



Topic	Hope Beyond the Tomb
Reference	1 Corinthians 15:50-58
Date	21 April 2019
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The words in this passage represent an event, not in the past even though it is written in the past, but something that will happen one day and what we celebrate today is that the event that will surely come to pass. It is the hope beyond the tomb.

We have hope beyond the tomb because:

1. Immortality becomes a reality
2. The sting of death is removed
3. Your life begins to matter

### 1. Immortality Becomes a Reality

Now the first passage describes us that immortality, which means living forever. The quality of life that is distinctively different from what we have now becomes a reality.

1 Corinthians 15:50 (ESV) I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable

Here the problem of life is outlined. As we talk about the kingdom of God, we are talking about kingdom that extends forever and ever and the problem is that, with flesh and blood you can't inherit it. This body of ours is breaking down. It is an inevitable thing that we all face. It is perishable what we have. Isaiah describes it,

Isaiah 25:7 (ESV) And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

There is a veil covering the whole world and this veil is death and this morning in order to talk about resurrection, we actually have to talk about death because at some stage in life we all have asked our parents about the deceased people. Our parents give us some sort of story that will plicate us, but we have to face this. Young people don't face this. Young people take selfies while on the other hand old people take food photographs. That's the thing that confronts us and basically if you look back there was a Pulitzer prize winning book called, the Denial of Death



by Ernest Becker and this basically guided the thinking of the secular world over the last 30-40 years since he wrote this book. A passage from this tell us,

*This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self--expression--and with all this yet to die.*

That's why at some stage in life you wake up in the morning and you would ask your parents, why is uncle gone and will that happen to me, because of all the beautiful things you experience in this life, you savor and yet at one day you got to face the fact, it is going to go away and then why bother. So therefore we began to do all sorts of things in order to handle this terror without our hearts where we do all that.

There have been over 400 psychological studies done to look at this question and they have come out with this idea that there is a death bias. There is a bias to believe that we can live on forever regardless of the evidence. This bias actually shapes the courses of history. It shapes the behavior of men. It shapes what you do with your life and there are four commonalities scientists have found of this immortality stories that we tell ourselves. It is retold time and a time again and in culture. You can see that in almost all cultures. There are four stories which are common and the first one is basically we want to live longer or forever. We have to do something, so therefore today it is not global warming, it is plastic. So therefore we have to cleanup our plastic, make the world last longer. If not then some of us who are exploring world's beyond, we have a planet called Proxima Centauri B. If you get on the space shuttle and you want to travel there, it will take you 148800 years to get there.

Mark Twain actually quoted towards the end of his life, "life would be happier if we could be born at the age of 80 and gradually approach 18." We can use a lot of worldly things to make us look younger, but inside we are still aging. Aubrey De Grey started an institute where they are actually looking at prolonging life and he says, the main problem with dying is the fact that we are aging. We got to stop aging. The cure for aging is neither prevention nor medication, it is repair and he thinks basically it is the mitochondria which are the energy packets into our cells, they are wearing down all the time and because of the DNA damage inside this mitochondria. So therefore if you can repair this damage with chemicals we could live longer. If they can slow down the aging process, you could live to 120. In fact, they have done this in fruit flies with extension of life to 20% and mice 35%.

The other idea of immortality comes out again and again is the eternal soul. Somehow the Greeks recognized that the body is made of the body and then there



is a spiritual part of it. When you die, you can't avoid that but somehow your soul gets transported to the gods as it were and this idea has been repeated time and time again, in fact liberal churches actually believe that resurrection was actually spiritual rather than physical. We don't believe that and the idea has trickled down and you can see even in our generation we have got this idea of the brain and if you can download your brain into a computer, the essence of your voice can be stored and you press the button and you come to life again, but scientists have also found that you can't extract a person from its brain. The brain is an organic thing and if brain dies everything else dies with it. So that's the problem.

The third one immortality story that we tell ourselves, to comfort ourselves, to react against death is this idea of legacy. People have this idea, Ziona Chana in India married 34 women and he has got 94 children, 33 grandchildren and he will live forever in the lives and the legacy of his children, but as Woody Allen said, I don't want to live in my children, I want to live in my own apartment. So when you die, you die and your children are different from you.

The fourth immortality story that comes up time and time in society and in history is basically rebirth, which is a Hindu idea of resurrection. That somehow this life will come back again. Rebirth is as old as Buddhism and as old as Hinduism and the modern one is cryopreservation. Just before you die, we chop off your head and we freeze it. In a couple of hundred years from now we reanimate you with a bionic body with your head there and the voice is still there. So these immortality stories are facts.

400 studies have shown that time and time again, society has these stories, why, but scientist who are secular believe that these stories are cooked up, so that man can deal with the reality and awful issue of death. But I think that is a little bit biased because you have to face the facts. The facts are, if there are all these immortality stories, could it also be that they are not cooked up, so you can deal with the reality of death but it could also be that they are deeply embedded in our psyche because God has put it there. That's actually much more logical. You know, you look at the facts and face the facts itself. Let's go back to Ecclesiastes, the smartest man in the world at that time was Solomon and he writes,

**Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV) He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.**

There is eternity into man's heart that's why always looking forward. That's why there are immortality stories.



Ecclesiastes 3:14 (ESV) I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.

The fear of death is important. It is actually put into our hearts, so that we will turn to him. That's actually the purpose of life. So therefore the facts of immortality comes out. Paul in the earlier part of this chapter says,

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (ESV) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

If you go back there is solid proof. There are 500 people who have actually seen the risen Christ and then if you look at it, 75% of non-Christian scholars also believe that the tomb was empty. There is nobody in the tomb. The changed life of the disciples, these 500 plus people like Paul and James, people who are totally against Jesus, their whole life is completely changed. These are historical facts, which time and time secular people refuse to accept.

What is the process of immortality? Let's look at the process. It is a process which we will all face one day

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (ESV) Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 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 a lot of us we will probably be dead, but it is okay we will be raised and when we will be raised, we will be raised imperishable. We will not rot again. We will be different.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (ESV) So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

What Paul is trying to do is, people would say this is not logical when you die it means you die. Paul is saying, look at the seed. It is an analogy of the seed. During



World War II William Barkley writes of a church in England and they were having a harvest festival, thanking God for the harvest and they actually got up all the corn and lot of presents to go and celebrate and then just at that time the siren came on and the Nazi's came and bomb and the whole church was blown to bits, nothing was left behind. Few months later on, the corn that was blown up started to grow, up sheaves and sheaves of corn. The Nazi bombs could not destroy life. You know why, life is in the seed but the seed has to die. For the seed to die and then life comes and Paul is saying, look what is sown is a perishable body so that when you come up again, it will be life. You cannot stop life. Jesus said, you cannot stop life. What is sown looks terrible, it goes into ground but it will come up again and the pattern of this is Jesus. He says,

1 Corinthians 15:47-49 (ESV) The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Which means the first man is Adam, he is of the dust and as he dies so shall we, its natural. It follows that pattern. Just as we are born in Adam's image, Adam's mortality, Adam's weakness, Adam's pain and suffering, we will also bear the second man, Jesus. Just as he died and rose again, we made after the image of the second man will similarly rise.

1 Corinthians 15:53 (ESV) For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

That's how he declares, it is going to happen and that's what happens with the tomb when the stone was moved away, death was rolled away.

## 2. The Sting of Death is Removed

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 (ESV) When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law

These are powerful words but if you look at the world, you look at Steven Hawking's, he says, *I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.*



That's what he says, so therefore just as when you die your computer stops. Epicurus, a Greek philosopher writes similar sentiments and these things are actually coming back in the minds of the secular world, *"Death does not concern us, because as long as we exist, death is not here. And once it does come, we no longer exist."*

So according to him, it is not logical for you to worry about death. When the death comes you will not be there. Modern philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, *Death is not an event in life we do not live to experience death.*

So death is actually like a book. A book has front cover and back cover they say and where are you, you are in the pages in between. It is a big stupid because if you look at the order of life, God gives various orders of life. If you are a plant, when someone play the piano, they can't even hear it. If you are an animal you might and if human you would love it. There are different orders of life which are able to capture and understand the reality. The greater order of life is a greater encapsulation of reality. The chimpanzee will not worry about death. Death for them is like end of the book. They only exist within the covers of the book and what secular philosophers are saying that, we are like animals, which is totally unacceptable from a logical point of view.

So what's the big deal about death. The big deal about death is, it is like a scorpion with a sting. If death is just death, when you transition from one part of life to another, it is not a problem, I agree with you but the Bible says,

**1 Corinthians 15:56 (ESV) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law**

That's the problem, it is death. Why is it that when the baby is born all of us get excited, we bring presents. We go to the hospital and everybody is rejoicing, but when somebody dies we do the opposite. Because instinctively it is not the backend of a book, we all believe there is something else going on. In fact, there was a study done on mortality. 22 municipal judges in Tucson, Arizona. Half of them were controlled group and the other half was the experimental group. What they did was, we gave them questions that made half the judges think about death. That's all, just think about death. After that, then they set them in the court and they had to pronounce the bail for prostitutes caught in Tucson, Arizona and they found that the average bond or bail set by the controlled judges was \$50, but the ones who are reminded of death their bond is \$455. Why? Because if you are not reminded of death then you think death is nothing. So the reminders of death reinforce notions of morality. You don't just die, you have to face something after death. That's why death is terrifying. Because everything you have done in life, there is a price to pay. There is a judgement. That's why the sting of death is



sin. That's why Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare walks around saying, out damn spot, out I say. She murdered people and every time she washes her hand; she cannot wash the blood away because there is guilt and guilt of sin is a sting of death.

The law says, the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is actually ironically the law. The law is spiritual. You can't obey it entirely. There is no mercy under the law. There is no part of the law that tells you, give you chance, and every sin has a punishment. You can't even break the traffic rules of Kuala Lumpur. The law says every transgression has a punishment. So the law is like a wall and sin takes you and smashes you against the wall because you are trying to break the wall and the wall will break your head. You either smash against the wall, it will break your head or you try to climb the wall and the wall is so tall, you will never climb it and you will fall down, you die. That's what gives the power of sin is given by law of God.

In fact, the law is so powerful,

**Romans 7:8-9 (ESV) But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.**

So you have this nexus, law, sin and death. Death is terrifying because of sin and what gives terror, such force is the entire law of God that stands by. Jonathan Edwards says, all three are like three balls of steel and they are dragging you down further and further and further down into the abyss which is judgement, but thanks be to God who gives us victory through our lord Jesus Christ and here he is. This is the victory because why should mortality be swallowed up by immorality, because there is a prophesy by two prophets. One of them is Isaiah, the second one is Hosea. Isaiah prophesied 700 years before the coming of Christ and the first one it says

**Isaiah 25:7-8 (ESV) And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.**

The second one is, o death where is your victory, o death where is your sting. This is actually taken from Hosea who actually prophesied to the Northern Kingdom. Paul actually alters the words a little bit to suit his purposes,



Hosea 13:14 (ESV) I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

So 700 years before Christ comes, God already tells us he is going to pay a ransom. He is not just going to make the skin disappear, he is going to ransom and the ransom is the body of Christ. So therefore today the sting of death is sin, the power of sin is the law and what we actually have is a stingless death. Paul is actually standup and giving a taunt. Ernest Becker says, all of us are so terrified of death we hide here and there, all sorts of immortality stories, Paul's approach to death is different, he stands up to death and say, where is your victory, where is your sting. It is a taunt based on what Christ has done. That is what every Christian should standup today on Easter. That's the kind of victory that we sing about on Easter.

### **3. Your Life Beings to Matter**

58 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.

Therefore means because you are going to be immortal, because the sting is removed from death, your labor is not in vain, which means the whole idea is that death takes away meaning. Ernest Becker writes,

*The fear of death that humans experience, though, lies not so much in the death of the body but in the death of meaning, for it is meaning that defines the human self and society.*

Meaning in life is very-very important to human soul. We all drive meaning from our professions, from our families, from our projects. Our human spirit desires immortality, the desire for meaning which gives meaning to life. In fact, the goals in life make you more stressed out. If we look at Michael Phelps, in between winning the last Olympics, his coach told him,

*'Michael, you have all the money that anybody your age could ever want or need; you have a profound influence in the world; you have free time - and you're the most miserable person I know.'*" Bill Bowman

Why, because his meaning of life is to be focused on another Olympic gold medal and somehow somewhere the Olympic gold medals are going to stop one day. He has fixed his meaning on that. You can't avoid that. We will do whatever it takes to get meaning. Ernest Shackleton, world famous explorer about 100 years ago





and he sailed his ship to cross the Antarctica. Before he sailed he put on an advertisement

*"Men wanted: for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success. - Sir Ernest Shackleton"*

In fact the author writes, all of England lined up. People lined up because honor and recognition, because people are looking for some sort of meaning to their lives. Hugh Hefner at a height of a huge playboy empire. He has got a huge mansion and then towards the end of his life, he goes to bed at 9:30 at night, no girls next to him. He spends all his time reading the 2485 volumes of scrapbooks of him having sex with these women, him living a good life and all he can do at the final years is just look back at the scrapbooks. Because somehow no matter how successful you are, the only thing you have got is to look back at your scrapbook. You could be the most successful surgeon in the world, but when your eyes give way, your hands give way you look back.

Suicide rates have increased throughout the world. Because if you fix your meaning to something that will not last, when that something ends you will be like Hugh Hefner looking back and you've got no other reason to live. This is a study published in a general of American Medical Association psychiatry division in 2016 to look at nurses. There are about 89708 women who are basically nurses and they want to look at the suicide rates, because suicide rates among nurses are pretty high because they deal with horrible people called doctors. They look at those and they found that the most important factor that actually predicted or correlated with the suicide rate was attending a church service. If you attended church service or religious service, your suicide rate is five times lower, more important than:

- marital status,
- other group participation,
- number of close friends,
- number of close relatives,
- number of close friends seen at least once per month,
- number of close relatives seen at least once per month.

Nothing correlates compared to something that will last beyond your lives. So,

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



Whatever you do is going to count and sometimes there is a contradiction if you look in the scriptures. Sometimes Paul fears that his labor is in vain.

Galatians 4:10-11 (ESV) You observe days and months and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Philippians 2:16 (ESV) holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

1 Thessalonians 3:5 (ESV) For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Here we have an apparent contradiction, sometimes he is afraid that he labored in vain and in Corinthians it says, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain and the reason is because he is worried, the fruits of his labor in this life because when you actually minister in the church, it doesn't necessarily depend on you, you can share the gospel but the people can walk away, they have free will. They can decide. So therefore he is worried that even though he has worked so hard, they may walk away and his labor was in vain, but looking at this,

that in the Lord your labor is not in vain 1 Cor 5:58

it is in the context of eternity. Even if you serve in a church that had three people left in the end, it was the labor done for him, in him, by him, it will not be in vain. Johannes Vermeer lived in Netherlands and he was a painter but not a successful one. In fact, his wife always nag him because of financial problems. So besides his painting he had to be innkeeper, he had to do another job and he died because of financial pressure. His painting of "Young Woman Seated at the Virginal" sold at an auction of \$30 million in 2004, but he died poor.

Sometimes good work is only recognized when you die. This is a sad part. If you are working for something and you are not the best and you don't get the accolades and you don't have the self-esteem because people are too stupid to see how clever you are. Because therefore we are immortal, because the issue of sin is dealt with, your labor is not in vain brothers and sisters.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Workmanship is actually masterpiece. We are his masterpiece. We are like the best painting. God works on every aspect of our personality, every aspect of our



character, every work that you do. As a collective body, we reflect the kind of masterpiece, so we have to interact together to become the masterpiece which we as designers to be the masterpiece, so that when the world looks at us, we will encapsulate the body and beauty of Jesus Christ because not every single one of you, a single person cannot do that. We could only reflect that in the body.

We are created for God, so that the world will look at us and find salvation. You never know the kind of affect we are going to have. If you look at John Calvin, he is like one of two people responsible for all that is good in the reformation. If we look at USA's constitution

*We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (Thomas Jefferson)*

They got this idea from John Calvin. Calvin is the one who started this idea that men are created equal, men can read the Bible for themselves, men can decide their futures. Puritans are the ones who influenced Thomas Jefferson to writes this. Years later on the effect comes and in fact Calvin represents a perfect idea of what the meaning of life is. When he died, after all the accolades he had, he had very specific instructions, you burry me in an unmarked grave. Because the works that he has done is rewarded by our Lord Jesus Christ. He doesn't need you to recognize him 200 years later on. There is somebody who looks at you, every single thing that you do, to honor and glorify our lord Jesus Christ, our single bit, He will not let you go.

*There no longer is a stone that seals my hope within a grave. Each regret and fear that gripped my heart has all been rolled away. Like the rising of the morning sun, let rescued ones resound: "Hallelujah! The tomb is empty now!"*

I am going to pray a prayer that was Paul's prayer. He prays that the eyes of your heart be enlightened.

Ephesians 1:19-21 (ESV) and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

All the ammunition in the world can take away life, but cannot produce life. When God raised Jesus from the dead, the power is so immense. That same power is



released in the church of Jesus Christ. That same power is in us, that's why when Paul prays in Ephesians chapter 1 here, he prays that you actually see this power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now inside us. So therefore we stare death and say, where is your victory, where is your sting. The stone is rolled away. The message of Easter is that we live in total power and victory of Jesus Christ.