

Text: 1 Cor. 15:51-58

Title: "Living because death is swallowed up in victory"

Time: 3/26/23 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In 2014 a giant sinkhole swallowed eight priceless Corvettes that were on display in the Skydome of the National Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, KY. The hole opened up right underneath one of the main showcase rooms of the museum.

It turns out that, while the sinkhole was very bad for the cars, it was actually great for business. More people came to the museum to see the cars destroyed in the sinkhole than had come to see the cars on display in the showroom. You might say that from a bottom-line perspective, those Corvettes were "swallowed up in [a] victory" of sorts for the museum.

As much as any other chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians is the "Resurrection Chapter." It is a chapter that has some things in common with news reports about a sinkhole. It tells us that "death is swallowed up in victory" (v. 54). It is as though our world is a showroom of death, and this verse says a sinkhole swallows the death in an ultimate victory.

Notice that Paul says this is a saying that will be brought to pass at some point in the future. The saying is a prophecy that was made in the distant past by the prophet Isaiah, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 25:8). For God's people, death will be swallowed up in victory someday.

Paul tells us it will happen in a moment (vv. 51-54). My brother often signs his name in an email under the complementary close, "Listening for the trumpet." This is the trumpet he is referring to, the last trumpet. It is the last trumpet because it brings to an end the age of the good news of the gospel. In that moment, death will be swallowed up in victory for all of God's people.

Paul knew that this moment is coming because he knew the resurrection of Jesus Christ had happened (vv. 55-57). This is his argument throughout this chapter.

Illustration: The Belcher Sea Snake infests the sea bottom sands of the ocean waters of Southeast Asia and northern Australia. The species is often described as the world's most venomous snake. A few milligrams of its venom is strong enough to kill 1000 people.

Application: The passage Paul quotes from the prophet Hosea here speaks of a sting with a venom that is more powerfully deadly than the Belcher Sea Snake. That venom is man's sin – your sin and mine.

It only took one sin from Adam to kill off the entire human race. But think of how the human race has had far more than one sin. Everywhere the good law of God has said, "Don't", man's decision is constantly, "Do." And everywhere the good law of God says, "Do it", man's response is constantly, "No, I won't."

Think of the millions of sins that each of our own lives have added to the one sin of Adam, which sin was deadly enough to kill off the entire human race. Then multiply those millions of sins by the billions of the sinful sons of Adam who have ever lived. If we could do that math, we

would begin to appreciate the magnitude of the victory Paul claims when he celebrates, "O death, where is thy sting?". In the face of so deadly a venom as our sin, Paul courageously affirms that we have "the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 57). God gave His Own Son to bear our sin and its penalty under God's law so that we might be saved from the poisonous sting of our sin.

Paul is clear that this salvation is something that God *gives* us through Jesus Christ. Like any gift, all we need do to possess it is to receive it. We cannot ourselves earn such a victory over our sin and the death it deserves. We can have it only if we receive it freely from Jesus by faith. Have you ever turned from your sin to Jesus for salvation from sin?

If we refuse that gift in unbelief, we have no victory over our sin and its deadly consequences. But if we turn from the sin of our unbelief and receive by faith this gift of salvation through Christ, who died for us and rose again, we can look forward to the moment in which death shall be swallowed up in victory for God's people. Not only shall our death end in that moment, our sin will end too.

So there is coming a moment for God's people when death is swallowed up in victory. But what does that coming moment have to do with the lives we live today? I want that to be our focus with the remaining time we have this morning from verse 58 of our passage. Notice with me 3 things about the purpose of life for those who live awaiting the moment when death is swallowed up in victory.

I. Our purpose of life is to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord."

Illustration: Our Easter breakfasts together abound each year, which means that we always have enough to satisfy our appetites and so much more left over. Let me say thanks to all who provide meals like that for us so very well. *To abound* means simply *to have far more than enough*. It means to be filled up and to have a lot of leftovers.

Application: That word *abound* is used a lot in Paul's letters. When Paul uses this word, he is most often referring not to what we do for the Lord, but rather to what He does for us.

In Christ, we abound in glory (2 Cor. 3:9); we abound in hope (Rom. 15:13); we abound in grace to give (2 Cor. 9:8); and we abound in grace to be forgiven (Eph. 1:8). When our sin abounds, grace to be forgiven super-abounds (Rom. 5:20). So the Lord abounds in love toward us. There is enough to meet our need and a lot of leftovers too.

Illustration: This past week I was with just over 50 brothers in the Lord studying the Resurrection together. One brother pointed out in his message that the Creator made all that He made in order to give it away. God made the universe to give it away to man. God's works have abounded for us.

In our passage we learn we should abound in work for Him, but as "beloved brethren," we need to understand that we will only seek to do this if we first have a full appreciation for how He abounds in love for us. Abounding in the work of the Lord must be a Spirit-filled response to God's revealing to us how His love has abounded to us.

So what does it mean to do *the work of the Lord*? One way to answer that question is that it means simply to be like Paul and Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10, "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do"). How did Paul and Timothy

abound in the work of the Lord? They labored for the well-being of the local church (see also 16:15, “ I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints).” It takes one to know one, and Paul described the house of Stephanas as addicted to the ministry of the saints, because he was like that too.

The word translated *labor* in our verse is used in 1 Cor. 3:8 of laboring to build God’s building, which for Paul was the local church of Corinth. Our labor in the Lord is laboring to build our local church like Paul did. That chapter tells us that we need to be careful how we build that building, for a reckoning is coming – the moment when death is swallowed up in victory is a moment of reward for faithfulness or loss of reward for unfaithfulness in this gospel ministry.

In this way and for this reason, Paul and Timothy’s purpose in life was to abound in the work of the Lord. Is that our purpose in life? Do we believe that death is swallowed up in victory?

So what happens when a local church is filled with members who abound – who provide more than enough – in the work of the Lord? That local church is used of the Lord to be a gospel blessing that plants and provides for other local churches in advance of the kingdom of Christ. I believe the Lord desires our local church to abound this way, but that work begins with each one of us accepting that our purpose in life is to abound in the ministry of our local church.

II. Our purpose in life is to be “steadfast, unmovable.”

Illustration: I have known a number ladies named *Ruth*, but I have never met an *Orpah*. Do you know anyone who ever named their little girl *Orpah*?

Application: Ruth was a great example of the kind of stability our purpose in life requires. After they became widows, her mother-in-law Naomi had nothing of this world's possessions, pleasures, or pride to offer Ruth. Yet Ruth was determined to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

She told Naomi, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Then the text explains, "When she [Naomi] saw that she [Ruth] was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her" (Ruth 1:16-18). Ruth was steadfastly minded, unmovable in the work of the Lord. Are we?

Paul spoke of his own steadfast, immovable commitment to the work of the Lord. Paul said, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Paul was steadfast, unmovable in the work of the Lord.

Are we following the examples of Ruth and Paul? Are we steadfastly minded like Ruth and can we say with Paul, "none of these things move me"?

III. Our purpose in life "is not in vain in the Lord."

Application: Do you and I ever have trouble believing that truth? When it comes to this truth, Satan would beg to

differ. He does his best to convince every local church member, "Your labor is vain in the Lord." "You have lots of better things to do with your life and time." Paul even struggled with this thought at times (1 Thess. 3:5, "For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain"). We must deny our enemy that influence over us. We must resist the constant temptation to conclude that our labor has been in vain in the Lord.

Our labor in the work of the Lord is never in vain, even though we cannot always see the positive change in people or the victory over our enemy, for which we have labored. One wonderful promise we have in this regard concerns especially laboring to share God's Word with others: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). That promise is true whether or not people listen to what we have to say.

Conclusion: Jesus is risen, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. Do we really believe that? Do our lives show that we believe that? Are we like Ruth or more like Orpah, like Paul's friend Stephanus or like Demas, who love this present world and left the ministry of the saints behind?

If we are willing to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," our labor is not in vain in the Lord because of the truth of Rev. 14:12-13, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the

Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

Basil Manly, a 19th century Southern Baptist, wrote a hymn about what it means to live with purpose in light of the day when death is swallowed up in victory:

“1 Work, for the day is coming,  
Day in the Word foretold,  
When, 'mid the scenes triumphant,  
Longed for by saints of old,  
He who on earth a stranger  
Traversed its paths of pain,  
Jesus, the Prince, the Saviour,  
Comes evermore to reign.

“2 Work, for the day is coming;  
Darkness will soon be gone;  
Then o'er the night of weeping  
Day without end shall dawn;

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*

What now we sow in sadness,  
Then we shall reap in joy;  
Hope will be changed to gladness,  
Praise be our best employ.

“3 Work, for the Lord is coming;  
Children of light are we;  
From Jesus’ bright appearing  
Powers of darkness flee.  
Now morning light is breaking,  
Day dawns in every land,  
Night shades beset no longer,  
For Christ is now at hand.”