

Title: The Death of Death  
Text: 1 Corinthians 15.53-57  
Theme: Christ is our Sin Crusher  
Series: 1 Corinthians # 94  
Prop Stmt.

Last Sunday I was preaching on this text knowing that the temporary crown on one of my front teeth had come off the day before as I awaited its permanent replacement. I sort of expected to become an illustration of the perishable and corruptible things I was dealing with. The next day, last Monday, I was at a girl's junior high basketball game (my daughter's) and toward the end of the game, which was the last game of the season, the youngest girl on the team, who had not scored a basket all year, made one. I yelled so loud, my tooth came off (again). But that isn't the worst part. This time it fell underneath the bleachers. So, in the closing seconds of the game, I went crawling under the bleachers in order to find my tooth. I found all sorts of things down there, some of which looked like they had at one point been in someone's mouth. Well, the good news is, I found my tooth and put it back in. The bad news is, Cathi hasn't kissed me all week.

If there is a text worth losing a tooth over, this is it. This text is the crescendoing finale on this glorious chapter on the resurrection. An anchored hope, a reasonable encouragement and a call to faithfulness exudes from every pore in these verses. Let's pick up with verse 52. There are three phrases in v.52 that describe this climactic event; in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, these phrases describe the suddenness and the triumphant nature of the change that God is going to bring about to our physical bodies at the resurrection.

1. **God must change you.** (53)

In verse 53, Paul picks up the argument that he made in verse 50, that in order for us to be able to inherit the kingdom of God, we have to undergo a complete and profound change. Genesis 2.7 says, "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." God made the human body and then, God breathed life into that body, at which point, man came into existence. The body without breath is not fully human, nor did God just breathe the spirit of man into the air. We are both body and soul. We have an outer man (body/physical) and an inner man. We are both animate and inanimate beings. Now, keep this in mind. God made you body and soul for Himself. Sin has profoundly affected both body and soul, but redemption through Christ overrules the profound affect of sin and redeems us, both body and soul. This text focuses more on how our redemption in Christ will affect our bodies. The big idea is this: God made the world to be the Kingdom of His Son. Christ is the King, and we were made in order to live with Him. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom that is incorruptible and indestructible. So, how can corruptible, mortal people be part of an eternal, incorruptible and indestructible kingdom? The answer is, you have to change. But, of course, you cannot change yourself, so God, must change you.

*"For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable"*

**A. You must change perfectly.** (imperishable)

You must change from perishable to imperishable. Right now, you are subject to decay. God is going to clothe you with a body that is incapable of degenerating.

**B. You must change permanently.** (immortal)

*“and the mortal with immortality”*

You must change from mortal to immortal. Right now you are liable to death. One day you will be incapable of dying. One day will be changed to change no more. Imperishable immortality will become the new normal. You will finally experience life as it was designed for you to live.

I love what Augustine said about this: “People are amazed that God, who made all things from nothing, makes a heavenly body from human flesh.... Is he who was able to make you when you did not exist not able to make over what you once were?”

There is a subtle shift between verses 53 and 54. The “must” of verse 53 gives way to the “when” of verse 54. For the follower of Christ, the need of change is met by the guarantee of change.

**2. God finishes what He starts.** (54-55)

There is no question that God is going to do this. This promise is so certain that Paul speaks of us being glorified (Romans 8.30). All those who are justified are glorified. All those who are in Christ, will be raised incorruptible and imperishable. That for which God originally made you will be realized in your life, if you are a follower of Christ. Regeneration brings re-creation. God finishes what He starts. God will finish His plan for your life, but please take this to heart. God’s plan for you is not limited to life as you know it now. Life as you know it now is a pre-cursor to life as you will know it forever.

**A. God’s plan for us.** (54a)

God’s plan for you is perfectly good, but God’s ultimate plan for you is not fully realized in this life as we know it. And intuitively you know that. You know that there is more to this life than what you have experienced. His plan is universal and comprehensive and at the same time it is personal and intricately perfect. His plan for your life fits with His plan for the world. If you are in Christ, you will be completely conformed into the image of Christ both body and soul. But, here is what I love and appreciate so much about this text. Paul says that “when” that happens (not if that happens, but when that happens), the saying that is written (Isaiah 25 – Kingdom text) will come true, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

**B. God’s promises to us.** (54b-55)

Think of that statement for a minute. “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” In short we are finding out that the resurrection of Christ guaranteed the death of death. Death is still active, but even death is as good as dead. Because, already we are in Christ, this is our promise, but not yet do we experience all of the benefits of being in Christ, but we will. Death will die. Death will be swallowed up in victory. That enemy of life, whose power cannot be stopped by any mortal being, who hovers as an unrelenting enemy, who snatches life from this earth and tears our hearts by ripping from our hands people we have loved, will one day be swallowed, overwhelmed, and annihilated in victory. Yes, we still experience death, but death has lost its teeth. So, in reality we pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

If you are a follower of Christ, you are in Christ. Your resurrection is guaranteed. Your eternal life is guaranteed. God keeps his promise to you. So, Paul now references Hosea and takes up a taunt. “Hey death, you want a piece of me? C’mon, death, you think you’re so bad?! Where’s your victory – huh? Where’s your victory? You’d better bring your “A” game cause I’m lookin’ at an empty tomb over here near a cross, and this is not just anyone’s tomb, this is the tomb of the Second Adam, who just stomped all over your ugly rotten face. For years you have haunted mankind, breathing out threats and whispering fears. For years death you have been our terror by day and our nightmare in sleep. For years you have stolen life, robbed us of pleasure, laughed at our pain and mocked our grief even as you have relentlessly tracked our steps, and now, finally death you’re dead. You are so dead! For the One who holds your key has just broken your neck.

Now, wait a minute you say. We still die. We still get sick. We still go to the doctor. We still have teeth that fall out of our heads. What do you mean that death is dead? Death looks very much alive to me. Here is what is so fascinating. When Christ died on the cross, it appeared to be a victory for Satan, only to find out that the death of Christ was his undoing. We simply await the consummation and the rest of the implications of Christ’s victory. In the same way, when we die, it appears that death has had another victory, but in reality, death is now the door through which we go that completes our glorification. That which was our enemy became a servant for our final and glorious good.

I’m taking the college guys through a study called, “Theology from a bunch of dead guys.” Last Sunday night I introduced them to Polycarp, an early church leader, pastor of the church of Smyrna, who was disciples by the apostle John. Polycarp was on trial for his faith and was threatened with death unless he repented of his absolute allegiance to Christ in exchange for professing loyalty to Caesar. The proconsul who was overseeing the trial told him that all he had to do was swear by the fortune of Caesar. Polycarp said, “86 years have I served Christ, and he never did me wrong, how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” The proconsul became angry and after further dialogue said, “I have wild beasts at hand.” I will cast you to them unless you repent. To which Polycarp said, “Call them then, for we are not used to repenting of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil. And it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is

righteous.” Did you hear that? Polycarp is saying, you threaten me with the very thing that will bring me to my goal. Now, the proconsul is losing control of the scene because it becomes very clear that he is facing someone over whom he may have authority, but over whom he has not control. And he does not know what to do with him, so he says, “I will cause you to be consumed by fire, since you are not threatened by the beasts...” Polycarp said, “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But, why do you wait? Bring it on! (Bring forth what you will). Is this just hype?”

### 3. **Thank God for the victory.** (56-57)

#### A. **The enemy is too strong for us.**

##### i. **Our biggest enemy is sin, not death**

We live with the presence of death, because we are still influenced by sin. There is a relationship between sin and death. That is what God told Adam and Eve right up front. If you sin, you will die. Adam and Eve found that out. Sin causes a separation between us and God. Sin makes us hostile rebels who exist in a condition of declared war against Almighty God. And the curse of sin is death. Sin KILLS our intended relationship with God, and death and its process is the effect we experience in our bodies. We often say that death is natural and it is in the sense that death is part of the natural life-cycle as we know it now. However, there is a sense in which death is not natural. God did not create life in order for it to decay and die. God made us perfect, so that we could live perfectly by enjoying Him and being satisfied in Him forever. But we chose to rebel. The decaying and dying process came into the world order when sin was introduced to the world through Adam. Therefore, death in that sense is unnatural, when you understand that nature as God originally made it did not have death in it. Death bothers us – and it should. Death is not an abstract principle. Death is a personal reality that hangs like the sword of Damocles over each of us, but death was only introduced into the world order because of sin. We hate death and we despise the death process, but the real enemy behind it all is sin. Sin affects us body and soul. We need a Savior who saves us body and soul. I am convinced that this is a critical issue that is often misunderstood.

We live in a world that is under the curse of sin, and we bear in our body the fingerprints of Adam, the man of dust. We struggle with both physical consequences and relational problems, and personal issues of fear, doubt, lies and inconsistency because we are sinners and we are sinned against. We make up our minds that we want to do something about those. We try to address our health problems – and we should. We don’t like the personal and relational problems in our life and we want to do something about those – and we should. But, just dealing with the symptoms does not address the cause. The root cause of my personal problems is my sin. Now, hold that thought for a minute, because this has huge implications on the way we view and communicate the gospel. The gospel is not fundamentally, nor ultimately or primarily about how to make your circumstances

better. In fact, the gospel is ultimately not about going to heaven when you die. The gospel is ultimately about how can a sinner, such as us, be righteous before a holy God?

Sure, death is bad. The decay process is awful. But, that is just a symptom. The real problem is sin. The sting of death is sin. Therefore, parents as you teach the gospel to your children, and Sunday school teachers as you explain the gospel to kids, remember that the question is not: Do you want to go to heaven when you die? With the solution being; “Now, just prayer this prayer and repeat after me.” The gospel is simple, but it is not simplistic, nor formulaic. We do not want to add to the gospel what it is not, but neither do we want to present half a gospel as the whole gospel, which ends up being no gospel. The problem is what can be done about our sin? And that is an enormous problem for which we do not have a solution. The text goes on to show us why.

ii. The Law reveals how powerful sin really is

*And the power of sin is the law*

The law of God is not the problem. The law of God reveals the problem. That was the point of the OT law. It cannot be kept. It is easy and convenient to get angry at God and use His Word as an excuse for your own sin. “God, this isn’t fair!” But, God gives us His Word so that we are not deluded into thinking that we are okay, when we are not. God’s law is impossible for us to attain. That is the point. I need a Savior because I am a sinner. The law simply provides me with more opportunities to see how much sin is really in my life.

Remember that phrase, “reverse psychology?” It is the idea that if you tell somebody they can’t do something, then they will do it. So, if you want your kid to eat his Cheerios, tell him that he isn’t allowed to do it, and he will. If the only thing you care about is your kid eating a few Cheerios, then that might work. But if you care at all about what is going on in your kid’s heart before God, then you will recognize that thinking like that is simply exploiting the fact that your kid will rebel against your law for your own purposes. We can’t keep the law of God, but Christ did. In keeping the law, he broke the power of sin. Sin had no hold on him because He was not guilty. Without any personal guilt, he was able to take upon Himself our guilt and be counted as being unrighteous. Now, we who were otherwise under the power of the law, counted as guilty of sin, and liable for death and its eternal sting have a Savior who offers us victory as a gift. So, if you are in Christ. Your body will more than likely experience death (unless you are alive at the event spoken of in v.51), but the death you experience is not eternal, but is instead a transition. We still don’t like it, but the sting is gone. The Savior took it.

**B. The victory is a gift. (57b)**

i. From God

Why should you trust God? Why should you worship and obey God? Why should you be faithful, and vigilant, and tenacious in your walk submission to Him? He destroyed

your enemy by sending you a Savior. What more do you want? What more could you possibly need?

ii. Through Christ

This victory only comes through Christ. The life and death of Christ is the only means by which you can be rescued from eternal death, eternal wrath and eternal punishment. The sting of death is sin. Christ took the stinger out of death for you. The hornet of death has no stinger. Christ de-stung it by absorbing it.

**C. This victory demands a response!**

i. A gift must be received.

“He gives” how many times is that phrase used in Scripture? He gives, is worthy of your meditation. He gives a Savior, He gives grace, He gives strength, He gives victory, He gives and we, with open hearts and hands receive as we acknowledge our need. (explain)

ii. An infinitely worthy gift must be received with thanksgiving!

We darken our hearts with bitterness, anger and self-worship when we take our eyes off of Christ and His death for us. Your circumstances have nothing to do with your heart’s condition. But, when you fasten your eyes upon Christ, when you consider the bending down his life as he bore upon Himself the infinite weight and the infinitely just and holy wrath of the Father for your sin and you see Him as your sin-bearer, and you hear Him cry out, that “It is finished.” That the sin-bearer became the serpent crusher. And looking further you see that the sin-bearer and serpent-crusher became the death-destroyer and the life-giver, then, what else can you do, than take your miserly eyes off of your own darkened gaze and turn your God, your Savior, your King and cry out with Paul, “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

iii. Hope (1.8-9)