

RESURRECTION VICTORY

(Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; Luke 9:28-36)

“Listen, I will tell you a mystery!” But what is the mystery? Is it the body hidden in the cellar, or the strange things that have been observed in outer space, or location of the missing car keys?

When the Apostle Paul talks about a **mystery**, he is referring to something we would never have worked out if God had not made it known to us. The Gospel itself is a **mystery**: we might assume that God would treat people fairly in the end, but in fact in Jesus he bears the cost of sin so that we can receive grace and forgiveness, rather than our just punishment. The **church** is a mystery: for God brings a community together from all races and backgrounds, not just the one nation he started with. Sadly the institutional church is mysterious in other ways which are certainly not in keeping with of God's purpose.

But in the closing verses of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul again says: “Listen, I will tell you a mystery. I am going to tell you something you wouldn't work out for yourself: something that God has revealed, that he wants you to know about.” And this supernatural truth has to do with the hope we have as followers of Jesus.

The theme of this long chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, which we have been focussing on over the last few weeks, is **resurrection**. The resurrection of Jesus at that first Easter opens up the way to our own resurrection: this is the hope we have as Christians.

Jesus truly rose from the dead, in bodily form: Paul insists that it really happened, and that we need to hold on that that truth. And what God did for Jesus is what God will do for Jesus' followers. Our life on this earth, with its shortcomings and difficulties, is not the full story. It is the prelude to something far greater.

In our reading from Exodus this morning we heard how Moses used to speak with God, and his face shone. It was in a sense a reflection of God's glory, but it was also a hint of a greater glory that Moses himself would one day experience.

We also heard in our Gospel of that experience on the mountain when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah, and the disciples saw something of the true glory of Jesus. Jesus was truly human, and the disciples knew that well. But behind that humanity was a truly divine glory, which Peter and James and John saw for that moment.

The Gospel tells us that God welcomes us as we are: imperfect and flawed. But God doesn't want us to stay as we are. He wants us to be people whose lives are becoming more and more pleasing to him: lives that reflect his love and goodness more and more. God has a great purpose and a great plan. And that plan involves our transformation: changes for the better here and now, and wonderful changes for eternity.

And when will this be? When will eternity invade time and space? In the ministry of Jesus, that happened for a short moment in time, but when Jesus returns in glory, that will be the signal, like a mighty trumpet, for the **great transformation**: a new heaven and a new earth, the uniting of heaven and earth in glory, and the resurrection of all people. Paul doesn't know when this overwhelming and wonderful event will take place. There will be those who have died, and those still living on earth when it all takes place. But **we will all be changed**.

Paul repeats something we read last week. Our mortal bodies will put on immortality. Our perishable bodies will put on imperishability. Our physical bodies will be transformed into spiritual bodies: bodies fitted for eternity, not just for 70 or 80 or 90 or more years on earth as we know it. Bodies without which we are not complete people.

On planet earth, death has the last laugh for us all. People used to say that only two things were certain in life: death and taxes. Unfortunately too many people have found out how to avoid the taxes they should be paying.

But death remains a certainty. I'm reminded of the pianist and comedian Victor Borge who was once asked by a lady who was enthusiastic but not well-informed: "Is Beethoven still alive?" Borge replied: "No Madam. He is still dead!"

But death will not have the last say for Jesus' followers. Our death will not be the end of the story. When Jesus returns, the curtains will be swept open and we will share in God's wonderful new creation. It will be us, but we will be transformed and perfected, and ready to share in a far more wonderful and eternal life, the fullness of life lived in the presence of God and his people: a life of worship and service and fellowship and joy and love and fulfilment. We won't be mere shadows with wings sitting on clouds with harps, but we will be more truly ourselves, and we will live a much fuller and richer life than we can ever begin to imagine.

And it is all because of Jesus, who laid aside his eternal glory to enter our human existence, to deal with sin and open the way to the fullness of life. Sin leads to death: that was the message back in the Garden of Eden. And our rejection of God's law, God's rule, is the very heart of sin. But its sting, its power to harm us, has been overcome by Christ's death and resurrection. And so Paul confidently asks: "Death, where is your sting?" It is done away with! Christ has won the victory over sin and death, and invites us all to share in that victory.

Here and now we experience the reality of life in this world. We still sin, though it should be a much less dominating part of our lives. We are still subject to the limitations and frustrations of life on earth: its problems and its hurts. We misunderstand and hurt people, and we are misunderstood and hurt by people.

That was certainly Paul's experience. Being an apostle was not a glamorous or an easy job. It was demanding. Travel was difficult. He was misunderstood and misinterpreted. He met opposition and rejection. He was imprisoned and he was beaten. It would have been natural to say: "This is all too much. I'm going to give up, and live a quieter life, a more pleasant life."

But Paul knew he couldn't do that. He was thankful to God, who gave him and gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. And he knew it would be well and truly worth it in the end.

Life has plenty of challenges. The student preparing for a major exam. The athlete who puts so much time and effort into training, and who needs to show so much discipline. The parent with an ill or injured child. There are times when people would love to switch off the demands of life. But for all sorts of reasons, they keep going. They know that in the long run they will be glad they kept going, that they didn't give up.

And Paul knew that Christians often didn't find life easy: the demands of love, the misunderstanding and opposition they met, the things they had to let go of. But Paul says: remember God's great promises, remember that the best is yet come – and it is incomparably better.

"Keep going in faith and keep going in faithful service", he says. "Be steadfast, immovable": hang in there, remain strong in your faith. "Always excel in the work of the Lord": keep living as Christ's people, seek to live lives that please the Lord, and keep serving and reaching out to people in genuine Christian love.

Why? Because "in the Lord, your labour is not in vain." It's right to keep faithfully trusting and following Jesus. It's worth it now. And it's worth it for eternity. Amen.

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