

Coming to Defeat Death! 1 Corinthians 15:45-58 12-28-2025

For his church's Easter program, 5-year-old Billy was asked to recite Luke 24:6: "He is not here, he is risen." Despite practicing it several times, when he stood in front of the church, he froze up and couldn't remember what to say. The director leaned over and whispered the verse in the little boy's ear. Billy smiled, grabbed the mic and confidently proclaimed, "He's not here. He's in prison!" We're going to be talking about how Jesus broke out of His prison and in so doing, freed us all! Please open your Bibles today to I Corinthians 15.

Over the last several weeks, we have been building in our excitement and anticipation for the advent, the arrival of God's Son our Savior. And this past Thursday we celebrated that with our families and friends. In preparation for that magnificent day, we started weeks ago considering some of the roles and tasks that Jesus came to fulfill and to complete. We learned that He came to be our Good Shepherd and celebrated the beautiful painting by Sister Kay Witt. Then we found Jesus came to serve with the anonymous work of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Next we remembered that Jesus came to die to be our Savior as Sister Shelly Miller captured so powerfully in her depiction of the crucifixion. Last week, as we dedicated children and considered that Jesus arrived on earth not as a full-grown man but as a tiny baby, we discovered that Jesus came as a child for children and we unveiled the amazing work of Sister Wendy Boyd of Jesus enjoying children. The artists' backstories for three of these powerful pieces are in your January newsletters and I encourage you to take the time to read what inspired and moved them to create such wonderful worship aides for us. Their powerful artwork becomes even more powerful with their testimonies.

Today we have one more piece to unveil and one more task to examine that Jesus came to complete. If you are able, please stand as we read about it from 1 Cor 15:45-58. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. 50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 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. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 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." 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. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives **us** the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Several NFL teams are busy this time of year battling for the few remaining playoff spots. As they do so, no review of NFL highlights would be complete without the 2018 playoff game between the Minnesota Vikings and the New Orleans Saints. With only ten seconds left and down by only one point, the Vikings had impossible yardage to cover. A 3-point field goal would win it for them but at their own 39-yard line, they were way out of range for even best kicker. Even a big gain would require more time than was left and rob them of a chance of then kicking for the win.

With nothing to lose and no hope of winning, the Vikings quarterback, Case Keenum, threw a simple 27-yard pass to wide receiver Stefon Diggs. Although it was a significant gain, it was still 34 yards short of the goal line and all the Saints defenders had to do was tackle him. Time would expire and the Saints would advance to compete for the privilege of playing in Super Bowl 52. Somehow, they didn't make that tackle and Diggs ran into the end zone for the score, the win, and what has become known since as the Minneapolis Miracle.

Few games are decided on the final play, fewer still from that many yards out especially in the absence of a Hail Mary pass. In this situation, no one gave Minnesota any hope and all their options were gone. Amazingly, they made the play that took them to the next level where they were eliminated by the Eagles who went on to win the Super Bowl that year. Nevertheless, Diggs' catch and run continues to be celebrated by Vikings fans years later.

This miraculous play leading up the Super Bowl reminds me of an even bigger play many years earlier. In a garden just outside Jerusalem, the game was already over. Life had lost and death had won as Jesus had been crucified and buried. Time had expired along with all hope of Him making even a last-second comeback. As He hung on the cross, mockers taunted Him to come down if He really was the Messiah. Even a criminal crucified with Him jeered by saying, "If you're the Christ, save yourself and us." Although the Bible doesn't tell us, I'm sure His disciples were desperately praying for some last-ditch comeback where Jesus would flex His miracle muscle, descend from the cross and usher in His kingdom with overwhelming force. When that didn't happen, their hopes were crushed as His life's clock hit zero and He was laid in the Garden tomb.

But God. But God engineered the most amazing comeback ever. For early on the morning of the third day when every earthly possibility of life had completely vanished, Jesus rose from His grave and stole victory from the jaws of death! He came out of that tomb and even though everyone had long left the stadium, He personally appeared to His disciples as well as to over 500 people at one time! This was not the Minnesota Miracle, but the greatest miracle ever!

My Brothers and sister, He's no longer in death's prison, He is risen! The manger is empty, the cross is empty, AND the tomb is empty. And if you're saved, your grave will one day be empty also! But our hearts are **full** because He is on the throne! And **that** will never be empty!

Because Jesus rose from the dead, so will all who died trusting in Him! That's what our Scripture this morning assures us of. All believers of all the ages will be sprung from death's prison. We will be raised to spend forever with them in heaven! This, my friends, is the **best** remedy for the grief many suffer from at Christmas as we miss our dearly departed loved ones. But, if they were in Jesus, and if we're in Jesus, we shall surely see them again when the dead are raised imperishable!

If Jesus had only been born in Bethlehem's manger, there would be no reason to celebrate His birth. If He had only preached moving sermons and healed many people, we might honor Him along with all the other great men of history. If He had only been crucified, our sins would be atoned for, and praise God for that, but we would still be locked in our casket-prisons through all eternity. But when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, everything changed! History changed, the present changed, the future changed, eternity changed!

When Jesus rose from the dead, victory itself gulped hard and swallowed down death in one decisive move that revolutionized the universe. Suddenly, the march downward toward hell, in which all creation was forced to participate, suddenly did an about face and began moving upward toward glory. Restoration of all creation was then assured and even now all creation awaits in eager expectation as Romans 8:19 reminds us. According to Dr. Frank Tippler, a professor of Mathematical Physics at Tulane University, who **was** an atheist, after a nearly 17-year study of the universe concluded that 1. God does exist, but 2. It is not only possible, but probable, that every human being who ever lived will be resurrected from the dead because of the structure of DNA and physics. Who knew? God did, and it doesn't take a PhD or a 17-year study to know it. It just takes faith and belief in the One who did come out of His grave to defeat death! Daniel 12:2 told us years ago that "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

Jesus was the greatest underdog of all time. If Vegas had existed, no one would have bet on Him! He was certifiably dead! Not a single cent would have been wagered on Him walking out of His tomb. Today, if you want to see Jesus' empty tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, you will likely have to wait in line several hours. But when He was buried, no one stood in line. No one was waiting then. All the odds were not only against Him, they were sealed with a Roman seal against Him. They were guarded with as secure conditions as they knew how. Where there's life there's hope, but in the cold dark tomb that Black Saturday, there was no life, no breath, not even a ventilator, no hope at all. Period.

And yet there was! Because Jesus was there! For on Sunday morning, very early, life returned to lifelessness. His body was transformed and it was raised! Revealing that Jesus **is** the Life He told us He was! His whole ministry was about bringing life as He claimed to be the bread of life, the water of life, and the life-giving spirit. As we've been studying in morning Bible Study, He offered the woman at the well living water. He came that we might have LIFE and have it to the full! His ministry was all about life! And when He triumphed over the tomb that first resurrection morning, He proved it! And He forever cemented the new reality, not where there's life there's hope, but where there's God there's hope! Even **after** death! For Death was swallowed up in victory that Resurrection morning!

This role was also prophesied for Jesus by various Old Testament Prophets. The first of these was Job, who lived perhaps 2500 years or more before Jesus. Job said (19:25) "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth." Isaiah, however, proclaimed it most clearly in 25:7-9 "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. 9 In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."" The sheet that covered all nations and enshrouded all people was death. No exceptions. Kings and peasants, rich and poor, strong and weak. All were disgraced under the sheet of death's universal shroud. But on that first Resurrection morning, the Sovereign Lord removed that disgrace from all the earth! And because of the everlasting life He provides, He will indeed wipe away all our tears! **This** is the day to say, ""Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us ... let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.""

And so we do rejoice. We are glad. As was Paul who said this writing to Timothy, "(2 Tim 1:10) ... Christ Jesus ... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel!" And the author of Hebrews declared in 2:14-15 "...He too shared in their humanity so that by his death He might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held

in slavery by their fear of death.” Praise God we have been set free from our prison, our slavery, to not just death, but even to the **fear** of death! We don’t have to be afraid because our physical death is a bridge to new eternal spiritual life. This is part of what was echoed in the angel’s pronouncement to the shepherds that night, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for **all** people.” We don’t have to be afraid of death anymore! If we are in Jesus! And it’s available to all so it’s good news of great joy for all the people that our imprisonment, our slavery to death is over!

This little newborn Baby’s eventual resurrection eternally sealed the deal! It forever slammed shut the devil’s prison door of death locking him inside and Jesus’ followers outside. The good tidings for all people that the angel promised were now freely available to everyone everywhere! Even here in Woodstock! Even in California! Terry. Even in Puerto Rico, Jaime. Even in Nigeria and the Congo! Even in prisons and hospitals. Even in funeral homes and cemeteries! And everyone said?

Part of that good news is echoed in Rom 8:11, “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to **your** mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” As Bro Ned Conklin reminded us before he passed, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us! And that same Spirit that raised Him will raise us! If we are His. Jesus’ resurrection makes possible the promise we often share at funerals, the promise from Rev 21:4 He **will** wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be **no more** death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Jesus’ resurrection ushered in the brand-new order!

So what will you **DO** with the resurrection? It does bring joy, hope, truth, life, peace, etc. All the things we celebrate at Christmas. But let me suggest a few things to do because of it. In our Scripture this morning, Paul starts that list for us. 1. Stand firm. Let nothing move you! Because you have victory over death, you can stand against even martyrdom for Jesus if you must. 2. Always **give yourselves fully** to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. What is that work? Sharing this best of all news with others that they too might know the joy, hope, truth and peace that comes with eternal life provided by Jesus’ resurrection. This news is too good to keep to ourselves. It applies to all and it is meant for all. It’s not God’s will that a single soul stay locked in death’s eternal prison. And if you have never received it, you need to do so!

3. Let us worship Him for it! Every Sunday in worship, but every day of our lives as well ! With every breath He gives us! Jesus’ resurrection changes everything for He came to defeat death! Paul tells the Philippian believers in 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 **Therefore** God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow**, in heaven and

on earth and under the earth, 11 and **every tongue confess** that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Let us worship Him!

To help us celebrate a miracle infinitely bigger than the Minnesota football Miracle, to help us worship the One who defeated death for us all, our final artist, Sister Roberta Demski, has done a phenomenal job depicting Jesus' resurrection! (unveiling) Coming forth from what was to be His forever tomb, His forever prison. Coming forth in victory over sin, death, hell and the grave! And victory that He shares with all who trust in Him! He is not here, He is not in prison, He is risen! If you've never accepted Him as your Lord, as your Savior from death, do that right now as we pray together.