

## Christ, the Mighty Warrior

### I Corinthians 15: 50-58

#### Introduction

##### A. The Corinthian argument continued...

Disney was on to something in its plot line. Walt Disney had an acute sense of good and evil and portrayed this conflict in many of his movies. The wicked queen, stepmother or demon is always defeated in the end by the virtue of the hero or heroine and their companions. Later Disney movies also try to celebrate virtue and family but often get caught up in the post-modern or pagan values of current society and Hollywood. But in the particular movie that I am referring to the message of having one's life, its actions and attitudes, being compatible with one's identity is a very Biblical theme. The turning point in the movie comes in a magical yet contemplative experience where the hero is encountered by a vision of his deceased father. The challenge from his father is to "Remember...who you are!" Simba in the *Lion King* is running from false guilt and is evading the challenges at home and has discarded his position and calling. His current life as "Hakuna Matata" is inconsistent with the position he was placed at his birth as the heir of leadership in the pride.

Our identity in Christ demands a perspective on life that we often fail to see or grasp. Our attitudes and actions are to be shaped not just by the external constraints of the rightness or wrongness of the situation but by the consistency these attitudes and actions have with the position of our calling. We are "in Christ." The Father's perspective on "who we are" is through the lens of Christ, his character, righteousness and work. Therefore it is imperative that we live our lives in the reality of our identity while at the same time recognizing that God is continuing to work out the particulars of the details as we go along.

The first century church in the city of Corinth was embroiled in serious struggles that found expression in conflict over leadership pedigree, worship style, class distinctions, gift expression and the like. The apostle Paul recognized that the root conflict was found in a failure to see the "gospel" and its life changing message as the purpose and goal of life. One's view of life and diversity is significantly altered when one realizes that we are to be governed by our view of Christ and his work. In our "Christ and the Christian" series, we are tying together the concept of finding our identity from Christ and linking the various themes and texts that emphasize this idea. Each morning and evening sermon pair is intended to be heard as a unit, the morning presentation of the Word is focused on an aspect of Christ's person and work, and then in the evening we will examine a text that relates that same theme more specifically to the life of the believer. In my topics I have chosen to stick with passages from the Pauline epistle to the Corinthians to maintain a familiar context and from a conviction that Paul's theme echoes what we are trying accomplish in our series.

## B. The power of the gospel in 15:1-11

This morning we find ourselves in the fifteenth chapter of this letter as Paul is bringing his argument to a conclusion with a topic that is a rhetorical unit in itself. This is likely because this point is so rudimentary to the whole of his presentation it gets a full scale treatment in its own right. The first eleven verses introduce the topic by presenting the narration of the facts of the situation. These amount to a narrative account of the events, not only of Paul's declaration and calling, but of the factuality of the events that are the substance of the gospel. Let us read through this section and hear Paul's case. [Read I Corinthians 15:1-11]

## C. The reality of the resurrection in 15:12-49

The reality of the resurrection and its centrality to the gospel message is then stated in the next section, verses 12-20 summarized in verse 20:  
*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Paul then goes on to state that the believer's life is to lived in the view of the resurrection because it is in Christ that all shall be made alive (verse 22) and it is in Christ that God demonstrates his authority because he has put all things in subjection to him as Christ stands in subjection to the authority of the Father (verses 27,28). Paul then ends this section with a clarion call of identity, "we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven!" So as we look more closely at the concluding verses of this section we will see why this should give us great confidence and assurance. We will discover that in the conflict of the ages, of good versus evil, we are identified with the victor, the warrior who defeats the ultimate of foes the death from sin as a rebellion from God's perfect law. Let us read the text for the morning and pray for wisdom in our minds to hear and openness in our hearts to obey and change. [Read I Corinthians 15:50-58]

## I. The Quest: Immortality vs. 50-54a

In Tolkien's tale, *The Hobbit*, a prelude or prequel to his magisterial *Lord of the Rings*, a story is told of a quest embarked upon by a dozen dwarves under the tutelage of the wizard Gandalf and the hobbit Bilbo Baggins. The story unfolds the treacherous journey for the noble cause of retrieving the dwarves' previously stolen treasure from the evil dragon Smaug in his lair. This is only the vehicle for telling the story of Bilbo and the finding of the "ring" but the concept of a "quest", a journey facing great obstacles to defeat a fantastic and seemingly insurmountable foe to achieve a noble end and great reward appears to be an allusion in Paul's presentation. Paul presents a wondrous quest, that of immortality as the challenge facing his readers.

*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality...*

The quest involves immortality and incorruptibility that allows one to enter the kingdom of God. It is a wondrous challenge, how can that which is created in a certain fashion, which is observed and known, cross to a region that is unknown and fraught with uncertainty and peril? Paul presents it as a non-negotiable. It must happen. The kingdom of God is inherited in a spiritual manner after a spiritual change. The apostle John would eventually tell of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus and his challenge that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" and "unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3,5). Paul is elaborating on Jesus words and informs us that the Spiritual birth that John records in the teaching of Jesus will eventually find its expression in change that is the most radical and glorious.

## II. The Enemy: Death vs. 54b-56

But as in all of the records of human-derived quests, there is a mortal enemy. In this case the enemy death.

*...then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*

In quotations from Isaiah 25 and from Hosea 13 Paul proclaims that the enemy in front of us is defeated. It may appear dark and foreboding. It may be accompanied by anxieties and pain and distress and turmoil. Its stronghold may look impenetrable. Its walls are high and thick. Its armies armed with the might of the masses. But it has been and will be defeated. But before we turn to Isaiah, why is death an enemy?

To answer that question we must turn to the beginning of our Bibles and read in the book of Genesis. Moses sets the stage of eternity by recording God's account of the plan of the world. In Genesis chapter 2 we find Adam and Eve in the garden entrusted to be his image by virtue of their calling and status of creation. But in chapter 3 it appears that evil prevails as they succumb to rebellion, no longer heeding the law of God to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest you die. Death is the result of rebellion to the law of God. Death is the enemy of life. They were given life and promised a

renewed life free from the encumberments of this curse. The remainder of the sacred text is to show us how God is working this out. And Paul is proclaiming that the great enemy is defeated only in the message and the power of the gospel.

Let us read the entire chapter 25 in Isaiah and here this encouragement.  
[read Isaiah 25]

Death will be swallowed up forever because of the work of the great warrior himself defeating and capturing his stronghold.

### III. The Victor: Christ vs. 57,58

And who is the victor? How is this victory accomplished? It is the Lord Jesus Christ! When you read and hear these words here them in the context of the first 11 verses, he died, was buried, rose and appeared according to the plan of the Scriptures. In that, he is the victor!

*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But is this warrior idea novel to Paul in his presentation of Christ? Of course not! Let us survey the Scriptures, highlighting this key concept. To begin with we can outline God's warrior activity chronologically in five stages. These can be described using the diagram you have on the slide. The first phase describes God fighting on behalf of Israel in conflict with its flesh and blood enemies. The second phase, somewhat overlapping the first finds God as the enemy fighting a rebellious Israel bringing judgment. The third phase presents God as a future deliverer which finds its first fulfillment in the earthly ministry of Jesus against the spiritual darkness of this world and culminates in the final victory at the end of the age.

This motif is exemplified in the song of Moses in Exodus 15. We read in the first six verses these words:

*Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name. "Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.*

An example of a passage that presents God as Israel's enemy is found in Lamentations chapter two:

*How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud! He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger. The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the habitations of Jacob; in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of*

*the daughter of Judah; he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers. He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; he has withdrawn from them his right hand in the face of the enemy; he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around. He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe; and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes in the tent of the daughter of Zion; he has poured out his fury like fire. The Lord has become like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel; he has swallowed up all its palaces; he has laid in ruins its strongholds, and he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.*

His future conquest is seen exemplified in Zechariah 14:1-4.

*Behold, a day is coming for the Lord, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.*

And our lives are affected by this fact we also have victory then in our quest because of who has gone before us to secure this victory. In verse 58 we are encouraged with:

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

Which leads us to our conclusion.

Conclusion:

1. Be confident!

The Lord has the victory, all of our struggles will find victory. Note that we have not asserted that God desires all of our problems and pain will find their end in this life, but we do proclaim that God wins when it matters. Our struggle and pain in this life is lesson building and purposeful, not an example of God's failing or our weakness.

2. Be steadfast, immovable!

We don't have to be wishy-washy in our living. We can be confident in the face of uncertainty to live according to God's ways and in his light.

3. Be working for the Lord!

Engage others in ministry in the life of the church. Are you working in an area of ministry here at the Chapel? We can help you find an area to serve.

4. Be dependent upon grace!

The gospel is a gospel of grace. It presupposes and highlights our weakness and demands that our strength be in what God is doing in and through us .

5. Be seeing the gospel as the organizing principle of your life...that will give the victory!