

The Eternal Victory.

Text: 1 Cor 15:55-58

Suggested Hymns:

88, 762, 92, 282, 95

1) Victory, Eternal Victory

2) What the victory over death means for us

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 15:55-58, ⁵⁵ ***“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”*** ⁵⁶ ***The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.*** ⁵⁷ ***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** ⁵⁸ ***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is Easter Sunday. The earth is vibrant with renewed vitality. The miracle of life is at work and the crops are planted with their growth sustained by both the refreshing rains and the sunshine of autumn.

But it speaks to us of another Easter Day. On Good Friday, the great heart of Jesus had bled and broken upon the Cross. His lifeless body had been laid in a borrowed tomb. Joseph of Arimathea had placed a heavy stone at its entrance.

The priests and the Pharisees had sealed it, and as a further precaution, Pontius Pilate had stationed a Roman guard to prevent fraud on the part of the disciples. The defeat of Jesus seemed complete. Escape appeared impossible.

But early on Easter morning the forces of heaven shook the ground. An angel rolled away the stone to reveal to human eyes what had already taken place. Jesus had arisen from death.

At the break of day devoted women hurried to the tomb to complete the unfinished task of embalming their Master. Hope grew pale, yet love lingered. But hope returned when they found the tomb empty and heard the message of the white-robed angel, ⁶ ***“He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.”***¹

A little later Mary Magdalene stands alone in the Garden, weeping, unable to be consoled. There is a stir behind her. A shadow falls across her shoulder. A stranger asks, "**Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**" **She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him ..."**² The stranger is a stranger no longer as He speaks her name with a tone and an inflection as only Jesus had spoken it.

That afternoon two disciples were walking from Jerusalem toward Emmaus. A stranger joins them. Before long He unfolds to them divine prophecy and shows how it has been fulfilled in that which to them seems a tragedy. They do not recognise Him until He breaks the bread before them.

The eventful day was drawing to a close. The disciples had scattered when the Shepherd was taken, but were once more brought together by startling reports of His resurrection. But the evidence was not convincing. It could not be true. Suddenly Jesus appears in the midst of them with the greeting, "**Peace be with you.**"³

There could no longer be any doubt. Jesus, the Crucified, had risen. So certain were the early Christians as a result of these and other appearances that their greeting to each other was, "**The Lord is risen.**"⁴

Before long this greeting was heard in Corinth, in Ephesus, at the crossways of the desert, from passing ships in the Mediterranean Sea, and among the servants of Caesar's household.

Why their joy? Why our joy? Why the crowded churches on this day? Here is Victory, Eternal Victory. Let us, on the basis of our text, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, study its meaning for us. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Victory, Eternal Victory

The Sting of Death.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the world became a vast cemetery. The hearts of men, like drums, were beating funeral marches to the grave.

If death had only meant the end of existence, it would have been a tragedy. But it meant that man would rise again from the tomb to give an account to God. Man would bear in his soul all the guilt of countless sins committed in thought, word,

and deed. Under the circumstances, there could be but one verdict, eternal damnation in hell.

Death, therefore, threw a shadow over life, a shadow that deepened into hopeless night when the hour of departure arrived. It became infinitely more tragic because it had a sting.

Death has a “sting.” Its sting is poisonous and deadly. What gives death its power to destroy, what gives it its sting, is sin. When man sins, he becomes death’s victim. Take sin away, and death is harmless.

“The strength of sin is the law.” It is God’s law that gives sin its fatal power. His law pronounces death upon sin. If there is no law, there is no sin — and there is no death.

God’s law, for example, demands, “You shall not steal.” When any individual breaks that commandment, he sins. The penalty for sin is death. **“The soul who sins shall die.”**⁵ Death has the sinner in its power and demands his life because he has sinned against God’s law. So sin becomes death’s fatal sting.

Death has destroyed the mightiest of kings and emperors. It has broken into every home and has taken its toll of every human family. It has robbed every one of its victims of all his earthly possessions. It has filled this world with futile tears and helpless groans. It has snatched away for all eternity the hour of repentance that could have saved the godless, and it has inflicted pain on even the greatest of God’s saints.

Except for Enoch and Elijah, death has won every contest with life. There is no masking its ugliness nor wishing away its awesome power. Despite all his little victories over disease and mortal injury, man still has no sword to slay and no shield to ward off this cruel and hungry monster. But to One Foe death must yield.

A Saviour from sin is Promised.

A merciful God brought the light of hope immediately after man’s fall. He spoke of the Woman’s Seed who would save man from the doom that he had brought upon himself. Through the centuries that followed God through His Prophets repeated the promise with greater clearness.

Thus the Old Testament prophet Isaiah saw Jesus in spirit and asked, ¹ **Who is this who comes from Edom, With dyed garments from Bozrah ...?** He hears the

Conqueror answer, ***“I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save ... I have trodden the winepress alone.”***⁶

Jesus Came.

At the exact moment which God in His wisdom and love had decreed, Jesus came. The devil knew Jesus’ mission. He tried to destroy Jesus shortly after His birth through the murderous hand of Herod. He directed all his wiles against Him when Jesus was in the desert in preparation for His public ministry. In the Garden of Gethsemane the devil made a last desperate effort to divert Jesus from His task.

Jesus Removed the Sting.

There is only one way to undo death’s fatal work. It is to nullify the sin that places the sinner into its power. Take away that sin and cancel its guilt by having someone else suffer its sting in the sinner’s stead, and death can no longer claim the sinner as its victim.

That someone else is Jesus Christ. Through it all, Jesus went on and on, with His face ***set like a flint***⁷ to the Cross. Short-sighted man saw in this a defeat. In reality Jesus was reaching into the jaws of death. Jesus was pulling out its sting, its poison. Jesus rendered it harmless.

How could death still have any sting after Jesus had atoned for our sins so completely, that a righteous God, could offer an all-embracing pardon in such words as, ¹⁸ ***“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool?”***⁸

How could there be any poison in it when the Holy Spirit put into the mouth of the Psalmist the prayer, ***“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”***⁹

All of this is so wonderful that we find it hard to believe. But all doubt must vanish as we on Easter Sunday see Jesus emerge from the grave and give to us the final proof of His complete victory. This is what St. Paul means when he writes, ***“He was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification.”***¹⁰

In the face of all this, how can any of us today fail to join in the jubilant challenge of our text, ***O Death, where is your sting?*** Here is victory, eternal victory. Death has become harmless to the believer.

The King of kings has vanquished the king of terrors. Our Saviour ***“has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”***¹¹

Death can no longer harm a child of God. More than that, for God’s children all the apparent victories of death are undone. The death that appeared to conquer and to doom our bodies to decay will know its utter defeat in the resurrection.

In the resurrection the victory over death will be complete, and they will join Paul in his triumph song, ***“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”***

With the penalty for human sin paid by Jesus Christ, the sinner’s substitute, the sinner escapes sin’s deadly sting. He thus conquers sin and overcomes the power of the law to destroy him. In the resurrection the believer’s victory over death is complete. ***“Thanks be to God! who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

2. What The Victory Over Death Means For Us

Means Much More.

But victory over death includes much more. Cicero, the noted Roman writer, assures us that there is nothing so well established as belief in the immortality of the soul. He finds that the Greeks as well as the Romans placed lighted candles in the tombs of their departed dead. The Persians left their graves partly open. Even the most barbarous nations had customs which, expressed or implied, a hope of life after death. Some writers speak of this as the instinct of immortality.

But instinct is not enough to give definite assurance. No wonder Plato, one of the greatest philosophers, on the day of his death, pleaded for a stronger vessel in which to make the voyage, for some divine word.

Jesus’ Resurrection Is The Answer.

Jesus brought that divine word. During His public ministry Jesus said, ¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***¹² He gave hope in such promises as, *The believer “shall not see death,”*¹³ he ***“shall not taste death.”***¹⁴

Before restoring life to the decaying corpse of His friend Lazarus, He said to Martha, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”***²⁶ ***“And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”***¹⁵

Without The Resurrection There Is No Hope.

All of these promises, however, seemed empty and futile when Jesus Himself bowed His head in death on the cross. The hours that followed were dark beyond description for the disciples. And if Jesus had remained in the tomb, that grave in Palestine would have been the ghastliest of burying places. It would have been the grave of all human hope.

The Certainty Of Resurrection.

But Jesus rose from the dead. Death had no more dominion over Him. There can be no doubt about that. Unbelievers and sceptics have thrown the merciless light of research on the story. They have more severely tested it than they ordinarily test history. But they have failed to discredit it. Some have emerged from their studies with the cry of faith, "**My Lord and my God.**"

Meaning.

What does that mean? Jesus is all that He claimed to be: the only-begotten Son of God. Everything that He has said is true. We can firmly rely upon such deathless promises as, "**Because I live, you will live also.**"¹⁶ And "**where I am, there My servant will be also.**"¹⁷

We can now take up the challenge of the inspired Apostle, ***O Death, where is your sting?*** The tomb cannot hold our loved ones who now rest in its chambers. One day its doors will fling wide open. Believing relatives and friends will come forth with glorified bodies to a new life, a perfect life, to be forever with the Lord.

When the hour comes in which the tomb will make known its claim upon us, we will not be afraid. It has an exit as well as an entrance.

Placing our dying hand into that of the resurrected Saviour, each of us can say with David, ⁴ ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*** ⁵ ***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*** ⁶ ***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.***¹⁸

Looking beyond the grave, each of us may rejoice with Job, ²⁵ ***For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;*** ²⁶ ***And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,*** ²⁷ ***Whom I shall see for***

*myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*¹⁹

Here is victory, victory for all eternity as we read in our text, ... *thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Once we become aware of the infinite greatness of our victory, life moves out of the depression, out of disappointments and sorrows to a level of joy in which thankfulness is the dominant note of heart and speech.

The final verse of our text says, ⁵⁸ *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

Therefore — what a powerful word! It is why we also live as Christians and not only believe as Christians. Upon the resurrection doctrine must follow the resurrection hope and the resurrection life. Because Christ rose from His grave and we shall rise from our graves, our lives must be different.

We must be steadfast. We must stand firm. Let nothing move you. Faith in the resurrection makes us strong in our conviction. Because Christ rose, everything in Scripture is true.

It must also remain true. If we lose our conviction that God's Word is true, we lose the victory that is ours in Christ. The foundation of our Christian faith and life must stand sure in our hearts.

In these latter days, when great churches are losing their convictions and are being moved off their foundations, we need Paul's exhortation daily, *be steadfast, immovable.* If we yield to shifting popular opinion, our testimony loses its conviction, and our witness loses its power. Then we have forfeited our right to say, *"Thus says the Lord."*

But soundness in doctrine and firmness in faith must also yield the fruits of faith. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. It is not enough to rest assured that we have the true doctrine; it is not enough to defend it.

We must also share that true doctrine; we must proclaim the pure gospel we still have; we must seek to win the lost sinner for the faith that God has still preserved to us. Because we have so much to give, we have so much to do.

This means that Easter cannot end with Easter Sunday. It cannot be followed by weeks and months of spiritual sluggishness and indifference.

Knowing that we are destined to live eternally with God, we will live in His fellowship and walk with Him day by day. We shall love the place where His honour dwells and where we learn to know Him more fully.

In the light of eternity our daily tasks will assume a larger meaning. We shall share our victory with others by bringing to them the living hope that is ours. Yes, this will become the great passion of our life. Yes, we shall abound in the work God has entrusted to us, knowing that victory, eternal victory, is assured. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 28:6

² John 20:15

³ John 20:19

⁴ Luke 24:34

⁵ Ezekiel 18:4

⁶ Isaiah 63:1-3

⁷ Isaiah 50:7

⁸ Isaiah 1:18

⁹ Psalm 51:7

¹⁰ Romans 4:25

¹¹ 2 Timothy 1:10

¹² John 3:16

¹³ John 8:51

¹⁴ John 8:51

¹⁵ John 11:25-26

¹⁶ John 14:19

¹⁷ John 12:26

¹⁸ Psalm 23:4-6

¹⁹ Job 19:25