

# Lesson 6 | April 9, 2023

## Death Destroyed

**Study Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:1–57

**Central Truth:** Christ's resurrection guarantees victory over death for believers.

**Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:20**

Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept (KJV).

In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- Students will explain the tragic consequences of sin as well as the scriptural promise of victory through Christ.
- Students will rejoice that death is no longer to be feared when they are walking with Christ.
- Students will live each day in a way that reflects their victory in Christ.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Death is the final enemy of every person. It came as a consequence of the first sin in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned, they began the process of dying physically. But death also has a spiritual aspect, and that is far more serious. Beginning with Adam and Eve, every person has a broken relationship with God.

However, the way has been made for our redemption. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated death and made the way for fellowship with God to be restored. In 1 Corinthians 15, we find the theme of victory a number of times. Our celebration of Easter is all about victory—victory over death and eternal victory in heaven made possible through Jesus Christ.

### Opening Activity—Easter Symbols

*Ask. What objects or practices symbolize Resurrection Sunday to you? Why?*

**Say:** For the world, Easter is no more than another Sunday—or perhaps an opportunity for a family dinner, egg hunt, or new clothing. For the believer, it is much more. It is the celebration of Christ's resurrection, which is the foundation of the Christian faith (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Through His resurrection, Jesus proved the truth of His claims during His ministry. Skeptics have tried to deny the Resurrection, but all their attempts have been unsuccessful. This one event is the crux of the Christian faith. Without it our faith would be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14).

# Part 1—Christ’s Victory over Death

## Christ Rose from the Grave

1 Corinthians 15:20–23

**Say:** The simple statement that Christ rose from the grave is the basis of our faith and a source of assurance that we, too, will rise from the grave. When we are facing our own mortality or when we face the loss of someone dear to us, we can have hope that death is not the end of life. For the believer, it is the beginning of an even more glorious life that will never end. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the verses preceding 1 Corinthians 15:20–23, Paul confronted those in Corinth who taught or believed there is no resurrection of the physical body as part of a wider belief that while the soul lives forever, the body dies permanently. This belief could do great damage in the church because it undermined the concept of the bodily resurrection of Christ. It is against this backdrop that Paul began his teaching in verse 20.

There will be a resurrection of every believer from the dead, a fact firmly anchored in Christ’s resurrection (verse 20). In verses 21 and 22, Paul used an analogy between Adam and Jesus to further explain the significance of Christ’s resurrection. Because of one man’s sin, all humanity would experience death. Conversely, because of one Man’s obedience, those who have been spiritually reborn will experience resurrection to eternal life.

In this way, Paul made two points. First, death is inevitable for all; it is the consequence of human sinfulness. Second, Christ’s resurrection ensures the resurrection of everyone who accepts Him. Adam’s disobedience brought the curse of death upon humanity, but Jesus reversed it through His obedience to the Father in going to the cross to die.

Christ’s resurrection offers a secure, unshakable hope to every Christian. When we sorrow over the sting of death or fear our own mortality, we can look back to what Christ did for us through His death and resurrection and look forward to what He will do for us in the future, when we will be raised to eternal life. Through Christ, we can live in the assurance that eternal life is ours through faith in Christ (verse 23).

The resurrection of Jesus was only the beginning. He was the “firstfruits” (verse 23, KJV; “first of the harvest,” NLT), but we who belong to Him will be resurrected when He returns. His resurrection is the basis for our hope of eternal life.

### **Discuss**

? In what way does belief in Christ’s resurrection give us hope for the future?

? How should we respond when we experience the fear of death, whether in our own lives or the lives of those we love?

# Christ Reigns

1 Corinthians 15:24–26

**Say:** Christ conquered death on that first Easter morning when He victoriously arose. Although we still experience physical death as part of living in this sinful world, the time is coming when He will completely destroy death. Paul’s words were confirmed by John’s vision in Revelation 20:14: “Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death” (NLT). You may have heard people say, “I’ve read the end of the book, and we win.” Indeed we do, because Christ reigns in victory. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The reign of Christ will result in the ultimate destruction of death, His final enemy, at the end of the age. Paul does not state a time frame in this passage, though it speaks to the events after the millennial reign of Christ. Paul’s primary point was to demonstrate the ultimate destruction of death. There is a time coming, the end of time itself, when Christ will fully abolish all enemies and deliver the Kingdom to the Father. The Father has declared it so, thus there is no shadow of doubt that it will happen (1 Corinthians 15:24).

In the end, Christ will vanquish all enemies. This speaks to the authority, power, and sovereignty of the God we serve. His reign is eternal. Even death, the ultimate enemy of the human race, will one day be defeated (verse 26). This stands in stark contrast to the false teaching referenced in verse 12 that there will be no resurrection. In reality, there will be no death because the risen Christ has defeated it.

Jesus Christ has assured the resurrection of all who believe in Him. Death no longer has power over us. While the pain and grief of death is very real, we find comfort in the hope of Christ.

We might ask ourselves, “How is my life impacted today by Christ’s victory over death and the hope of eternal life in the future?” Such hope does not make our daily challenges disappear. Rather, it points us in the right direction—toward Christ—in finding help for today and hope for tomorrow.

## Resource Packet Item 1: Resurrection Hope

Distribute the case study, read the scenario as a class, and answer the questions. Then give students an opportunity to tell when they have observed resurrection hope in their own lives or the lives of others.

### *Discuss*

? Why is death the last enemy to be defeated?

? In what sense do Christians experience victory over death?

## Part 2—Sharing in Christ’s Victory

## Resurrection Illustrated

1 Corinthians 15:35–41

**Say:** Just as Jesus used parables to illustrate Kingdom truths, Paul used familiar objects to illustrate his message. The Corinthians were being influenced by the Greek philosophy being taught in their culture, and Paul needed to counteract that teaching so they could understand the truth about Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After establishing the truth of Christ's resurrection, Paul refuted the questions posed by those with a wrong understanding of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:35; see verse 12). Greek philosophy included a belief that while the soul, or mind, was immortal and good, the body was evil and would eventually decay. (This teaching led to a belief that it did not matter what a person did with his or her body because physical behavior did not corrupt the mind or soul.)

This philosophy had a negative impact on the Corinthian Christians, causing some to not believe in a physical resurrection since the body was considered evil. Paul had to challenge their thinking; the resurrection of Christ was physical, not spiritual, as some of them believed.

In verse 36, Paul bluntly referred to the denial of the Resurrection as foolishness. His words might remind us of the Old Testament definition of a fool: one who believes there is no God (see Psalm 14:1). Paul used the example of a seed to show that life comes out of death. A seed that is planted in the ground decays, or dies, but will eventually sprout up into a plant more beautiful than the seed (1 Corinthians 15:37). So will it be with the resurrection of the saints.

This resurrection of Christians will include a God-given body (verse 38), which Paul again illustrated through nature. In the physical world, God has given beings different bodies: humans, animals, fish, and birds (verse 39). Likewise, heavenly bodies are also different (verses 40–41). Paul's point is this: Our Almighty God can take physical matter and form it however He likes, according to whatever purpose He gives. How foolish to deny that God can raise a body from the dead!

### **Discuss**

? What false belief regarding resurrection from the dead did some Corinthian believers hold, and why?

? Why is it critical for Christians to believe in a bodily resurrection? How would not believing this affect the way we see Christ, His ministry, and His redemptive work on the cross?

## Resurrection Explained

1 Corinthians 15:42–49

**Say:** Paul used the next few verses to explain the example he had just given. Death of our physical body is natural because it came from the dust of the earth, but in the end, believers will be raised to have a new immortal body fashioned after the resurrected body of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, Paul explained the nature of the resurrected body. Believers' future bodies will be different from our present, physical bodies. Earthly bodies decay. Lacking honor and bearing the consequences of sin (death), they were even regarded as unclean in the Old Testament. But they will be raised as glorified. Physical bodies are weak, frail, and dying, but our new bodies will live forever in resurrection power. Finally, physical bodies are natural, made of the material of this world, but our glorified, risen bodies will be suitable for the world to come.

This great contrast is seen in Adam and Christ (verses 45–49). They represent the physical and spiritual orders. Adam represents the earthly being, which is sin-stricken and bound to this corrupt earth. Christ represents the heavenly being, which is eternal and incorruptible. The first man was made of the dust of the ground; the second is of heaven. The natural body will return to the dust. But those who have been born again, even though their natural body will return to dust, will be raised to incorruption.

In eternity, all who have believed in Christ will be heavenly, celestial, and immortal. They will have incorruptible, spiritual bodies. On earth we have borne the corrupt state of the earthly man, Adam. In heaven we will bear the state of the resurrected Savior (see also 1 John 3:2).

Because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), we should honor God with them. Even our corruptible bodies can bring glory to the Lord rather than reflecting the corrupted nature of this present world.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Earthly Body vs. Resurrected Body**

Distribute the worksheet, and discuss how our hope of a new body can give us joy.

#### ***Discuss***

? According to Scripture, how would you describe what the Christian's eternal state will be in contrast to our present state of being?

? How might our resurrected bodies be similar to our physical bodies, and how might they be different?

## **Part 3—Triumphant through Christ's Victory From Mortality to Immortality**

1 Corinthians 15:50–54

**Say:** When Christ returns, we will be instantly changed from mortality to immortality—either by the resurrection of our bodies or by being “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17, NLT). The bodies we live in now are not suitable for eternity, but we shall receive new bodies and live forever with Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul begins the conclusion of his argument in support of the resurrection of the dead with an important point: A corruptible physical body cannot inherit God’s kingdom. It is unsuitable for eternity and must be changed.

Such a change will indeed take place, but not while we live in this corruptible world. When and how will this transformation happen? This is a mystery known only to God, and we can understand it only to the degree God reveals it to us in Scripture. The event we know as the rapture of the Church will take place in the briefest of moments (verse 52; see 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17). The Greek term translated “moment” refers to a fragment of time so short it cannot be divided any further—the blink of an eye. In that moment each saint’s body will be transformed. All earthly corruption will disappear as the mortal becomes immortal (verses 53–54). The victory of eternal life replaces the defeat of death.

### **Resource Packet Item 3: The Rapture**

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its content. Note that while Scripture does not use the term Rapture, this transformational event is clearly described in a number of passages.

#### ***Discuss***

? What will our resurrected bodies be like?

? How can the knowledge of the resurrection at the moment of the Rapture motivate and encourage us today?

## **Victorious over Death**

1 Corinthians 15:55–57

**Say:** Because of the resurrection victory of Christ, we too can look forward to victory over death. Our sorrow over the death of a loved one who is a believer can be tempered by the joy that we will see that person again in eternity. The separation we feel is only temporary. Referring to Isaiah 25:8, Paul writes, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Death lost its power with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and with the coming resurrection of the saints, death will finally be destroyed. Paul exulted in this reality with his declaration in 1 Corinthians 15:55. We also can declare that death no longer threatens us. It will do no harm. It is defeated. Even though death still occurs, its sting has been removed and replaced with eternal hope.

The sting of death is the consequence of sin (verse 56), which through the Law exposes our ungodliness, our fallen state, and our filthiness before God. But Jesus dealt with sin once and for all through His sacrificial death on the cross.

Finally, Paul expressed profound gratitude to God, who provided our great spiritual victory through Jesus Christ (verse 57). While this victory will be enjoyed forever in our resurrected state, it also encompasses the gracious gifts we receive from God every day. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, we can find victory over sin, victory in spiritual battles, and victory that carries us through life's challenges. And it all has been made possible through the glorious sacrifice and resurrection of our Savior.

Christ's victory over death and sin is accessible to all who believe in Him. The hope found in the Resurrection helps believers now and in the future. In the present, we have victory over sin's bondage. In the future, our victory takes the form of incorruptible bodies. Our hope of resurrection can have a powerful impact on how we live. We know our future is in God's hands—a future that is marvelous beyond description.

### ***Discuss***

? In what sense has death lost its sting?

? In what ways have you experienced victory through Christ?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** As we look forward to eternity, we should live each day in the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11). In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul instructed his readers to “be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless” (NLT).

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Take time to speak a message of hope to someone this week.
- As new life comes to the earth this spring, focus on the new life offered in Christ.
- Pray for someone you know who does not know Jesus.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

Hope of Resurrection.

Job 19:23–27

Tuesday:

Resurrection Foretold.

Psalms 16:8–11

Wednesday:

Order of Resurrection.

John 5:24–29

Thursday:

Promise of Resurrection.

John 11:23–26

Friday:

Resurrection of Believers.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Saturday:

Resurrection of the Dead.

Revelation 20:4–6,11–15