

Our Risen Hope (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

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[0 : 00] Okay. 1 Corinthians 15.50 says, Clothed itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

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.

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God. He gives us a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Good afternoon, PCBC English, and happy birthday. It's such a privilege to open up this passage. Thank you, Rachel, for reading it. It's so lovely to have you back.

[1 : 26] And thank you for everyone who's joined us today, whether you haven't been in a while, or this is your weekly hangout. We really appreciate all of you for being here. Let me pray, and let's head into God's Word.

Father, we thank you for your Word, that it is living and active, and that today it reminds us of our risen hope. Help us to stand firm. Help us to be watchful.

And as we lean on Christ, not just today, but every day, until you call us home, that you would help us just to be abounding in the work of the Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

It was 2018, April, when they nailed it to the notice board. Pakaranga Chinese Baptist Church English Service Proposal.

I have read this document, by the way. It has Ian's legal handiwork all over it, I can tell you that. Look, there was a bunch of highly motivated brothers and sisters, right, among us, willing to push new boundaries.

[2 : 31] A new worship service here conducted, I quote, entirely in English. I mean, after over 25 years of faithful gospel ministry, here for an immigrant church was a bold new direction, was it not?

A new focus put on the table, English-speaking worship, English-speaking prayer and encouragement and fellowship. In obedience to our Lord Jesus' command, make disciples of all nations here in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

And it was tricky, right? There was a lot of dinner conversations, meetings together, a lot of false starts, a lot of dry runs, perhaps. Some of you may remember some of these moments.

But it came to a July members' meeting. But this one actually turned out really well, right? We sought the Lord's will together. And the result, it was like a chapter out of Acts 15, 22.

Yes, this seems good to the leaders and the whole church and the spirit. And the rest is history. That first Sunday of English service, we had gospel-centered worship.

[3 : 45] We even sang some of the same songs today. Pastor Albert preaching the word of Christ to us, followed by one of Uncle Ben's famous dinners. And then year after year, God has been kind, right?

2020, the year of lockdown, English service, a haven for us to worship in our heart language, no matter where we were, right? A place of faith, hope, and love. We could even invite English-speaking friends along.

2021, okay, still pretty tricky, right, through our country. But hey, we got to do outdoor baptisms. We got to invite friends from overseas. There's a picture of me standing on a step because my friend Yotam was like so much taller than I was.

All kinds of goodness and grace. 2022, we celebrated our church's 30th anniversary. More friends. More of Uncle Ben's famous milk teas this time.

All kinds of goodness. A reminder to be reaching out to the ends of the earth with the gospel. And four years later, right? 2023, we're not dead.

[4 : 52] We're still here. Praise the Lord. An outpost of brothers and sisters. A family on his mission. But four years is a long time, isn't it?

It's enough to go from young and free to maybe old and weary. Four years ago, I have to confess, I could fit even these pants a little bit better.

Four years is enough time for hopes to be built up and dashed. For hurts to grow and fester. For motivation, zeal to dip and slip.

And I think the Apostle Paul, he would empathize. We've been hearing from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Actually, he was in the delivery room, as it were. He was there when baby Church of Corinth was born.

He played his part as the evangelist, the preacher, as baby Corinth took her first steps in the way of Jesus. And you know what?

[5 : 56] Although the Lord called Paul away from Corinth, after a while he church-planted in Corinth, and then he had to go to Ephesus, it's actually around four years later that he writes back to them as their spiritual father.

I mean, you think about the timeline, actually it's quite uncanny, isn't it? We didn't plan this. The Lord planned this. We are hearing Paul's words on our fourth anniversary, and he is writing to a church on their fourth anniversary.

A word from the Lord in season. And let's think about four-year-olds a bit. So, I mean, I know most of you aren't four years old, but imagine that we are a four-year-old.

What can four-year-olds do? We can do a fair bit. We can drink milk from a cup. We can walk around. We might be able to make some friends, play with toys, maybe even read, or other things that four-year-olds do.

But what milestones does God want us as PCBC to hold on to? Brothers and sisters, today from our passage, I want to share these three milestones that Paul wants, not just the Corinthians, but for us to hold on to, to celebrate.

[7 : 16] Three milestones that I want to share with you. They all come from the good news as we've been reciting that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. So we're going to look at three milestones. If you flip back, some of you who don't speak English very well, please feel free to download the outline.

We'll put it in Chinese this time. Or just grab it from the front as well. But for the rest of us, just follow along the three points on screen. But keep your Bibles open because we'll be looking in it.

Firstly, here's the first milestone that we hear from the Apostle Paul. Firstly, yes, the risen Lord Jesus is bringing an eternal kingdom. Jesus is bringing an eternal kingdom.

Look at your Bibles again. Look at verse 51. Paul says, Listen! I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. Now the word transliterated into mystery here, it's actually got nothing to do with escape room puzzles or Pokemon Go missions or whatever else that is mysterious.

Look, whenever Paul uses this word, mystery, he's usually talking about the gospel. Right? God's mystery, which is in Christ, Colossians 2 verse 2.

[8 : 29] It was hidden for ages, now revealed to the saints. God revealing his ultimate plan to unite broken, selfish sinners to himself.

God pouring out the Son of God, his innocent blood to save us from our sin, to ransom us from our slavery, to make and gather a new people.

This is the gospel. A story that was once veiled, in a sense, now revealed in the death and resurrection of King Jesus. Do you believe this?

Do you believe this? Sometimes we forget, though, don't we? Actually, in this passage, I wonder, when Rachel was reading, did you notice how often the word mortal, immortal, corruptible, incorruptible appeared?

Actually, 11 times in total in this short passage. Can you guess what the Corinthians might have been worried about in the back of their minds? Why so often about these concepts?

[9 : 33] What were they worried about? Flat feet? Aging bodies? Flesh and blood stuff, right? The concerns of our humanness.

I wonder, as we grow beyond four years old, as PCBC English ages, what will we gradually get anxious about as a people of God?

Finding a partner? Scoring a job? Other projects and dreams? Last week, we talked about the bucket list that we're all trying to tick off. Look up, Paul says.

The risen King is speaking to you today. An earthly marriage is not your happily ever after. An earthly kingdom is not yours forever.

Because Jesus is alive. And Paul tells us, he reminds us, verse 50, it's not just flesh and blood that endures. It's not just our cute building at the corner of Tirako Drive that will last forever.

[10 : 35] But what will? Paul says one thing. Verse 51 says, the kingdom of God. And flesh and blood cannot inherit this kingdom of God.

And so you see, it's so crucial that we believe as a church that Christ is risen. Amen? Christ is risen. Believe in him that he is risen. Because that means not just that we have spiritual bodies after we return to dust.

It's more than just, oh, after we die, we will rise again as we heard last time. Believing in Christ, the risen king, also means we will one day inherit, we can inherit a spiritual kingdom.

Because we will be spiritual people, we can inherit a spiritual kingdom. Do we understand this? If we were just flesh and blood, we cannot inherit eternal life.

We cannot have an eternal home. It's precisely because Jesus lives right this moment that you and I will one day too and we will inherit a kingdom forever.

[11 : 41] And so friends, every Sunday is like Easter Sunday, really. Because he lives, I'm saved from my sin. And I can tell the enemy to go home. Stop accusing me.

I'm not guilty anymore. Because Jesus lives, I'm rescued from slavery to all the things that hold me down. All my temptations. I can tell the enemy, get lost. I've been set free.

I don't need to listen to you anymore. Because Jesus lives, I am part of a greater kingdom that you guys can't see here on earth. But we can by faith. And there is an unmissable crowd there.

And that crowd is not going to end after the last song of the concert or the last final whistle of the game. Or once I log off, that crowd will continue on for eternity.

What a kingdom to be a part of. And how can I be sure of this? Look at your Bibles. Verse 52, right? Because the Bible reminds us, verse 52, verse 53, one day the trump shall resound.

[12 : 44] One day the Lord shall descend. One day it will be well with my soul. Paul wants us to imagine the picture. Behold that picture.

In a flash we will rise again. And what we're wearing, it's immortality. Finally alive. Forever transformed.

Fully welcomed into a new kingdom. Part of a home that we have always been waiting for. Never reaching. And so friends, I pray that this is what we are focused on and fixed on as an English service.

Not just four years from now. Maybe even 40 years from now. That we would still be men and women still making disciples of all nations. Maybe with more grey hair, sure. On the verge of finally becoming alive in Christ.

Closer and closer to eternity. To our eternal home. Rejoice. The risen Lord Jesus is bringing an eternal kingdom. But secondly, today's passage tells us too, right?

[13 : 51] Rejoice. Yes, the risen Lord Jesus is ending the curse of death. Paul is saying in verses 54 to 56, look, when Jesus returns, we will literally be clothed in immortality.

We will be wearing a life that never wears out, never dies, more alive than ever. That is such good news. And it is good news because as we heard, right, in our New City Catechism question, ever since our first parents, humanity has suffered the curse of sin, which includes death.

When the Lord judged Adam and Eve, our first parents, He said, you will surely die. And they did. And all through the Scriptures, the way back into eternal life was barred shut.

Our sin brought death time and time again, generation after generation. But there were always whispers of hope in the Old Testament and those promises for God's people weren't there?

Think of what Eve heard, a sorrowful wife promised a descendant who will one day crush the serpent's head. Think of Ruth, a destitute immigrant promised a royal child born in Bethlehem.

[15 : 09] Well, think of David, a warrior king, right? But he's promised an everlasting kingdom far beyond what he can imagine. every story in the Bible from the very first pages to the last whispers the name of Jesus.

Including Isaiah, chapter 25. He foresaw a banquet feast better than Uncle Ben's, I have to say. Better than our 30th anniversary banquet meal.

That was pretty good, but this one's better. And look, friends, let's be honest, there may be brothers or sisters that you can't see eye to eye with today.

Here or not here. But on that day, the day Isaiah promises, foretold, Jesus, our captain, will present the best meal ever.

And that meal is going to be where the shroud of death, the word says, the fog of death is lifted. No more suffering, no more tears. And we will all have one song to sing.

[16:14] We'll be singing to each other, verse 9, surely this is our God. We trusted Him. He saved us. Let's rejoice. Let's be glad in our salvation. Do you long for that day? Do you live for that day?

Paul did, and that's why he exclaimed, right, in verse 54, death has been swallowed up in victory. He's quoting Isaiah here in verse 8.

Another story that whispers his name, the prophet Hosea. I don't know if you've read the book of Hosea before. It's pretty graphic. It's pretty convicting for God's people. Hosea foresaw God's judgment upon rebellious Israel.

And yet, he declares his power to break the chains of death. And Paul knows this tune so well that he sings it here. He breaks into song when he thinks that Jesus is alive.

He says, Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory? You see, friends, Jesus changes everything.

[17:16] If you rise with him, death cannot sting you. The grave cannot hold you. Isn't that worth looking forward to, brothers and sisters?

On that final day, we'll never burn out. We'll never need to take a pill or book an appointment. And so can I say to you, if you're here and you're not a Christian, don't settle for the sting of death as your end, of eternal death.

Do you have victory in Christ? Do you truly? Ask yourself. Do you ride under the banner of Jesus as your captain? Or are you his enemy?

If so, you need to be seated at his table. You need to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus for your sins to be forgiven. You need a better captain than the one you're following now.

Because only Jesus, the risen king, has won eternal life for all his troops. And he wants you to join his army. Hear verse 57 again.

[18:28] Thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. This language of a captain defeating the enemy, what a powerful image, isn't it?

Brings up ideas of Lord of the Rings or Narnia or whatever war movie that you like to watch on Netflix. Death's dark forces pushed away by the light of the risen king, Jesus.

Some of you, as we've heard, have been through battles since the beginning of English service. Pleading with skeptical brothers and sisters that even an English service needs to exist.

Feeling caught between the expectations and arguments of first generation parents and then trying to serve the needs of the next generation whom we don't understand either.

Sandwiched. Maybe you've even had to give up after a while and just check in to another church for a while. Welcome home. Thank you for sticking it through.

[19:33] Thanks be to God, though, who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus, our Lord. We're part of the battle together. Some of you here, you are new reinforcements.

You weren't around when they posted that proposal up. And maybe you want to know today, do these people here, do they care about me? Where is this church headed?

How can I join the battle? Well, the battle is not with each other, friends. The enemy is not the group on the other side of the auditorium. No.

Who's the enemy? It says here, verse 56, the sting of death is sin. Its power is in the law. Right? That's the enemy we fight together.

And against this enemy, God has promised. He gives us the victory through Christ Jesus, our Lord. And friends, we thank God that because of the cross, we live actually on the other side of the decisive battle.

[20:34] Right? As it were, we are fighting after D-Day. We know the war is won. We just have to mop up and clean up the battlefield. War will end soon.

And we are on the winning side, friends. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Yes. He is ending the curse of death.

But finally, yes, here's a milestone and it's right here, right now. Today, yes, be steadfast in the Lord, abounding in His work.

That's what verse 58 says to us. That's our application. But I want you to feel Paul's warmth here.

He doesn't say, yes, go and recruit five more people for English service.

He doesn't say, yes, you must achieve this level of holiness next, by next year. No, he doesn't.

What does he say? Actually, the main verb here is be, not do.

[21 : 35] That's grace, not works. Be steadfast, right? Actually, this is the only command other than the commands we heard last week about being warned and so on.

So friends, I don't want you just to do this coming year or achieve something this coming year. That would be going backwards. But do be fixed and steadfast on the gospel of first importance, on our Lord Jesus Christ as your captain.

And that will be life-changing for you. It will transform all the things that you do for the Lord, not just here in PCBC English, but in your workplace, in your family, as you go to school.

We are not going to be a place that's going to just talk about untested, fresh ideas from the Bible, new discoveries. No, that's what cults do. We fix our eyes.

We are steadfast on the Lord Jesus Christ. And so yes, I will abound in the Lord's work this coming year because I'm in Christ. Yes, I want to learn His patience, His kindness, His not-envy-ness, His gentleness, and so on because the living Lord lives in me.

[22 : 48] And so yes, I'm going to measure growth in PCBC English, not just by numbers or head counts, but by how people mature in Jesus this coming year. The question, friends, is not supposed to be whether we are bigger, but whether we find God bigger among us, in us, through us.

Amen? And so friends, don't be discouraged. Be steadfast in the Lord today and let everything else follow. We often overestimate what can happen in four years, right?

But I think we underestimate what God, by His grace, could do through us over 40 years. And so let's think that way. Today is a day to celebrate, to remind each other because Christ has risen, be steadfast in the Lord, abound in His work.

And so here's my birthday wish for what it's worth. I wish that by God's grace, English service is a place where we proclaim, we live out a gospel culture with thousands of souls transformed in Christ, with hundreds of families committed to building vibrant multilingual congregations, including English, with all kinds of creative, caffeinated ways of blessing our local communities.

and through every member here filled with the Holy Spirit as His witnesses, not just in Pakaranga, not just in Auckland, but beyond to the ends of the earth.

[24 : 23] Happy birthday. Let's pray and to that end. Father, I want to give thanks first and foremost for Your grace to this church over the past four years and more.

We think of some of the pioneers who are no longer with us when we thank You for them. We pray that You will continue to bless their steps. We think of those who have been hurt along the way.

Forgive us, Lord. Help us to reconcile and be one in heart and mind together for the Lord. We think of new friends who have joined us in the four years since.

Help us to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. And we thank You for all the works You have planned for us to abound in. But help us, first and foremost, to be steadfast in the Lord Jesus.

We thank You and we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.