

April 20, 2025
Easter Sunday

Pastor Prieue
1 Corinthians 15:51-57 NIV

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⁵¹*Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵²in 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. ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When 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.”*

⁵⁵*“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”*

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

Jesus Robbed and Killed Death to Give Us the Victory

Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Lord, who died for our sins according to the Scripture, who was buried, and who was raised again on the third day. Easter is the day to celebrate the truth of Jesus’ resurrection and so it is the most glorious celebration day of the entire church year. It’s a day of sheer joy. The “Alleluia’s” are hanging in the entryway, the people are singing, the trumpets and winds and strings are adorning our songs of joy. The sanctuary is dressed in beautiful white, with the Easter Lilies, and shouts of “He is risen, indeed” echoing through this place all day long.

But do you remember what a change this place has gone through since perhaps the last time we gathered on Friday. It’s been quite the overhaul when you think about it. Just on Friday, this place was draped in nothing but bleak, black darkness, filled with mournful dirges, as we commemorated a day we know to be good, only through faith—Good Friday, the day of our Lord’s suffering, death, and burial. Black is the fitting color for that day, the color of death, for the funeral of Jesus.

Then on Saturday morning, we had another funeral, one for our member Dr. Jerome Papendorf, now fallen asleep, and can you guess how this place was decorated for that? We just got done saying that black was the fitting color for death, but no, this place was not dressed in funeral black for a mournful, hopeless wake. It was dressed in bright dazzling Easter white for the celebration of a believer’s victory through Christ, and it was the most fitting this place has ever looked for a funeral. It was the perfect picture of what the message of Easter does to death. Easter robs it of its sting. Easter overcomes the oppression of darkness with the joy of light, and all because of what Jesus accomplished in his own death and resurrection, so that his victory becomes our own victory. It’s our theme today: ***Jesus robbed and killed Death to give us the victory.***

Now maybe that seems an oddly violent phrase, especially on Easter Sunday, to think about Jesus robbing and killing like he’s some sort of violent criminal, especial when he was the victim who was crucified as a criminal. But Paul’s words for us at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, the great Resurrection chapter of the Bible, illustrate for us quite vividly how the righteous and holy robbery and destruction of death played out as Jesus Christ the Righteous One died and rose.

First, we want to see an accurate picture of our enemy. Paul keeps referring to Death almost like a person with a name. “O death,” he calls it. Death personified is fairly common picture for us. We tend to think of the Grim Reaper, but Paul pictures Death more like a Scorpion or a deadly hornet or bee carrying around a big bad stinger with the power to put us to death.

Paul says, **“The sting of death is sin.” (1 Cor. 15:56).** And come to find out, Death has already used that lethal stinger and the clock has been ticking. Sin was injected into the veins of the human race by the fangs of that murderous serpent the Devil when he first caused Adam and Eve to sin by breaking God’s law. God had given them only one command, one law, **“You must not eat from the tree of the**

knowledge of good and evil.” And they did. They disobeyed. They sinned against God’s command and right then and there, they were bitten, or to switch back to Paul’s metaphor, they were stung with sin! Now the consequence God had laid out would come true, **“When you eat of it, you will surely die.” (Gen. 2:17).** This deadly sting of sin would now put Adam and Eve to death.

The reason this sting was so deadly is because it was backed by God’s holy righteous law which had been broken. Paul says, **“the power of sin is the law. (1 Cor 15:56).** God’s law gave Death the power to hold sinners accountable for their sin. And so, Death began to rule and reign through the ages like a tyrant, punishing sin with an iron fist, demolishing life wherever it saw sin. **“Death came to all people, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)**

That means that Death has most likely already come to visit someone you love. It has come as an uninvited intruder and forced you to experience the pain and the oppression and the sting of watching someone you love die. And unless Judgement Day comes first, it will also come to visit you as well. Death’s record is nearly undefeated, billions and billions who have succumbed to it compared to almost none who have escaped it. And make no mistake, it’s what we deserve. A lifetime of sin testifies against us as the power of God’s law continues to declare, **“The soul who sins is the one who will die.” (Ezekiel 18:20).**

All of that, I will grant you is depressing and gloomy, and not what we might prefer to talk about on Easter Sunday, but it’s the truth that we have to acknowledge if we are going to appreciate the full joy of Easter. We sinned. **1) We deserved the sting of death** and the full power of God’s law coming down on us on Good Friday. It was us who should’ve died and been turned back to dust. Even more than that, it was us who should have suffered the pain of the death Jesus died—and not just for a few fleeting last moments, but for a never-ending eternity in hell.

It’s all what we deserved, but it’s not what we got. Instead, Jesus the author of life, offered up himself instead, and Death sunk it’s big bad stinger deep into the perfect hands and feet and side of the Son of God and injected him with the most potent and lethal venom the world has ever known—all the sin and wickedness of all the people of all time, laced into one deadly dose, and the sting of death most definitely killed him. That’s the fact Easter begins with; women were going to find the dead body of Jesus.

Now let me leave you in suspense about what happens next in the story and let’s consider for a moment something about bees and stingers that helps advance the metaphor. Lots of bees like yellow jackets and hornets can sting you all kinds of times and keep on going. But there’s one particular kind of bee—the honey bee, that when it stings, the stinger actually gets lodged into the victim with a barb, that gets stuck like a fish hook, and as the bee tries to pull the stinger back out and fly away, the stinger rips right off, and pulls out the bee’s internal organs, dooming to its own death.

That, my friends is what Jesus did to death. He made death into a honey bee. He endured the last deadly sting of sin and death in himself and he ripped the stinger right out. **2) He robbed Death of the sting of death** and its power over us and he doomed it to its own death, still to come at the end of time. It’s kind of two-part process. Jesus already dealt the deadly blow, but it won’t prove fatal until the Last Day. So in one breath, Paul can talk about death still being alive when he says, **“The last enemy to be destroyed is death,”** and in another place, he can also say that **“Christ Jesus has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:10).**

Both things are already true and guaranteed and we can be sure of it because Jesus didn’t stay dead. He rose from the dead on Easter because he had so perfectly atoned for our sins and wiped them away that the Law had not one more word to say about it. And the God who accepted Jesus’ payment and death on our behalf now credits Jesus’ victory as our victory. Paul declares, **“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:56).** Jesus fought the fight. He suffered the deadly blows to his body, and we get to wear the victory belt. ***Jesus robbed and killed death to give us the victory.***

And that 3) **victory changes our final destiny from death to life.** Now Death the brutal enemy that roamed far and wide killing people has been robbed of its power and sting. Now it can only put the believer's body "to sleep" for a little while. Yes, the body still returns to dust, but the soul goes straight to heaven to the feast of victory for our God. And that, my friends, is why the Easter Lilies are the most fitting decorations for a funeral and why the Christ-candle burns brightly at the head of every believer that has fallen asleep, reminding us that Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection too. Yes, still with tears in our eyes, we mourn to say good-bye to our dear loved ones, but with eyes and hearts of faith we rejoice in the promise of victory and life that our God has made to us. **"He will swallow up death forever."** (Isaiah 25:8)

That moment will come to full fruition, whether we are alive or dead at the moment the last trumpet sounds, **"We will all be changed—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 all be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."** (1 Cor 15:51-53). God says you're not coming into heaven with your creaky old body. There's no mourning or crying or pain there. It'll be your body alright, but transformed and glorified, made ready for heaven! **"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'"** (15:54. 3) *Jesus has transformed our destiny from death to life!*

Now for our final minutes today, I want to focus on what that does for you during your life now while you wait for that "last trumpet", or the final buzzer, as we might say. Now any good coach in any game we've ever played has taught us, "Don't go celebrating 'til the game's over. It ain't over 'til it's over, not 'til the final buzzer." The point is that you don't want to be overconfident or let off before the victory is sealed, and you want to be a good sport, and you don't want to hurt the team by getting a penalty for excessive celebration or taunting. My Dad turns 70 today, and there's nothing he hates more than watching dumb touchdown celebrations in the first quarter. I tend to agree with him.

But do you know what God says he wants us to do? **CELEBRATE THE VICTORY NOW! BEFORE THE TRUMPET!** Up and down the field, every day, like it's Easter Sunday! It's kind of like when our old hero Aaron Rodgers used to strap on the imaginary championship belt, and he started doing that before he ever won the championship. So God wants us to strap on the victory belt now. He gives us the words to stand over our enemy Death, all robbed and powerless and dying in the dust, and taunt him mercilessly. **"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"** (55) And the glorious truth is—Death's got nothing! It's been destroyed and will be swallowed up forever because Jesus robbed it of its sting and rose from the dead victorious. He is risen indeed! His victory is yours now and forever. Christian, Christian, that's your battle cry—**V-I-C-T-O-R-Y!** Amen.

Now to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb who was slain be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever. Amen!