

The Final Victory - Matter Matters

by Michael Flowers

The sermon emphasizes the significance of resurrection and transformation, asserting that our physical existence and actions matter in God's redemptive plan.

Duration: 30:00

Scripture: Genesis 1:31, Psalm 13:1, 1 Corinthians 15:20-58

Topics: "Victory"

Description

In this sermon, Paul emphasizes that victory is a gift from God and not something that can be achieved through our own efforts. He highlights the importance of recognizing the grace and work of Jesus in paving the way for our victory. Paul urges believers to take their mission on earth seriously, as everything they do matters and will be accounted for in the future. He concludes by discussing the final victory and the transformation of the body in the resurrection, emphasizing that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Transcript

I am armed up here today with a cell phone. I'm not anticipating a call, but it's smaller, my Bible's too big, and I don't have the room. I need, like, a podium this big to put my Bible here, my notebook here, and any books that I'm bringing along.

Yeah, that's ridiculous. Yeah, help me. We are speaking today about the final victory.

The final victory. Matter matters. And this is the last eight verses in 1 Corinthians 15, beginning with verse 50.

Today, Paul is continuing his argument, beginning with the phrase, which seems to be out of keeping with his whole argument thus far about the body and the sense of the body being transformed and a new materiality coming into being in the resurrection. He uses this phrase, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable or the corruptible put on imperishable or incorruptible.

What is he getting at? It sounds like in the former verses in his argument that the question how the dead are raised, that question last week, the week before last. But he's using a different word. He's not using the word for body here.

He's not saying that the body and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. He's saying sarks. It's the word for flesh, and it's a theological term for Paul most often.

And so it's not flesh per se, but he's saying untransformed flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, resurrection must happen, because if resurrection doesn't happen where transformation occurs, you won't make it in with your old creation body. Isn't that good news? You don't have to take your aches and pains into the eternal kingdom.

Yes. And the older you get, guys, the more you're going to say hallelujah to that lower back issues, all of that stuff. Yeah.

But these momentary light afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory. That's what he says. Even we capitalize on the aches and pains.

So that old stuff won't inherit the kingdom without going through a final transformation. Risen materiality. Matter matters.

That's why the resurrection is the big deal, because it's the redemption of creation. Paul says in Romans 8, you know, just kind of go back and think about Romans 8 or read it again this week. You know, creation is standing on tiptoe, you know, awaiting the manifestations of the son of God, you know, so that this whole cosmos is being redeemed through Jesus, the new Adam.

And even the passages that like the gospel passage, the father last read this morning, Jesus is speaking about his resurrection. I am going to my father and I am the way to the father, the truth and the life resurrection and the life. And so he's identifying even in his earthly counsel there on that final night before he was handed over to suffering and death.

He's speaking in theological terms now to his disciples, saying, when I'm risen, this is what's going to happen. I'm going to bring you with me and you will be one in the father and the son. Not until the resurrection, not until the ascension.

And so Paul begins to frame his knowledge then of what we're going to talk about in the term mystery. This is a great mystery. A piece of hidden knowledge about God's preordained purposes now disclosed through revelation.

That word apocalypse. The mystery is that even the living will undergo transformation into a new form when Christ returns, because that's the big question. Now that if the dead are raised, what happens to those who are living on the earth when Jesus in his second advent returns? And he's going to answer this question, but it's not going to satisfy our curiosity.

Just won't satisfy our curiosity because we can't conceive of what it's going to be like. These kinds of mysteries really are meant to cause us to worship and just go. I surrender.

I surrender trying to figure all that out. It's a mystery. Now, this is the true transformation of society, though, when Jesus returns.

We talk about the transformation of society. I'm a little bit more skeptical of that sort of approach to mission as if all society will be transformed. I personally can't get a hold of that.

But truly, I can get a hold of that at the second coming. That is the transformation of the cosmos. That's the transformation of society that I am looking for.

And if we believe in that kind of transformation of society, it will matter what we do in this life. Matter will matter now and how we treat matter and how we view matter and our bodies and one another and relationships. All of that is hinging on the reality of the resurrection of this one man, Jesus Christ, who is the first fruits from all who are risen from the dead.

He has gone there and he's planted that tree of life, as it were. He is the first fruit from the tree of life that we will all be rooted and grounded in. Amen.

Where are your cowbells? That's it. Though we don't see this now, right, we have to live by faith and not by sight, Paul says. Though we don't see everything in subjection to him, this passage has pointed that out.

There will be a day when everything comes under his feet. He is currently ruling and reigning at the right hand of the father through the ascension as the risen lord and king of all creation. Not only the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but the risen lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

Paul says it is a fact and he is speaking from experience. Right. He saw the risen word.

And so Jesus has already become the first fruits of new creation. Whatever it's going to be like, it's called new creation. Think your spiritual growth has gone at a snail's pace.

You feel like you're a little behind the eight ball or you're growing very slowly and you wish you could hurry up the process. Oh, I sure do. But there will be a twinkling of an eye when that final transformation occurs.

Until that final transformation occurs, you could be the most spiritual person on Earth and you would still be dissatisfied. Because the longing, the longing to be fully united bride and bridegroom has not yet happened in its fullness. This is what creation is groaning over.

I want to be married to Jesus in fullness. I want all creation to come to an end and I want to be wedded in new creation. One where God will be all in all.

And that's the longing in us. This is not pie in the sky. You guys, this is a longing that causes me to get up and preach the gospel.

If it weren't for this, Paul says, we're miserable people, right? Just go home, eat, drink and be married. That's what he says. But Christ has been raised from the dead and he is the first fruits.

And so soon all of our prayers like how long? Oh, Lord. You know, the Psalms, the how long Psalms? We counted them. How many? I don't know.

I haven't counted them. But I know Psalm 13 became one of my favorite Psalms one summer where it just seemed like a whole string of things were going wrong in my life. Right.

How long, oh, Lord, will you forget me forever? David says you feel like David in his emotional passion. Right. He's not being logical.

He's not being rational. That's not what Psalms are about. Right.

You know, the diary of the soul coming out. God, destroy my enemies like we heard today. It's divine poetry.

Now, this transformation is going to be introduced by a heavenly soloist. We speculated back a couple of weeks ago it could be a redeemed Miles Davis with wings. But there's going to be a trumpet sound.

And that's just really a metaphor for this unveiling, this apocalyptic unveiling. You know, when God comes in his fullness and he's saying that he's rendering, he's rending the heavens and he's coming down that second and final time. It's going to be like that prophetic blow the trumpet in Zion.

Here I come. Here I come. Introducing the day of the Lord, like in Joel 2.1. Yeah.

This transformation is an elaboration to the question in verse 48. What kind of body is it going to be? The resurrection body will be radically transformed in a way that remains mysterious, utterly mysterious. And yet.

Our present existence, what we're doing now, what we're doing now will not be simply annihilated. It will not. The metaphor of putting on new and glorious clothes that we heard read.

We're putting on those new and glorious clothes. It suggests that our mortal bodies will not be abolished, but encompassed with the glory of the risen Christ, somehow taken up into this eschatological life of the resurrection of Jesus, of new creation. For the perishable body must put on incorruptibility and this mortal body must put on immortality.

This is part of God's mysterious plan to redeem not only us, but all creation and not reject it. It's not a plan B. This was in the plan in the heart of God the whole time before creation ever existed. Even the Lamb of God was slain before the foundations of the earth.

Jesus crucified and risen is not plan B. It was in the eternal heart of God the whole time. And so when this transformation occurs and our flawed bodies are clothed in immortality at the resurrection, there will be fulfillment of God's long promised triumph over the powers of sin and death. Death will no longer have a hold on creation.

And we heard that this morning. He's drawing out of the Hebrew tradition. Isaiah 25.

I love it. Verse seven. He will swallow up on this mountain, which is the kingdom of God, by the way.

The mountain of the Lord is the kingdom of God. OK, that's a metaphor for the kingdom of God in the future age. He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples.

You feel that covering sometimes that dark cloak. Sometimes you have to shake it off like a shroud. Right.

And the veil that is spread over all the nations. Gosh, all you have to do is read the news. Yeah.

You can get so discouraged if that's all you read, because that's the bad news. This is the good news. Verse eight.

He will swallow up death forever. He will swallow up death forever. Why? Because that's not a future reality.

That's already in the reality of the risen Jesus himself. And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. John, the revelator, John in the apocalypse, draws from Isaiah 25.

He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and the reproach of his people will be taken away. You feel reproach. It will be taken away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken.

That means it's just going to happen. The Lord has spoken. And it will be said on that day of his returning.

Behold, this is our God. We have waited for him. Isn't it beautiful? Can you wait for him? We're called to wait for him.

We have waited for him. The other alternative is giving up and saying, I can't handle this anymore. We must wait for him in the company of the righteous.

We must support each other in this waiting and encourage each other in this waiting. When we do grow weary, we need encouragement. We need each other to help us wait for him.

That he might save us. Behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us.

This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Verse nine. That's Isaiah, you guys. Amen.

And this is why Christianity battled so ferociously heresies such as Gnosticism and Doctrine. The incarnation and the resurrection is a resounding yes to creation. And what do I mean by that? Jesus was not a ghost.

Jesus was not a phantom. As the Doctrine would teach, he only appeared as a human being. It was an ancient heresy that Christianity just completely wiped out.

And you see its inception in first and second and third John. They deny that Jesus has come in the flesh, right? A physical body. It's so important that he comes in a physical body because if he did not come in a physical body, he cannot save our physical bodies.

That's why it was very, very necessary that God, the father, didn't come down and do the redemption. Because God, the father created us through God, the son and God, the son became one. He united himself with his creation to come and redeem and restore and to be the first fruits of the resurrection so that we could follow him in the way, the truth and the life.

And so say it with me. Matter. Matter matters.

And so Paul is ending this thing up. This has been four weeks and he's saying, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory. The victory is a gift, brothers and sisters, it's not something you have to drum up and shout and scream and make it happen.

That won't work. You know, you're defeated when you're doing it. Just receive it.

It's a work of grace. The victory is a work of grace, the incarnation of the son of God who obediently carried out his father's plan. And he said, come on, sons and daughters, with me, you will be united with me now forever.

Jesus did it for us. He paved the way and he's saying, come and follow me in the way and I'll take you there. Amen.

And before you get there, you're going to have a mission here because it really, really matters now because matter matters and evangelism matters and your art matters and your studies matter. And everything that you do is husbands and wives and singles and celibates. It matters now for that day.

We will give an account for what we've done here. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. And so we must contemplate these matters, brothers and sisters.

We must take them very seriously. I don't want to stand before the Lord and say, oh, I thought you were just kidding. No, no.

I mean, I don't want to regret what could have happened in my life. Right. Because I didn't take him seriously.

I didn't believe that he is the resurrection and the life. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory. This hope is firm and it purifies us.

Peter says this kind of hope purifies us, cleanses us. This hope does not disappoint us. Romans five, because character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us.

And we said last week that hope is not optimism. Hope is eternal. Hope is powerful.

Faith, hope and love go together. And they are the foundation of our anticipation in God. Matter matters because God said it was good.

And when he made us, he said what? Very good. That's right. We were the final crown of his creation.

He didn't say and he said it was good. He said it was very good. In fact, I'm going to unite with that and I'll become the second human being who will redeem and restore everything that's gone wrong from Genesis to Revelation.

And so chapter 15 is summarized in this one gift. God gives us the victory. God gives us the victory when God raised Jesus.

The benefit was not for him alone. Church, rather, all of us in the church, the body of Christ share in the victory in such a way that we, too, can expect to be raised from the dead. Those who bear the image of the heavenly man, Paul has said in verse 49, and they will be set free from the powers of death, sin and the law.

All three have been subdued under Christ. And so as a result, he says in verse 58, therefore, and we've been using this as a blessing at the end of the Eucharist. Therefore, our labor is not in vain.

Be steadfast, be immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Now, based on all the stuff about the resurrection of the dead, this eschatology, he's saying, therefore, being movable because being grounded in this, this hope of the future will stabilize us when we're out in the oceans of just craziness and waves are beating against us. And the foundations are being tested in our lives, in our houses.

The rain will come and the floods will come and beat against this house. But the house that is built upon the rock and not the sand will stand. The rock is the risen Christ.

It's just not any Jesus. It's the crucified and risen Jesus who is present tense, real time speaking to your hearts on a daily basis. Amen.

So be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because, you know, in the Lord, your labor is not in vain. Feels like it sometimes, right? What good am I doing? My life doesn't really matter in the scheme of things. Sometimes we can really conclude in a false humility that will rip you off and steal and kill, destroy the very life that you're supposed to live because you discredit yourself.

Right. But know this, that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain. Paul is saying you must get that on a daily basis when you wake up and you don't feel like it.

You don't feel like any labor in the Lord. Right now, it is that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. You see, the Christian life is not some kind of self-improvement thing where if I don't feel good, there's something wrong.

Read the New Testament again, brothers and sisters. Persecuted, but not forsaken, beaten down, but not destroyed. The risen Lord didn't meet me and say, go listen to Oprah.

You know, Paul is saying just having a little fun there. OK, it's true, though, right? And that brings me to NT, right? Because I'm right. Right.

He says about verse 58, the last verse of this chapter. If it is true that God is going to transform this present world and renew our whole selves, bodies included. Then what we do in the present time with our bodies and with our world, it matters.

So many in the 70s who are expecting Jesus to return at any moment said, I'm not going to school. I'm not going to college. I'm not going to do anything with my life because Jesus is returning.

Do you see the damage in that kind of theology that stinks? That really stinks. That's ripping people off. That's not what the gospel is saying.

Know that your labor, know that your schooling, know that, you know, everything that you're doing in the Lord is not in vain. If it's not in the Lord, it isn't. Yeah, if you're just doing it for yourself, it's in vain.

It's empty. We know that that's all creation. That's flesh and blood that cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

But that's not our calling, right? Amen. I love that. This is on the contrary.

It is a matter of the greatest encouragement to Christian workers, most of whom are always from the public eye. Unsung heroes and heroines getting on faithfully and quietly with their God given task that what they do in the Lord during this present time will last, will matter, will stand for all time. Do you get that? Isn't that good? That's really good because our life is not meaningless.

It has meaning in the resurrection of Jesus. How God will take our prayer, our art, our love, our writing, our political action, our music, our honesty, our daily work, our pastoral care, our teaching, our whole selves. How God will take this and weave its varied strands into the glorious tapestry of his new creation.

We can at present have no idea how he's going to do that, that he will do so as part of the truth. That he will do so as part of the truth of the resurrection and perhaps one of the most comforting parts of it all. So talk to me.

How does that play out in your life? Say, Chris, talk to me. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You can do it.

Yeah. How to be patient. Your labor as a husband is not in vain.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Your labor as a, is not in vain. What would that be? Anybody. Your labor as a parent is not in vain.

Yeah, I'm going to get close to you. So if you say anything else, it's going to get on the recording. Yes, that really matters.

Mm hmm. It's not even you, Sarah and I. And then the community steps in and supports that. Right.

Yes, absolutely. Rod. I think as an employee.

Yeah. It's all sacred. Talk about sacred space, but.

Everywhere you go. Everywhere you place your foot. It says.

Right. And do not. Is it.

Joshua. It's yours. So you're making sacred space everywhere you walk.

Anyone else. Dylan. Anybody.

OK. I would say just. You know, I'm a single guy.

As everyone here knows. And I live with five other guys. So sometimes my attitude can just be.

What is the least I can do? Like, how can I just stay out of their way? But. Rather than that, it's like a complete opposite. We've seen that in you.

Man. We've really seen that in you. In our circle.

Lisa. I get the job by makeup and trinkets. Wow.

Oh, yeah. Because you're a steward, right? And when God increases your surplus, you're still a steward. So we always have to say, well, this is not mine.

How do you want me to manage this? Yeah. It's good. Very good.

Anyone else. Yes, Steve. So important.

That's the commandment with the promise, right? Honor your father and mother. That it may go well with you. That's the promise.

Yeah. Yeah. Praise the Lord.

Anyone else. Worship and intercession matters, doesn't it? Right. And prayer is a labor.

Aphrodite. He's always wrestling in prayer for you, Paul said. And we bring our bodies into worship and use our bodies, even making the sign of the cross.

It's a way of worshiping with your bodies. It's. And just saying, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the cross.

It gets it all, right? It's a visual of the gospel. Right. So I begin to do that in my private prayer times before I ever did it in public.

I would encourage you, if you long to do that, but you're a little self-conscious, you don't feel like it's going to be genuine. Just begin to do it before the Lord. Audience one.

It's where we do everything anyway, right? Before the Lord. In an audience of one. Thank you, Lord.

We love you. And we just want to acknowledge how you've loved us. It's incomprehensible, but we just want to say it.

Your great, great love for us. We just want to be able to receive the love of the father and the grace of Jesus and the communion of the Holy Spirit. In increasing measure.

Give us the hope of the resurrection. Let us live in faith, hope, and love rooted in Jesus Christ. Because our lives matter.

And I just pray that everyone walking out of here today would have that renewed sense of mission and purpose. In the small things. The small things.

Because they're big things to you. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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