

## **1 Corinthians 15:51-57**

<sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—<sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.<sup>53</sup> For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian congregation in Corinth was a mess. When the Apostle Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to them, he had plenty of issues to address: divisions in the church and lives corrupted by disgusting sins. Corinth seemed to be a corrupted congregation about to perish and die, about to be defeated by sin. But Paul opens the letter to that congregation with this greeting, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3). Grace. Undeserved love. That theme pulses throughout Paul’s letter. It’s how he opened up and how he closed. Even though Corinth was feeling “the power of the law” (15:56), Paul knew these believers had already won. They had already won because Christ had already won! After dealing with all the messy, sticky issues, Paul wanted to leave his fellow believers with this simple message, “Christ is risen! He won! And you will win over sin and death too! Christ’s victory is yours!” That’s his answer for all *your* problems this Easter dawn. Christ’s victory over sin and death is yours!

The trumpet is probably one of the most common instruments. It’s easy to spot a trumpet when you see it. It’s easy to identify it when you hear its notes. You’ve heard in all different kinds of music: jazz, swing, and film soundtracks. It has shared the stage with Earth, Wind, & Fire and ska bands like Reel Big Fish. We associate the trumpet with music. That’s not the way it always was, though. If you were a Greek person back in the day and heard the long, loud blast of a trumpet, you immediately thought of war. A trumpet blast was connected with war. Sometimes it signaled formations or marching orders, but most often – and most importantly – a long, loud trumpet blast signaled victory! The battle’s over! The war is done! Victory is won! Sound the trumpet!

So this Easter, when you hear the trumpet blasting off the pages of Scripture and blasting throughout Easter worship music, you can connect it to war. You and I have been through a war, as evident in all our battles against sin the past seven weeks of Lent. This battle started with Adam and Eve struggling against Satan in the Garden of Eden. We saw them lose big time. From there we watched as all creation was corrupted – humans, animals, plants. Everything corrupted. Mortality followed right behind, swallowing everyone in its path. Death after death after death filled the pages of Scriptures. It looked like death had won the battle and the victory.

And as we watched this war take place, we realized that we’re still in the thick of it right now. You and I realized that we’re fighting the same battle against Satan, temptation, and sin as Adam and Eve did, and we’re doing it with the same weakness and helplessness. Day after day you and I witness the corruption and perishing of our bodies. The sore muscles hang around a bit longer after hoops. It takes you longer to get out of bed. You’ve visited the doctor’s office way too many times. We’re perishing. We’re corrupted. It’s all leading to one thing: Mortality. Death. You and I fight our battles with a soul corrupted by sin. With mortal flesh. With a body that is perishing. I’m no match for it. One by one we watch those around us fall on the battlefield, stung by death. It looks like defeat for us and victory for death. There seems to be nothing but silent sadness.

Then the trumpet sounds! You hear the long, loud trumpet blast! You know what it means. It means victory! Christ has won! It’s a “mystery” (v. 51) to my human reason, but it still is a glorious fact. This mysterious fact proclaims “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day” (15:3). Christ is victorious, and so are you! “[God] gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 57). On the last day “the trumpet will sound” (v. 52) and signal victory. It’ll be like an alarm clock for those believers who are asleep in death. It’ll be time for them to wake up and leave their graves. “The last trumpet” (v. 52) will be like the final buzzer for those who are still alive and fighting their spiritual battles here on earth. Either way, when “the trumpet will sound” (v. 52), it will signal complete victory.

It will signal your own resurrection. “We will all be changed... For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed” (vv. 51,52). Christ’s victory is yours, and that includes a perfect body. You can’t enjoy heaven if you have a body that still is mortal, with flesh that still perishes, with a frame that is still corrupted. So, just like the Father raised Jesus with a glorious, perfect body, your heavenly Father will give you one too. “We will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable” (v. 53). The trumpet blasts to signal your complete victory, and then your ailments, your aches, your deficiencies, and your pains will all go away. You will be changed into a perfect body

that can't fall into sin anymore. A perfect body that will be clothed "with immortality" (v. 54). A perfect body, just like your Savior's. No more death, for you or your friends! No more sin! The mortal turn to immortal because Jesus has won the victory. He died. He lay in death's strong bands, but he rose. "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (v. 54), and Christ gives you that victory. Christ's victory is *your* victory!

That joyous, good news makes us shout, "Alleluia! Praise the Lord! Alleluia!" Did you know that many Christian churches say farewell to that word over the seven weeks of Lent? Many congregations put *alleluia* on the shelf throughout Lent to help them focus on our battles with sin and on Jesus' suffering and death. But now on Easter, Christians everywhere belt it out again, "Alleluia!" You do that because Christ's victory is yours! You have complete confidence that death hasn't defeated Jesus. And it won't defeat you either. You have complete confidence that Jesus took away death's sting. So now you taunt it. "Where, o death is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting" (v. 55)? Because Christ's victory is your victory, you say, "Alleluia! Praise the Lord!" Because Christ's victory is your victory, your whole life says, "Thanks be to God" (v. 57). Christ's victory is your victory and it comes with a thankful life.

Despite what the world wants you to believe, sin isn't fun. A life of sin is a life that is crushed under the power of the law. It's a life destined for pain and defeat. It's a life destined for death. "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (v. 56). Where's the fun in being convicted by God's law day after day? Where's the fun when you experience the pain and sting of death? When you have sin and death hanging over your heart and life, there's no joy. There's no thanks.

"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 56,57). Christ's victory is your victory, and now you have a thankful life. You have a life on this earth that doesn't want to do anything else but praise and thank God. You and I want to thank Jesus for taking the sting of death away for us. When he got up and left behind an empty tomb, he took away death's sting for all eternity! Your life is one of thanks because you have a power that's even greater than the law. You have the gospel. You have the good news of Christ's resurrection. That gospel "is the power of salvation" (Romans 1:16) and the power of your victory!

Christ's victory over sin and death is yours, and it gives you a thankful life. It's a life that gets rid of all the sin that corrupts your heart. After hearing such good news, all we want to do is thank God. I want to clean house, sweep out all my old sin, and live as a new batch. When I see the Lamb of God who was slain, who rose from the dead, and won my victory, I want to celebrate this Easter festival with "sincerity and truth" (5:8). Certainly, there are going to be tough battles ahead, and sometimes the devil will make it hard for you and me to stay thankful. But we know who has the victory. We know who has defeated sin and death for us: "our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 57). His victory is our victory! So we see Jesus, our Passover Lamb, we sweep out the yeast of sin, and we celebrate the resurrection on this Easter Festival. We live thankful lives until he changes us into perfect bodies on the Last Day. Until then we sing, "Alleluia! Praise the Lord!" And we shout, "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 57). Amen!