can learn anything from this tragic, mistaken pronouncement and all the harm that has been done from it -- if good can come of it -- maybe this would be one good

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that could come of it: we would be thinking more frequently and fervently and longingly about the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This should be the heartbeat of a Christian. This has been the heartbeat of the church from the first century – come Lord Jesus. Come make all things new.

I remember reading a quote of a British reformer, a social reformer leader named [Lord Shaftesbury](#), back in the 1800's. He said, "I do not think that in the last 40 years that I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord's return." That is wonderful. That's how we should be living – every hour influenced – seasoned -- by this thought of the Lord's return. This desire for Him to return.

It is in this context that Paul writes in I Corinthians 15 – this chapter that we've been looking at the last few weeks. He's been telling us about the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and how He is reigning now at the right hand of God the Father. In [verse 27](#), it says He must reign there until God has put all things in subjection under His feet. He reigns at the right hand of God the Father and then He will come to judge the living and the dead. He will return again. He will judge and then He will make all things new. There will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. And 1 Corinthians is all about this hope that stems from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and His return in glory.

We see in this passage that we've read this morning that there are three glorious realities that will mark Christ's return -- three experiences that we who are longing for the return of Christ will enjoy and will behold upon His return. I want us to focus this morning on these three glorious realities that are spoken in these verses. First of all, there will be a trumpet blast. Secondly, there will be a transformation. Then finally, a taunt.

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1. The Trumpet Blast

In verse 52, we read, *"...the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."*

Now I think I had a wonderful childhood, great parents, but I did occasionally experience cruel and unusual punishment. [They listen to these sermons so I'm going to be careful here.] When I was in junior high, I had a hard time getting up in the morning, especially on Sunday mornings. My parents didn't bring me a cup of coffee to help me get out of bed like some really good parents do. But my Dad, who had been in the Army Reserves, thought it was really fun to get out his old trumpet and to do that trumpet [reveille](#) in the morning: "You can't get 'em up, you can't get 'em up in the morning." And he would just blast it and I'd hear it coming from his bedroom, down to my room and I'd just think, "Oh no. This is a rude awakening." I'd get out of bed as quickly as I could just to make him stop playing his trumpet. It was sudden. It was sharp. It was jolting. And you couldn't sleep through it.

Now there's going to be a trumpet that is going to sound. It's going to be sudden. It's going to be sharp. And no one is going to miss the sound of this trumpet. Some believers will be alive when this happens. Others will be asleep in their graves, their souls are present with the Lord but their bodies are resting in the ground. And no matter our physical state -- our place or condition at that time -- this clarion call will be unmistakable. Everyone in the universe -- everyone in the ground, everyone in the sea -- is going to hear this trumpet blast. And they are going to respond. You won't be able to ignore it.

It's a summons to battle. In the Old Testament, the trumpet was a sign of the day of the Lord. A trumpet blast was often a warning of danger or attack. This

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trumpet blast in I Corinthians 15 signals that the Lord has arrived in battle. A battle with death that doesn't need to last more than a moment in time because Christ has already achieved the decisive conquest over death when He rose from the dead Himself. But now He's going to gather His whole body to share in the victory of His resurrection. When that trumpet sounds, it's going to announce that all is now over. The great drama of redemption has reached its climax. This what we're singing about when we sing...

“And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.”

[It is Well With by Soul by Hoatio G. Spafford](#)

Why? Because...

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

[My Hope is Built by Edward Mote](#)

It's going to be a glorious awakening for believers!

I love the way Paul speaks of death here. It's not the whole truth about the death of the believer but he calls it sleeping in verse 51. Don't get the mistaken notion that our souls just kind of go to sleep and we go into a state of unconsciousness. The Bible is clear that immediately upon the death of a believer, we enter into conscious fellowship with our Lord. But nonetheless, there is this reality that the body is sleeping. Death for a believer is like going to sleep in Jesus and being woken again with this trumpet sound - this sound of victory, this sound

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of triumph. It's a glorious thing because of the second reality that we see in this passage that is going to accompany the return of Christ.

2. The Transformation

The trumpet blast announces a transformation. Verse 50 tells us why this transformation is so necessary: *"I tell you this, brothers: [when he uses the word brothers, he's speaking of the whole church, brothers and sisters] flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."* Flesh and blood is humanity in its fallen condition. Humanity as we have been corrupted by sin. We can't go into the Kingdom of God like this.

Just yesterday, we had a great men's breakfast here in the morning. I came in jeans and sandals - I think that was perfectly alright for the men's breakfast, don't you? But later in the afternoon, I had a wedding to do somewhere else. If I would have shown up in jeans and sandals, I think they would have said, "Hey, we'll hold off on the wedding. You go home and get something appropriate on for the ceremony. You can't come in here dressed like that."

And the truth of the matter is, we can't enter into the Kingdom of Heaven clothed in this perishable, mortal flesh. A transformation needs to take place - a change has to take place. It's a glorious change.

I read a quote a while back that I copied down by [N.D. Wilson](#). He said, "There is no evil in God's voice calling us to cross the Jordan. Whether He calls us singly or in droves. There is no evil when He tells us to lay our first flesh down. No more than when He sends a caterpillar into its cocoon."

[Notes from the Tilt-A-Whirl, Thomas Nelson](#)

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That's a good picture of the transformation that's going to happen to believers. It's like a caterpillar going into its cocoon and coming out a glorious butterfly. There's continuity between the caterpillar and the butterfly but the new creation is so much better than the old.

And what Paul tells us in verse 51 is that there is a "*mystery*" here. A mystery is something we can only understand through revelation from God. We could not have figured this out ourselves. The mystery is that all believers are going to be changed at once. Some believers are going to be alive when this happens; other believers will have already died and decomposed in their graves.

Take heart! It's not inevitable that every believer is going to die. There are some believers who are going to be alive when Christ returns -- that's the group I'd most like to be part of -- the group that is alive at the return of Christ. But those who have died in Christ are not going to miss out. In fact [1 Thessalonians 4](#) makes it clear that they will be raised first and then we who are alive and remain, we're going to all be changed together. We're going to experience this transformation into glory together. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says this is going to happen instantaneously -- like a lightning bolt. "*In a moment*" -- the word there is the word that is used for atom, the shortest unit of time. In the "*twinkling of an eye*" -- the length of time it takes you to blink your eyes. That's how quick and instantaneous this transformation is going to be at the last trumpet. And two things are going to be transformed about our bodies. Two things are going to be permanently altered. First their perishability and secondly, their mortality.

Our bodies are perishable. They wear out, they decay. We need knee replacements. We need organ transplants. Our bodies are failing. That's their perishable nature. But we're also mortal -- that means we all die. And some mortals

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die when their bodies are in peak condition. Babies even die and young people die. And what Paul is saying here is both our perishability and our mortality is going to be gloriously transformed. Verse 53 says, *“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality.”*

Once this transformation takes place, then death is out of the question because Jesus has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And in the Kingdom of God -- in the new heaven and new earth -- there will be nothing destructible, nothing that causes decay. There will be no danger, no interruption or revolution. There will be no abrupt shock or siege of the king of terror called death when he will come and shock us suddenly like death so often does now. There will be no need then for the arrangements we make here to stave off death because we're not going to be dying creatures any longer. We're not going to have to go through great medical programs. We're not going to have to go through chemotherapy or radiation or surgery. We're not going to have to experience angioplasty or pace makers or organ transplants. We're not going to need health insurance or life insurance. Health care reform is going to be totally unnecessary in the new heaven and the new earth because the perishable will have put on the imperishable. The mortal will have put on immortality.

In that kingdom, there's not going to be anything to intercept or obscure or dissolve our vision of God. We're going to behold Him face to face - know Him as we are fully known by Him. Experience perfect communion with Him. That's the transformation we're waiting for at Christ's return. No decay. No wearing out. No running down. No disability. No death. But a perfect vision of God in a new body that is gloriously capable of beholding Him and living in this sinless environment. That is what we are looking forward to.

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3. The Taunt

In light of that transformation, Paul says, there is a third reality that is going to be going on in Christ's return. There's going to be some taunting going on. I like this. Death is being taunted in verses 54 through 57. Death is being sneered at. Death is being mocked, ridiculed. Look at these verses again: *"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.'"*

Then look at what we're going to be saying when Jesus returns: *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* Those are fighting words. As you look at these verses, what's the key word that you see repeated three times? It's the word victory. The Apostle Paul only uses that word three times in all of his letters and here it is, all condensed in this passage. What is he telling us? He's telling us the dominate note of Christ's return is going to be victory. [Victory in Jesus!](#) We are going to be celebrating the triumph of the King. We are going to be celebrating His conquest over sin and over death and over hell. That's going to be glorious!

I read a passage from a Scottish Presbyterian leader of the 1800's - [Robert Candlish](#). His words were so powerful that I tried to paraphrase them to just describe what Paul is talking about here. I'm going to read this and ask you to meditate for a few minutes on what is being described here - this victory over death, this taunting of death that takes place in these verses. Listen to these words:

Death in this world is the great devourer. He swallows up all living things. He has an insatiable stomach. No refined taste; no delicacy of pallet has Death. Indiscriminately, promiscuously, one equally with another, Death's voracious appetite swallows up all. He is a ruthless, pitiless monster of prey. Neither man nor woman

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will his horrid appetite spare. The tender baby, the fair youth, the lovely young lady, the strong man in his prime; the veteran tough and scarred; the feeble, cripple tottering under the weight of years -- all alike come to Death. He swallows up them all. Hungry and greedy, he prowls in all streets and lanes, on all highways and bypaths, in every city, village, hamlet; throughout all houses.

He has servants by the hundreds who are eagerly catering for him -- a multitude of diseases which no man can number; accidents that no one can prevent; wars, plagues, pestilences, poverty and famine, lusts and passions, sins and crimes -- vast troops of soldiers who incessantly do Death's pleasure. And with all this, Death never gets gorged; he keeps craving for more. Like the devil whom he serves, he goes about seeking whom he may devour. His cruel fang pierces the loveliest form and chills the warmest heart. Power has no weapon to resist his onset. Wealth has no protection against his rancor. Wisdom cannot confound his wiles. None are humble enough to be overlooked and pitied by Death. None are good enough to be referenced and spared. None are high enough to have the right to make Death stand at bay.

The king of terrors, formidable to all, is himself afraid of none. He seizes and swallows up the whole family of man. Yes, even when there stood before him One over whom he had no power, One who could say, "No man takes My life from Me. The prince of the world has nothing in Me." The Son of the Highest -- the Holy One of God, the Man Christ Jesus, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners -- stood before Death. When that Holy One on the cross -- giving Himself a ransom for many -- bowed His head and yielded up His Spirit, Death, had you no shame? No scruple? No fear when you had to deal with Him? Was there no misgiving, no relenting, when to the long list of the victims, His name -- the Name of Jesus -- was to be added and your mouth was open to swallow Him up?

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Truly Death, that was your choicest morsel. The daintiest and rarest delicacy you ever tried to swallow. He was your bane, your poison, your ruin. His Death was the Death of you, oh Death. He could not be held by you. You could not digest that bloody prey, that bleeding Lamb of God, as ravenous as you were. You could not keep Him in your bowels anymore than that great fish of old could keep Jonah in his belly. The Lord spoke to you, oh Death, as He did to that fish and compelled you to vomit out of your mouth His Holy One before He could see corruption. That was your first disgorging, oh Death, but you know it is not your last. On that great morning that is about to dawn, when the last trumpet is to sound, what an emptying of your foul stomach awaits you, you gross and wormy feeder upon carcasses. "Give up" will be the word. And it is the voice of your Conqueror, oh Death, Him who has power over you. "Give up My slumbering saints as you were forced to give Me up.

That's what Paul is talking about. Death has lost its victory. Death cannot hold Christ's people under its power. Just as Jesus' [Death was swallowed up in victory](#), so will the Death of all who have died in Christ be swallowed up in victory. Death seems to be the defeat of all our dearest hopes and desires and dreams but it will prove to be the greatest victory of them all. Because Death has lost its sting.

Look at verse 55: *"O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?"* The sting of Death is sin. Sin is what makes Death dreadful but there will be no dread in Death for those who trust in Jesus. Because when Death seized upon Him and put its fangs into Jesus and put that venom into His body, the blood of Jesus became like an anti-venom that spewed out Death. He rose from the dead and conquered it. So Jesus has taken the stinger out of Death for all who have trusted in Him. So for a believer, dying is kind of like being struck by a venomous cobra. It strikes you with its power and knocks you unconscious. It is terrifying in itself yet you awake to glorious resurrection life and realize the venom of Death has been

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removed. The sting of Death was sin but Christ Himself bore in His body my sins. So sin no longer has anything on me.

Paul also says the power of sin is the law. You see, the law of God -- His holy, righteous law -- convicts us of sin and condemns us in our sin but Christ fulfilled the law for us. [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.’”* So Death pierced the body of Jesus with its sharp fangs, left his poisonous sting in Him on the cross and He triumphed over it, rose from the dead. Because the sting of Death is sin and sin has now been forgiven in Christ, all that is poisonous and malignant and dreadful in Death has been taken away for believers. That’s why we can rejoice in the face of Death.

That’s why when two civilians came to [Deitrich Bonhoeffer](#) in his prison cell -- evil looking men -- and said to him, “Prisoner Bonhoeffer, get ready to come with us.” Knowing that those words meant the gallows for him, he leaned over to his friend and said, “This is the end but for me, the beginning of life.” That’s what it is for believers. Death is the gate of glory and everlasting happiness for those who trust in Jesus. It is the beginning of all that is everlastingly good for us. That’s why the poet, [John Donne](#), can look at these words and say, [“Death, be not proud.”](#) Don’t gloat and strut about Death thinking you’ve such power because Christ has freed us from the fear of Death that holds us in slavery. “Death, be not proud” because for believers “Death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die.”

Now this whole teaching is practical for life today. Let’ look at verse 58. Paul says, in light of what I’m saying about the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of believers and the hope that is ours, Death can not destroy. *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,*



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knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” There’s something about this teaching that should make us like steel, unmovable. It should make us steady in the Lord’s work. It should make us abound in God’s work. Next time, we’ll look at this verse and draw the practical implications of this teaching from this chapter.

But for today, I want us to think about that event, that future that awaits us all. I think we spend most of our lives trying to avoid eye contact with Death. We’re much more comfortable reading the sports page than the obituaries. We’re more comfortable going to weddings than to funerals. We don’t want to face Death. But what Paul is saying here is that someone has stared Death down and Death blinked first. Death was destroyed by Jesus. He has conquered Death and those who trust in Jesus need not fear it any longer. So I want to ask you, “Are you trying to avoid eye contact with Death? Are you afraid of Death?”

The truth of the matter is that until we are ready to die, we’re not really ready to live. This is the ultimate reality we have to face. The glorious hope that is held out for us in this passage is that we can have victory over Death through our Lord Jesus Christ and there is nothing we have to do to earn that or deserve that – [it’s a gift from God](#). That’s what Paul is saying in verse 57. Look at the hope that can be yours in Christ: *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Let’s celebrate that victory together!

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.