

**OUR LABOR IN THE LORD**

1 Corinthians 15:58

**Intro:** Our text for tonight is another of the many favorites in Scripture, a verse which many of the Lord's people can quote from memory. It comes at what has been called *the resurrection chapter of the Bible*. The chapter begins with a brief reference to the resurrection of Christ as a part of the Gospel. This evidently had been a truth concerning our Lord that the Apostle Paul, like most Jews, had been skeptical about until his sudden and miraculous encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. This is evidently what he was referring to when he wrote in verse 8, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." The Apostle Paul was not one of the original apostles. He was not saved until after the ascension of our Lord. But by our Lord's appearance to Saul (as he was then) on the road to Damascus, our Lord not only saved him, but gave him absolute evidence that the talk by Christians about the resurrection of Christ was absolutely true.

In verse 9 and 10 we see how Paul attributed not only his salvation, but his appointment as an apostle to have been due to nothing other than the grace of God.

From that Paul went on to learn from the Lord how vital the teaching about the resurrection of Christ was because vitally linked to it was the resurrection of believers. It was to a great extent the Apostle Paul who brought the Gospel to the Gentiles in Corinth, and he was astounded that there were those in Corinth who denied the doctrine of the resurrection. And so he went on in verses 12 through 19 to show that, if there is no truth to the doctrine of the resurrection, then it completely destroyed any hope that they had for their own salvation.

That argument continues down through verse 34.

Then from verse 35 on Paul deals more thoroughly with the doctrine of the resurrection, seeking to answer the question, "How are the dead raised up? His answer goes from verse 36 down through verse 50. All of this has to do primarily with the resurrection of the people of God.

The doctrine of resurrection is not limited to the NT. The first reference to resurrection was in connection with Abraham's willingness to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice to God. This is in Genesis 22. As he and Isaac left

Abraham's servants to go to the place of sacrifice, Abraham said to them, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen. 22:5). The writer of the book of Hebrews in commenting on this said that Abraham fully intended to kill Isaac, but that he did so, "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19).

There are other passages that we might refer to in the OT, but I will only speak of one because it speaks not only of the resurrection of God's people, but of the resurrection of all people. I am referring, of course, to a verse we are coming to in our present reading of the OT, Daniel 12:2. There we read,

2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2).

So the truth was in the OT about the resurrection, even the resurrection of Christ, for those who had eyes to see it, and ears to hear it. See Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, especially verses 22-36.

But Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 15 was on the resurrection of believers.

However, it was a truth which had to be concluded, or, we might say, be brought up to date following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so in verse 50 of our chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul, by revelation from God, spoke to give us the completed doctrine of the resurrection as it applies to those Corinthians who knew the Lord, and also to the rest of us who know the Lord, from that day until this, and on until the Lord returns for us. And he introduced this in verse 50 by stating a fact that we all know to be true. That truth is that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Now when Paul mentioned the kingdom of God he was speaking primarily of the eternal state. We all know, whether Christians or non-Christians, that we are not going to live forever the way we are. If the Lord tarries much longer, we are all going to die. This is where the closing verses of chapter become so very important. And here we come again, twice in the same day, to the word "mystery."

Paul defined this word several places in his epistles in the New Testament. One place is at the very end of the book of Romans. See Romans

16:25-27. Another place is in Ephesians 3:3-6. And so the Apostle Paul, enabled by the Holy Spirit, tells us *the secret*, that part of the doctrine which had not been fully revealed before. Let us see what it is.

First, in verse 51, we are not all going to die. I am sure that there has not been a single generation of the Lord's people from the time of Christ's resurrection to the present day, who has not hoped and prayed to be in that generation of believers who would not die. I sure that we all feel that way. What did Paul mean? Here we need to put together 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 with these verses, and we will see that Paul was speaking about the return of the Lord. In Thessalonians we read that "the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be with the Lord." Here in 1 Corinthians 15 we are told about what resurrection will mean for all of us. We won't all die, but we are all going to be changed.

Look now at 1 Corinthians 15:52. When the Lord come suddenly and unannounced except for the blowing of "the last trump," or trumpet, that which will happen first is that "the dead shall be raised incorruptible." Now keep that word in mind. It refers to all believers who die before the Lord returns. Their bodies are in corruption.

What kind of bodies do we have? We have mortal bodies, bodies that are living but subject to death. Twice Paul has said that we are going to be changed. We are going to be changed so that our bodies will become immortal, the resurrection body of our Lord. "Death" no longer has dominion over Him. See Romans 6:9.

What is the difference between and incorruptible body and an immortal body? There will be no difference at all. The two words are used to distinguish between those who die before the Lord returns, and those who are still living.

But when this takes place, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Look back at 1 Corinthians 15:26. Death is our enemy. Death is the fruit of sin. But it is our last enemy to be destroyed because we know that with the destruction of death will be the destruction of sin because we will not be able to sin in our resurrection bodies.

So what kind of victory was Paul speaking about in verse 57? He was speaking about our final victory, over death, but also over sin, and sick-

ness, and every other enemy that we have. Death cannot destroy the work of the Lord. Cf. Matthew 16:13-18.

What is the work of the Lord? In this dispensation it is the church. What is the church? It is people. We who know the Lord are the church.

Cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-17.

Now Paul's word to us is this: In the light of all that Paul has had to say in 1 Corinthians 15, we know that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord." The enemies of the Gospel have always thought that if they could do away with Christians, the work of the Lord would die. The Jews and Gentiles thought that if they could do away with Christ, that work would die. But they killed the Lord. What happened? God raised Him from the dead. And though the church, the body of Christ, has had its ups and downs, it is strong and living today, and will never die. Kings and empires have come and gone, but the work of God remains.

So what are we to do? Look at our verse. "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." What do they mean? First, the word "be" would better be translated, *become*. They had not been steadfast, but that is what Paul wanted them to be. They were not to be sitting back, waiting for all of this to happen. They were to be unshaken and unshakeable in their purpose, always seeking to do more and more, not less and less. But we need to remember that it is the Lord's work. He is the Lord over His work. It is His Word that we must use, and His ways that we must employ. E. M. Bounds stated a great truth when he said, "The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men." As I mentioned this morning, we need to be godly people who give ourselves to prayer, and who go forth with the sword of the Spirit to turn people from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.

Victory is ours in the Lord. Let us take courage and persevere. The Lord will give us His blessing.