

## VICTORY 1 Corinthians 15

Think back to a victory celebration that you were part of:

- Maybe it was when your little league team beat your cross-town rivals.
- Maybe it was a team you were on in school, or a team your kid was on.
- Maybe it was with a bunch of friends watching the World Series or the Super Bowl—or maybe it was last night as you were watching Duke beat Michigan State in the Final Four!
- Maybe it was when you won a chess tournament or a dance competition or a science fair. Or a spelling bee – You’ll be excited to know that you are looking at the Stanly County Spelling Bee Champion of 1976!

Think back to a victory celebration that you were part of. Remember how it felt – what you did to celebrate. And then think about this: Today is the most important victory celebration ever in the universe!

Because Christ is risen!  
**Christ is risen indeed!**

**LET’S PRAY:** *God, this morning we’re all in different places:*

- *Some of us are suffering*
- *Some of us are doubting*
- *Some of us are weary*
- *Some of us are depressed*
- *Some of us are just plain bored*

*God, thanks for understanding that. Thanks for meeting us where we are.*

*Please speak to us. And I pray that before this service is over, everyone in this room would get at least a taste of victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.*

**It’s one of the most iconic photographs of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**



**And it was part of a victory celebration.**

August 14, 1945 –VJ Day! The end of World War 2.

All across America, people took to the streets:

- The war was over!
- The enemy was defeated!
- Prisoners were being released!
- Soldiers were coming home!
- All those years of sacrifice and pain were over!
- And this country was united in a celebration of victory!

**June Rogers** told me they were dancing in the streets down in Bennettsville, South Carolina.

**My mother** said she heard the cars honking their horns, went out on front porch and saw people running up and down the streets shouting

**My Dad**, against his father's wishes, jumped on the trolley and went downtown – people were running everywhere, screaming and shouting. Dad's brother Charles said, "Jack, don't get in anybody's car" – so my dad hopped on somebody's running board and rode around *on the outside* of the car.

The victory celebrations at the end of WW2 were awesome, but they pale in comparison to the victory we're celebrating today. All over the world, Christians are coming together to shout:

Christ is risen!

**Christ is risen indeed!**

**Please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 15.** 1 Corinthians 15 is a l-o-o-ong chapter, and Paul's dealing with a specific problem in the Corinthian church. But in the course of his argument he says **three crucial things** about the resurrection of Jesus and what it means to us, here, now, today. **Because of Easter, we have three kinds of victory**

**#1 – Victory over SIN – Verse 17:**

*<sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

Paul says there's a connection between Jesus being alive and your sins being forgiven. And if you'll work with me, I'll try to explain this with an illustration.

Suppose you are caught speeding. The cop writes you a ticket, and now you owe a fine (let's say it's \$100). The penalty for what you did is \$100. It has to be paid. It's the law. So you go down to the courthouse to pay your fine. But suppose a friend of yours shows up and says, "Hey, I've got \$100 in my pocket. Let me pay that fine for you!" Would you let your friend do it? Would you accept this free gift?

Well, you *have* been caught sinning (we all have.) The penalty for what you did is death. It has to be paid. It's the law.

But your friend Jesus has showed up to pay the penalty *for* you! He lived a perfect life, without sin – and then he offered *his* life as **payment** for the sins of all who would trust him completely.

Now, what does resurrection have to do with that? Here it is:

*The resurrection is the receipt that shows that the fine has been paid!*

We know Jesus defeated sin because he defeated sin's penalty.

**\* *Because He Lives, we have Victory over SIN.***

## **#2 – Victory over DEATH:**

I remember the first funeral I ever did. I was so nervous I cut myself shaving three times. But the funeral was for a pillar of the church named Lillie Mae Lemmond – and I knew she was a believer in Christ. I'll never forget when we went out to the grave, and I looked down into that gaping hole. The casket holding Lillie Mae's body was suspended over that hole. I could smell the scent of fresh earth coming up out of the grave. I looked into the eyes of the family.

And the most powerful feeling washed over me as I stood beside that grave and I read these words from the United Methodist funeral liturgy:

*<sup>51</sup> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> 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 will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:*

*"Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

<sup>55</sup> *"Where, O death, is your victory?*

*Where, O death, is your sting?"*

*<sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*

## JESUS HAS DEFEATED DEATH!

Think about somebody you love who has passed away. I know it hurts. It hurts to lose someone. It hurts to say goodbye. But hear me: Even though death hurts us, in the end it cannot destroy us! You can stand beside the grave of a loved one, or you can lie down on your own deathbed and you can look death right in the face and say,

*Where, O death is your victory?*

*Where, O death is your sting?*

*Thanks be to God who gives **ME** the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

**\* Because He Lives, we have Victory over DEATH.**

## **And then finally, #3 -- Victory over DESPAIR**

*<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

These are words of HOPE! Paul's saying, "Don't give up! Don't give in! Keep going, because there's hope!"

Now, let me explain that word *hope*. Usually we use that word to mean a wish that we have, but are not sure will come true. For example: "I hope it doesn't rain ... I hope Duke beats Kentucky ... I hope my mother-in-law doesn't stay all day."

But that's not Christian hope! Harper's Bible Dictionary defines hope as "the expectation of a favorable future under God's direction." It's the belief that what we see is not all there is. It's the confidence that better things are on the horizon.

Now as some of you know all too well, life is hard. And some of you are wondering, "Why does God allow such horrible stuff to happen?"

- On Thursday there was a massacre at a Kenyan university – 147 people were killed. Why?
- Last month a jetliner crashed in the French Alps, killing 150 people. Why?
- Recently a pastor friend of mine lost her husband to cancer. He was 48 years old and he leaves behind two children. Why?

- Yesterday, Pastor Rick and I did a funeral for a man who was early 50s, just like us. He leaves behind a wife and two kids. Why?
- Why does God allow earthquakes?
- Why does God allow hurricanes?
- Why does God let babies die?
- Why did God let those 21 Coptic Christians get kidnapped and beheaded by ISIS?

When we deal with situations like these—especially when they’re happening to us—we want to know WHY. And the older I get, the more my answer becomes, “I don’t know.”

But ask me another question. Ask me, “*Is there any HOPE?*”

- As we stand beside the bed of a person who’s dying: *Is there any hope?*
- As we talk to parents who have lost their child: *Is there any hope?*
- As we reach out to the victims of earthquakes and floods: *Is there any hope?*

The answer to that question is a resounding YES. Because of the resurrection, we know that somehow, some way, someday, God is going to have the last word.

And this hope is not positive thinking, or naïve optimism, or Pollyanna syndrome. This is confidence based on the historical fact that a man named burst free from a sealed tomb. He’s defeated sin, he’s defeated death, and eventually he will defeat evil in every form.

My Dad used to say, “Son, when your mother and I argue, I always have the last word. And the last word is, ‘Yes, Dear.’”

You know who has the last word in the universe? GOD. Somehow, some way, someday, God is going to set things right.

But in the meantime: Don’t give up. Don’t give in. Keep going, because there’s hope.

***\* Because He Lives, we have Victory over DESPAIR.***

Today is the greatest victory celebration of all time! We have victory over sin. We have victory over death. We have victory over despair.

And all because Christ is risen! **Christ is risen, indeed!**