**1 Corinthians 15:51-57 (EHV)**

**Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled: Death is swallowed up in victory.
55Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory? 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**

The women came to the tomb that day with some expectations. Our verses from Luke today make it pretty clear what those expectations were. They had brought spices with them. Spices used for Jewish burials. They had brought worries with them. Worries that they wouldn’t be able to move the huge stone away to get into the tomb. It was pretty clear what these women expected. They expected to find a body.

Instead, they were met with the most wonderful news of all. **“They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. 3When they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothing. 5The women were terrified and bowed down with their faces to the ground. The men said to them, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? 6He is not here, but has been raised!”**

Their expectations were drastically changed! And they changed even more throughout the day! As the risen Lord appeared to them. To Mary Magdalene confused and crying outside of the tomb. A special appearance to Peter, to the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus. To the disciples in the locked room later that night. All of their expectations shattered as Jesus appeared and said “Peace be with you!” because that’s what he had done. He had won peace for them. Peace with God. He won peace for us too. And the empty tomb shows us it's really ours!

That empty tomb changed all of their expectations. And it changes ours too. It changes our expectations about death and our relationship with God.

There was an ancient Greek philosopher named Epicurus, who lived about 300 years before Jesus. And he’s quoted as saying this, “What men fear is not that death *is* annihilation but that it is *not*.”

Epicurus was not a Christian. But his quote really does highlight well the Biblical, Christian truth that all people have a natural knowledge of God. In other words, God put a part in all of us that recognizes sin and recognizes we’re accountable for it.

When we look at God’s word we see just how serious our situation is, because we see what Gods’ expectations are. Holiness and perfection. In other words, if God’s expectations for our lives were an archery target, he would expect us to get a bullseye every time. “Be holy as I am holy.”

Sin is *not getting* that bullseye. In fact, that’s kind of what the word in Greek means – **ἁμαρτία** – sin, literally means “missing the mark.” Missing the bullseye, less than perfect and in many cases not even on the board. We’ve failed to meet God’s perfect expectations.

And because we’ve failed to meet God’s expectations, apart from Christ, our expectations for what happens after death could only be terrible. Paul says in verse 56, **“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. “**

Apart from Christ, and because of our sin, death has a sting to it. The picture there is of a sting with some venom in it. Not just a small nick that hurts a little bit for a while, but a sting that will *end* you.

Apart from Christ that’s the power death had. A sting with venom. With death could only come the just punishment from God that our sins deserve. With death could only come separation from God and his heaven forever.

But… **“God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.”**

Enter Jesus. Where we miss the mark, Jesus was an expert archer. He perfectly hit the bullseye each time with each expectation God had for a perfect life. Honoring God perfectly. Perfectly loving his neighbor. Perfect thoughts, words, actions. Jesus hit the mark every time. And he did it for us. God left heaven to life as one of us, for all of us. As our perfect substitute, Jesus kept God’s law perfectly in our place.

And as our sacrifice, he paid for the times when we haven’t. We saw that on Good Friday. The lamb of God paying for the sin of the world. Jesus bore the sting of death for us, in our place. And not just by his physical death for us. That would have been a small sting if that’s all that happened on the cross that day. No, Jesus took the full venom sting of death in our place. On the cross, he suffered the wrath of a Holy God and paid the full price of hell for our sins. Paying for every single one of our sins, in our place, because that’s how much he loves us.

And on Easter….we see God’s full approval for everything his Son did for us. Easter morning, that empty tomb, is God the Father saying “Yes, Yes, Yes!” to everything his Son did for us and the promises he shared with us. Yes, your sins are really forgiven! Yes, Jesus perfect life, the Father sees that as *yours* now. He credits that to you like you’re the one who lived it! Like you’re the one who perfectly hits the bullseye every single time. Yes, you can call God the Father your father too, you can call Jesus your brother, because he has made you a full member of his family! Yes, the inheritance that rightly belongs to Jesus as God’s son, is also rightly yours too – you have a home in heaven because of Christ! The victory over sin and death and hell that we could never win by relying on ourselves, in underserved love, God *gives* to us. **Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**

Because of the resurrection, what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 is true. Paul quotes from Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13 and he says, **“Death is swallowed up in victory. 55Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?”**

How awesome is that picture? Death being “swallowed up.” It’s a picture that shows absolute complete victory over something. We have a similar phrase – “chewed em up and spat em out!” But I like this one even more. Jesus didn’t spit death out again, he just swallowed it! It’s eternal power over us is completely broken. On this side of heaven, we still feel the hurt that sin and death bring. We still miss our loved ones at funerals. We still cry. But what a comfort to know that the venom of that sting is completely gone. When a Christian dies in the Lord, it’s not a victory for the grave or for Satan. It’s something that brings glory to God. That loved one is in the arms of their Savior. And Jesus resurrection is their resurrection too!

That’s what Paul is talking about in our verses today. Easter not only changes our expectations about death, it changes our understanding about heaven.

**Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.**

Jesus promised “because I love, you also will live.” The resurrection on Easter shows us that’s a promise we can count on. And it’s a promise God is already keeping! Right now, you are living your eternal life with Jesus. You’re alive, and Jesus is your Savior. In heaven, you will *continue* living your eternal life with Jesus. You will be alive, and Jesus will continue to be your Savior.

Here Paul gives us a little glimpse of what heaven will be like. Because of Jesus death and resurrection, we know that very day we’re going to be with Jesus in paradise. That’s the promise he gave to the thief on the cross, and that promise is for you and me too. But here God reveals to us that heaven isn’t only for our souls, its for our bodies too. Right now our bodies have the taint of living in a sinful world. They get old. They get tired. They get gray hair. Unless Jesus comes before this happens, they die and decay.

But because of Jesus resurrection God says our bodies will live again, we will have them in heaven! But not only will they live again, they will thrive in a way they never could before! They will be perfect! The word in Greek is **ἄφθαρτος** – it’s a word that means imperishable, incorruptible, immortal. It’s a body that is totally ready and matches perfectly with the inheritance our Father gives us. The inheritance that Peter talks about in 1 Peter 1, the **“inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”**

On the last Day, God gives us glorified bodies, like that of Jesus. God changes our bodies. They are still ours, you’re still you. Remember what Job said? Words that we’re going to sing about later in our service? **I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the end of time he will stand over the dust. 26Then, even after my skin has been destroyed, nevertheless, in my own flesh I will see God. 27I myself will see him. My own eyes will see him.**

You are still you. Your own eyes will see your redeemer Jesus. But you’re you with your body that has been made absolutely perfect by God. A body that will last forever without any kind of taint of sin or death on it at all.

On that day, when that last trumpet sounds, the victory that Jesus won for us, the victory that is already yours right now, will be fully realized. Death will be swallowed up in victory. There will be no trace of it left. We will be in heaven with our Savior. With our loved ones who have already died in the Lord. And we will get to live face to face with God, in his glory, in his perfect love for us, forever and ever. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.