

NOTHING LESS THAN A MIRACLE**1 Corinthians 15:35-57****(Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-57)**

Intro: I think I've shared with you before about my nephew's 1967 Mustang Fastback, but let me tell you again since it really works here. When my nephew Greg was 15 years old or so he found a rusted car in someone's back yard that had once been a proud Mustang that had been shiny and new and ran like a top. But a previous owner had allowed it to fall into disrepair for 15 or 20 years and it was only a rusty shadow of its former self. But Greg saw the potential of the old car. He had a vision of it being restored to its former glory, but it would take lots of work – several years' worth, as a matter of fact. He and his dad took the car apart piece by piece and restored what they could and replaced what they could not. They had the 289 engine restored by a skillful family friend and they replaced the rotted tires with new ones. Finally it was done. It looked beautiful and purred like a kitten. It was a sparkly resurrection of a sad rust heap. To see it as it was when he discovered it and then to see it when he finished it, you would agree with me that the transformation was nothing less than a miracle.

The passage I read as I began this talk is about a similar transformation – ours, as a matter of fact. Paul points out that we will be changed. What was a sad human rust heap in this life will be a restored and renewed and infinitely better model of the very body we had here. And while he has been striving to clarify to skeptical Corinthian Christians the reality of the resurrection, as he wraps up his teaching he makes no attempt to explain resurrection any more than to say there's nothing natural or inevitable about it; the bodily resurrection believers will enjoy is the direct act of God and a miracle.

In the limited time I have this morning I'm going to relate one more time the message that comes from Easter – Jesus rose from the dead and so will his followers. This day we celebrate today, Palm Sunday was the ticker tape parade to Good Friday that began the death of death. What Christ Followers know is the death is not the end because . . .

Life comes from death

- Paul was not afraid of death. As we saw last week, he knew that he faced it daily – but he knew that on the other side of physical death was future existence. Life after death is a great motivator.
- But as the Corinthian questioners pushed back they wanted to know what this new body was going to be? They couldn't imagine that it was going to be new at all. They could only imagine that it would be a resuscitated version of what they had seen lowered into the grave.
- If you've seen Dickens' Christmas Carol, the play or any of the movies, you may have an image of what the Corinthians were imagining as you think of Marley's Ghost. Scrooge's late partner, Jacob Marley arrives looking very dead and worn out with a cloth tied around his jaw to keep it in place. Marley is not a picture of life – he's a picture of death warmed over. He is merely a resuscitated dead body. Paul assures his foolish readers that our resurrected bodies will not be a living version of the corpse that was buried but a new and improved body full of eternal life. None of the imperfection brought on by Adam's sin, only the perfection possible by the sinless obedience of Christ. Paul is saying, "Let me assure you, you do not want your old body back! Get ready for the new body God has for you." Kenneth Forman puts it this way, "*Just think about this: this present body, the one that is put in the ground is perishable, dishonored, weak, physical, the image of the man of dust, the first Adam, the human atom. But the resurrection body, the one that's raised, is imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, the image of the man of heaven, that is Jesus.*" Life comes from death. In fact . . .

You plant one thing and harvest another

- I'm about to talk about tomatoes again! Some of you are planting your seeds for planting in May. Take a tomato – you plant a tiny seed, only a little bigger than a pinhead, and the plant that comes from it grows three to six feet tall if you stake it up and it will be feet across. That little seed produces a huge plant and lots of wonderful fruit. It looks dry and dead when you place it in the potting soil but it comes alive and look what you get! Or take the ugly little acorn. It might be a half-inch or an inch but when it sprouts in the soil it brings forth a tree that might be 50, 80, or a hundred feet tall and magnificent. You plant one thing and harvest another.

- So it is with us Christ Followers. I used this last week but it works here as well, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.* Ephesians 2:1-2. In this life we start out as sinners. Bound for death – but because of the Cross and because Jesus rose first and . . . *because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,* Ephesians 2:4-6. One thing is planted and we harvest something far better.
- We are a new creation. In fact, to quote a joyful song, we have . . .

Victory in Jesus

- Listen to it again:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but 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 be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 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.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?” 1 Corinthians 15:51-55

- *I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from glory, how He gave His life on Calvary to save a wretch like me.* He gave his life on Calvary to give us eternal life. He gave his life, lay dead for a couple days, and rose to life to give us new resurrection life. To give us the victory! It was nothing less than a miracle, but for him it was just a weekend project.
- The other day I had dental work done. Dr. Rohr was prepping a tooth I broke a couple weeks ago for a crown. She began by putting some anesthetic gel on my gums before she pulled out the massive needle they use to put the lidocaine into your gums so they can drill away. After a short while she took that needle and said, *“Okay, here we go, a little pinch.”* And that’s all it was – a little pinch. Without the gel I may have shot through the wall and onto Kathryn Avenue. But there was little or no sting. In comparison to the permanent loss of death without Christ, earthly death is just a little pinch. That’s what Paul means when he says death has no sting for the Christ Follower and he shouts with joy. *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:57.
- Death is a cruel interruption brought about by the sin of the first Adam. The resurrection life, which is life eternal life was restored by the incredible love of the only one who could do it; so I’m not minimizing the gut wrenching loss of a loved one. I’m just reminding us of the hope that only Christ Followers have because we know the resurrection is a reality. A reality rooted and grounded our faith in God. The same God who raised the Lord Jesus Christ will raise us in victory with him. It’s nothing less than a miracle. Amen.