

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58. Six months until Easter celebration. **October 4, 2015.**

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Death. Now I've got your attention or else scared you away. Death. We don't like to talk about it. We say pass away. Life insurance agents ask, "What if something happens?" They even call it life insurance, even though it's only good when you die. Death. It should be a way to connect with people. It's something we all have in common. We are all going to die. Death. Probably not what you figured on hearing at a special, out of place and time Easter celebration. Death. It's defeated. Death. It's not the end. Death. Is the loser! Death is defeated. Look at the empty tomb. Death. I am not one of those who are afraid you. My sins hung on Jesus on that cross. My death hung on Jesus' shoulders on that cross. My death is no more. Death is defeated. I look forward to death because death is my entrance to heaven. Death is when I get to really start living. Death. You are the loser. Jesus is the winner. I am always going to side with Jesus, because death is defeated. Death is defeated. Death is defeated. I'm not sorry. I can't just celebrate Easter once a year. I love Easter too much. The Lord is risen. Death is defeated. He is risen indeed. Death is defeated. Death is defeated.

There's a part of death that always makes it uneasy to talk about. Here's the cold, hard, truth. The wages of sin is death. Sin is more than just a few bad things I do that if I try a little harder I can fix them. Sin is what I am. Sin is my condition. Sin is me. My picture is in the dictionary next to sin. That's why my eyes are drawn to where they shouldn't go. I am a sinner. That's why our children learn bad habits so easily. They are sinners. Blech. I hate this condition. I shudder. I abhor. I wish it were not this way. But it is. I am a sinner. You are a sinner. We all deserve death.

But death is not the end of the story. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Death is swallowed up in victory. Death is swallowed up in the empty tomb. Think of death as a plankton. Jesus is the whale. No contest. It was no contest. It wasn't even close. Jesus rose. Death is defeated. Look into the empty tomb. Death is defeated. Death is swallowed up in victory.

Death is defeated. Paul, the one God used to write 1 Corinthians, pictures death as throwing away an old, ratty robe and putting on a new one. That's what he means with the perishable and imperishable and mortal and immortality. Perishable and mortal, that is what can die and will die. The imperishable and immortality that is what cannot die, what will not die. Which would you rather wear? A robe that will wear out and needs to be thrown away, or one that doesn't? If you could trade in your old car for one that will never rust, never break down, never get a crack or scratch or ding, would you make that trade? In a second! That's what physical death is. Physical death is throwing away our old ratty robe for a new one, a body that will die for a body that can't. Physical death is trading in your old car for a new one, trading in a body that is doomed to death for a body that can't ever die. Think of Jesus. He went to death in burial rags. But he left them behind in the empty tomb. You will go to physical death in your burial rags of this body. But you will leave this body behind in your empty tomb. And you will get a new body. One without glasses. One without knee replacements. One without any medicine ever needed. Can you imagine that body? Can't you wait to have it? Don't you almost just want to trade in right now!

Death is defeated! Don't be afraid. Jesus rose. Don't be afraid. Look into that empty tomb. Death is defeated. Stare at that empty tomb. Death is the loser. Death is a rattle snake with no fangs. Picture that. You're at the zoo. You hear the rattle across the room. You jump. Then you see the snake handler with the snake in his

hands. He says, "Don't worry. He has no fangs." Then this once deadly rattlesnake is almost a cute, little toy. Oh, come here little snake. No fangs. No fear. In fact, wouldn't it be cool to hold up the snake, to take your picture and you have a big smile on your face? Wouldn't you almost like to taunt that snake? That's death.

Listen to the taunt. Where, o death, is your victory? Nowhere. You ain't got one. You ain't got no empty tomb. But I do. Where, o death, is your sting? It's gone. You loser. You don't scare me. Seriously. That's how this verse treats death. The Bible taunts death. Believers in Jesus taunt death. We have an empty tomb. Death is the loser. The construction of this verse puts death in the least important position. Death? You ain't nothing. Death. Bother someone else. Death. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. I am the winner. You are the loser. I have an empty tomb. I have Jesus. Death is defeated.

Jesus is the winner. Did you hear that word, "Victory," three times? Death is swallowed up in victory. Where o death, is your victory? God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Victory. Victory. Victory. That's what Easter is all about. We win! Death loses. Victory. Victory. Victory. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Let's see what this triple victory has done. Sin is taken away. The sting of death is sin. I really struggled with exactly what this verse means. The sting of death is sin. Sin separates us from God. When a person sins and there is no sorrow, no sadness, no repentance, that sin would ultimately separate us from God forever. That's hell, which is eternal death, eternal separation from God. So sin and death both involve separation, from God. But you see, now with Jesus, now with Easter, now with the resurrection, death is changed. Death is our ticket to be with Jesus. That changes how we look at death. Sin was taken away by Jesus. Think of it every way you can think of it. Sin is lifted up from us and placed on Jesus. Sin is buried in the depths of the sea. Sin is removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Sin is placed behind God's back. Sin is remembered no more. Sin is taken away, so the sting of death is taken away. Jesus died for your sins. I know you've heard that like a million times. But that means something. Sin is taken away, so the sting of death is taken away.

In the same way, Jesus kept the law in your place and so the law has no power over you. Sin has no power over you. Sin will not be your master because you are not under law, but under grace. Wow! Look at the empty tomb. It means Jesus kept the law perfectly for you. Look at the empty tomb. It means all your sins are taken away. Look at the empty tomb. It means sin is not your master, sin has no power, death has no sting. Look at the empty tomb. Death is defeated! Look at the empty tomb. Death is defeated once and for all.

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. There's that key word victory again. And notice how we got the victory. God gives us the victory. Most victories you have to fight for. Not this one. We didn't live a perfect life to win the victory over perfection. Jesus lived a perfect life and gives us the victory over perfection. We didn't die on a cross and take away sin. Jesus died on the cross and gives us the victory over sin. We didn't rise from the dead and defeat death. Jesus rose from the dead and he gives us the victory over death and so we too will rise from the dead. Jesus did all the work. We get all the blessings. Jesus won the victory and he gives us the victory. Wow! This is one cool victory.

He gives us the victory. But this giving wasn't a one time thing that happened a long time ago. He keeps on giving us the victory is what the Greek word literally says. He keeps on giving us the victory over sin and death. When you stood at grandma's funeral and knew with real confidence, in spite of the tears, grandma really is in a better place with Jesus, that's God giving the victory over death. When I have heard Christians say before

surgery, “I’m not worried. The worst that can happen is I’ll die and then I’ll be with Jesus,” that’s God who keeps on giving the victory. Death is defeated and every day, God keeps on giving you the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So what? What does it matter? Hear our final verse again. It’s a great one. The resurrection has occupied 57 verses of this chapter, and here’s the conclusion. **Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** Don’t move from Jesus. Keep standing on Jesus. He’s the only foundation. He’s the only real winner. It’s one thing to be loyal to the Vikings because that’s whom you’ve always cheered for. It’s another thing to switch to the Vikings after you have been with the Packers, who have won four Super Bowls. Why would you leave the winner, Jesus, to go over to the loser, the devil? Keep standing on Jesus. Don’t leave Jesus’ team.

Don’t be afraid to work hard for Jesus. Yes, maybe it was extreme labor to get up the guts and invite your friend to church with you. And then he didn’t show. But it wasn’t in vain. You invited one more person to join the winning team. Will God use your words later? Did God use your words to bring someone else? Has it all been for nothing? It can’t be. Jesus promises your labor in the Lord is not in vain. I’ve had nights where I visited ten people who have not been in worship in a while and no one was home. Not one. But then on Sunday, one was here. It’s not in vain. Has your work been in vain? It can’t be. You’re a winner. We are getting closer to heaven every day. We are on the winning team. Death is defeated. Jesus wins. That’s what Easter is all about. Amen.