

Easter Sunday- 2025

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

The American people have an uneasy relationship with their bodies. Statistics show that more than half of women in America and almost half of men wish they had a different body- and not because it's sick or dysfunctional, but because it doesn't look a certain way- it's not muscular or lean enough. The average American spends at least \$1,400 dollars on medication, much of it not having to do with health issues, but with pain suppression, weight loss, and other non-life threatening issues. This doesn't surprise me, and it shouldn't surprise you either. When you watch TV, what kind of commercials are constantly on? Medication! Heart medication, diabetes medication, hair loss medication, testosterone medication, depression medication, erectile dysfunction medication, STI medication, HIMS, HERS, - if there are these many commercials, this means two things: People are buying a lot of them, and they are getting enough money to have a monopoly on commercial time on cable and streaming platforms. Why? Partly because our social media platforms, movies, and TV shows are filled with muscular, thin, beautiful, healthy people that implicitly tell us, "unless you look like me, you'll never be worthy." But even deeper than this, it is in deep denial, fear, and hatred of death. Ernest Becker, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, wrote in his book, *"We build character and culture in order to shield ourselves from the devastating awareness of our underlying helplessness and the terror of our inevitable death."* Becker is saying that all of us have death lurking around the corner, and everything we do is, in some way, an attempt to deny that fact. I think he has a point. Every time you see your face in the mirror with one more wrinkle, one more gray hair, one more inch of the bald spot, one more pain, one more ache, one less ounce of energy, one less boost of stamina, one less effect of metabolism, one more reminder from Instagram, Facebook, your neighbor, media that your body and life is broken and incomplete. Every negative pregnancy test, every nervous breakdown, every cold, every failed attempt at intimacy, every streak of depression, every stroke, every heart attack, every cancer diagnosis, every pop of a pill and doctor visit is a reminder that our bodies are actively breaking down and falling apart. For some of us- every close encounter with the dead body of those we loved, every funeral, every memory, all reminder that death will not be denied, it will not be avoided. Some of us know this better than others because you've seen it more closely, but everyone has hints of it everywhere. Death will not be avoided. Death will not be ignored. Death will not be denied. *But it can be laughed at.* Yes, really, that's what Paul wants us to learn today, that's what Jesus' resurrection means. If you'd like to be the kind of person that laugh at death, that can be unsinkable, a stubbornly buoyant Christian, this is for you.

Paul offers you a *mystery*. The word "mystery" in Greek isn't like a murder mystery- it's something that you can't make up or figure out on your own. God reveals it to you. Paul has something that humanity wouldn't be able to know unless God told us, and this is it: A time is coming when we will all be changed. A day is coming when God's people, whether or not they've died, are going to change into something completely different. The perishable, the weak, the mortal body is going to be changed into something imperishable, strong, and immortal. Don't

you understand? This is exactly what your heart desires. Every time you put on makeup, secretly wishing you had new, different skin, every time I go to the gym wishing that I had bigger, leaner, stronger, muscles, every time you take that diet pill or skip that meal wishing for a new body, every time you take that heart medication wishing for a new, stronger heart, every time you pop an aspirin wishing for an end to pain, every time you take your depression medication desiring a better, more functioning brain that doesn't sap the joy out of life, every time you remember your husband, your father, your friend, wishing for an existence where death is no more, Christ comes to you and says, "Yes. That is what I have in store for you. That is your future. That is what you have to look forward to." Don't you dare settle for a heaven filled for a bunch of disembodied spirits floating all over. God created the body and the soul, and he fully intends on redeeming, recreating, restoring, and beautifying both. In the new Heavens and New Earth, we will eat, we will sing, we will dance (and not look ridiculous doing so), we will hug, we will love, we will enjoy each other's company. You will hold your husband's hand again. You'll laugh with your father again. You'll work with your mother again- and we'll all be resurrected, perfected and made what we were always meant to be. CS Lewis famously said that each of us is destined to be turned into something that if we saw now, you would be deeply tempted to fall down in worship.

Therefore, death can be laughed at. "Where, O death, is your victory?" "Where, O death, is your sting?" Well, Paul actually answers that- the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law. The philosopher Epicurus once observed that the terrifying part of death isn't actually death, but what comes after. It's not that it's the end, but that it might not be the end. Are you ready to meet God? It's a fair question. If you were to meet God at the end of your life, and you watched the highlights, and the lowlights, how do you think that would go? Maybe there would be some good moments, but remember, God sees the heart as well. Every thought of hatred or arrogance or selfishness, you'll have to explain to him. Everything you said and did in a corner when you thought no one was watching, God was, and you'll have to explain it to him. Your worst mistakes, your most cruel words, your most selfish, immature, hostile moments, your ugliest behaviors and habits, you will have to watch over with God and explain to him, "why did you disobey me?" What answer will you have? What excuses will you make? You didn't know better? That won't work. It was someone else's fault? It was your upbringing? Do you think that will work with God? Do you think you'll be able to explain everything? That's the sting of death- and if you think, "Well, I'll be okay because God is nice." Is he? How do you know? You can quote the Bible, but Jesus himself says, "Be perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect. If your righteousness doesn't go above and beyond the Pharisees, you won't be acceptable before God. Love the Lord your God with every inch of your soul and love your neighbor as yourself perfectly." That's the Law- that's God's standard. How then can Paul tell us that we can mock death when it's clear that it will destroy us here and forever? Because Jesus came and was crushed in your place. The death that God demands, both physical and eternal death in Hell, was placed on Jesus' shoulders as he suffered and when died, he cried out, "It is finished." The payment is complete and the punishment is done, God's wrath is satisfied. And when Jesus rose

from the grave alive, it was proof that the sacrifice actually worked, that the punishment is gone, that everything God has promised to his sinful people can be absolutely trusted. And if we are as forgiven and as acceptable as Jesus, then whatever he gets, we get. Resurrection. The new body, the new life. That is why you can mock death. That is why you laugh at death. The power of death is gone. The venom of the sting of death went into Jesus and there's none left for you. This victory over death is not earned by you, it's a free gift through everything Jesus has accomplished for you. Therefore, you don't have to wonder. It's yours. Death is no longer a danger lurking around the corner. Instead, it's more of a gardener. When death plants you in the ground, it will not end you, it will simply turn you into a seed which will produce the new, perfect, glorious you. It will be only a door through which you leave this rotten existence. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, because of what Jesus has done, "*Death is the last stop before freedom.*" Death is God's final mercy before he brings his child home forever. Death is no longer a sign of God's wrath, but an instrument through which we become who we were meant to be. Don't you dare fear it. Mourn it when it happens to others, sure, yes. But don't you dare fear it. What can death take away from you that Jesus isn't going to give back to you? What sadness can death bring to you that won't be swallowed up in joy? What tears can death cause that won't be wiped away by Jesus? Christian do not fear death. They don't befriend it- it's an enemy that was defeated. They don't ignore it or pretend it doesn't hurt. They face it and mock it because death has lost.

At this point, Paul has made my job easy. Normally, I like to do an application part of the sermon, a part where I spell out how this teaching plays out in your life. But Paul does that- he says, "Therefore, be steadfast, be unmovable, because your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Understand something- Paul's original audience were from Corinth, an ancient Greek metropolis that thought in a Greek way, which ultimately said, "Death is the end, we don't know what's going to happen after, so you might as well do whatever you want- eat, drink, be merry, make yourself happy, for tomorrow we die." And Paul is telling the Christians: don't listen to that. That's not true. And he could have said, "You better not do that because you're going to have to explain it to God after, so behave yourself." But he doesn't, he says, "Be unmovable when temptations to sin are around you, be steadfast in your Church work, in your worship, in your prayer, in your self-denial, in your forgiveness and love for your neighbor. Why? Not out of fear- but because of the joy of resurrection. That's your motivation. Joy. Why should you repent of that secret sin and fight that temptation instead of giving in? Why should you be generous with your church? Why should you labor for your brothers and sisters? Why would it be worth it to sacrifice a worship preference for the sake of the college students? Because in the Resurrection of the Dead, there will be people who are there, celebrating with joy as God's precious children partly because of the work you did and the sacrifices you made. Why should we stay clear and honest about biblical truth and teaching, even though it clashes with our culture? Because truth saves, and we aren't laboring for people to think highly of us, but for people to celebrate with us forever. That's important. Why would I the pastor of your church confront you about your sin, or

have an awkward conversation about your church attendance? It's not because I find it fun. Because I believe in the resurrection. I want to celebrate with you in the New Heavens and New Earth, and if I see someone actively walking away from that, I'm okay with that person being ticked at me for a bit, so we can celebrate together for eternity. Why do we keep reaching out with the Gospel, even though we get rejected and so many people aren't interested? The resurrection- because through this work God brings his children home. We do not labor in vain. We do not mourn our loved ones in vain. Every hour, every tear, every prayer, will all be turned to glory- The hours you put in, the resources you give, are all an investment that will last forever because Christ is risen, and we will be too.

*Oh eternal weight of glory!
Oh inheritance divine!
We will see our Lord redeeming
Every past and future time.
All our pains will be transfigured,
Like the scars of Christ our Lord.
We will see the weight of glory,
And our broken years restored.*

*We will see our wounded Savior.
We'll behold him face to face;
And we'll hear our anguished stories
Sung as vict'ry songs of grace.*

*For behold! I tell a mystery:
At the trumpet sound we'll wake
"Death is swallowed up in vict'ry!"
When we meet our King of Grace
Every year we thought was wasted
Every night we cried "How long?"
All will be a passing moment
In our Savior's vict'ry song*

Amen.