

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.

One day can make a big difference. Take for example August 6, 1945. That was the day that "Little Boy," the first atomic bomb this world has seen, was dropped on Hiroshima. That one day made a big difference in this world's history. It ushered in a terrifying new era – the nuclear age, with arms races and threats of nuclear annihilation.

Or maybe a more positive example. September 3, 1928. That was the day a scientist name Alexander Fleming returned to his lab after a holiday and found a mold growing in an uncleaned petri dish that seemed to kill off infectious bacteria. Penicillin, we call it. That day ushered in the age of antibiotics – an age where we don't have to be afraid of dying from simple infections or sore throats anymore.

One day can make a big difference. Of course, no day has made a bigger difference – in this world's history, and in your personal story – than the first Easter Sunday 2000 years ago. Jesus lives! That truth is the only truth that makes life worth living, and death worth dying. Paul has been explaining that for 50 verses already – the new and wonderful age we live in because Jesus rose. We come in at the end of the discussion. A new day dawns... Paul says. It did with Jesus' resurrection. It will with yours.

Paul really draws us into these verses, doesn't he? Listen, he says, as if to pull us in close for news we can't afford to miss. Listen, I tell you a mystery. In the bible, a mystery isn't something we can never know. It's something we would never have known if God hadn't revealed it to us. Paul is about to pull back the veil and let us in on divine truth we wouldn't otherwise know.

We wouldn't know it, because...well...what he says is so contrary to human experience. The age we live in – the one we know by experience – is the age of the dead and the dying. The one where death reigns supreme. Paul says here, "Where, O death, is your victory?" Based on our experience, we might say: Where *isn't* death's victory? It has laid low the mightiest of this world's kings and emperors. It has brought sadness to every human home in history. It robs its victims of all of life's possessions in an instant. It renders all of life's accomplishments ultimately meaningless. In spite of all our advances in

medicine, we have found nothing that can stop death. Life is one headlong rush to the grave for every human being.

Do you know what it took to usher in the age of the dead and the dying? One day. Really, just a moment, when our first parents sinned. Paul says that here: **The sting of death is sin.** Sting – he’s talking about a goad, a stick with a sharp point that drives an animal. Ultimately, Paul says, it’s not bacteria or bombs that cause death. What brings death, goads every human being to the grave, is sin.

Which means we’re not the innocent victims in this age, are we? We’re the culprits. **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law,** Paul writes. God who created us gave us laws – parameters in which life was meant to be lived to its full. But we’ve stepped out of those parameters. Sometimes on accident. Sometimes on purpose. Either way, the consequence is the same: We forfeit the right to live. The law condemns us as sinners, and the wages of sin is death. Our sin puts us under death’s power.

But... Paul says. **Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** Did you hear that wonderful news? There is a way to beat sin and death! And you don’t need to do or pay anything to have it – this is a victory **God gives,** freely, as a gift. And it’s found only in one place – rather, in one person: **Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Our Lord – our God – entered into the age of the dead and the dying to save us from it. To do that, he had to take away death’s sting – what gives death its mighty power – our sins. So he came into this world as one of us. He never stepped outside of the parameters God set for us...but he did that so that he could make your sins – the world’s sins – his own. On the cross, our sin became Jesus’ sin. And he suffered what we deserved to pay for them all. The author of life took away death’s sting by letting it drive him into the grave!

But here the story changed. Christ is risen! Instead of death claiming another victim, death itself became the victim. Jesus conquered death, and he gives victory over death to all who believe. One day changed history! A new day has dawned. No longer the dead and the dying...through faith, Jesus has brought you into the age of the redeemed and the living. Your sins are gone. Death holds no fear for you.

Paul even taunts it here: Where is your victory? Where is your sting? No, Jesus has made death what Paul calls it in these verses: **Sleep.** Are you afraid to fall asleep after a long hard day? No – you look forward to it! That’s your new attitude in this new age that’s dawned. Life is hard, but it has joy and meaning – living for the Jesus who loves you and saved you. And death is something you can look forward to – body rests, but soul rejoicing in heaven.

But another day is coming, Paul says, that will change all of history – and your story, too. It will kick off, Paul says, with the **sound** of a **trumpet.** You know the day he’s talking about, right? The day Jesus returns. **Not all will sleep** before that day, Paul says – some of us who are worshipping here this morning might still be alive when Jesus comes back. All of us, if he comes today! **Not all will sleep, but we will all be changed** – for the much, much, much better.

It’s easy to forget that. Or maybe the problem isn’t that we forget it – we just don’t fully trust it. We know that this life isn’t all there is, but sometimes we live as if this life were the best there is. We

say, "Where is your victory, death?" But secretly we don't want to die anytime soon, because there's a whole lot we want to enjoy and do before then. We know Jesus is coming again soon, but we think, "Don't let it be *that* soon..." I wanna get married, first. See my grandkids grow. Don't get me wrong – it's not wrong to enjoy this life with its blessings. But don't let the dim joys in this sinful and dying world distract you from what Jesus has in store for you when he returns.

On that day, death will be swallowed up once and for all. It will never claim another victim. On that day Jesus will raise all the dead. **And we** – all believers in him – **will be changed**. These **perishable** and **mortal** bodies will become imperishable and immortal. Sinful people will become perfectly holy. Such is Jesus' power that it will all happen in a **flash, in a twinkling of any**, Paul says.

But can you imagine how wonderful that will be? Whatever is wrong with your body – weakness, sickness, aging – will be made right. Perfect health and strength and vigor is all you'll enjoy from that time on forever. Reunited with loved ones lost in the Lord, never to be separated again by death. Sin will never mar your happiness ever again. No more frustration, futility, worry or want...no more headaches, heartaches...just endless years of perfect joy in a perfect world with Jesus.

It almost seems too good to be true. But then just go to the empty tomb. There is your proof there is your guarantee. There is your downpayment by Jesus himself: It's too good, but it is most certainly true.

A new day has dawned. A new day will dawn. All because, "Christ is risen!" Praise God for this day – this one day – that has changed our story forever. Your life now has full meaning. Your death holds no fear. And his resurrection guarantees yours....and that the best is yet to come. Amen.