

## LIVING VICTORIOUSLY

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Good afternoon, brothers and sisters and friends! God is good, all the time!

Today I want to talk about how we can live a victorious life. How we can overcome all the odds, all the problems, all the heartaches that life throws at us. That's why I've entitled this message, "Living Victoriously".

It is not easy to live in the world we live in right now, right? We can easily get discouraged – inflation, mass shootings, earthquakes, sickness, wars, bullying, job insecurity, political instability, liberal teachings, marriage problems, and the list goes on. I know we're in the mood for celebration right now but after all the fun and festivities, and we go back home and settle down in the quiet of our rooms, the harsh reality of life will hit us.

This is a hard experience on a personal level, but a church likewise could go through a season of difficulty and discouragement as well. Many churches in the US, in fact, have shut down recently due to the pandemic. I spoke to one pastor who said they voted to close down the church because people didn't want to come back anymore after they re-opened. But even before the pandemic, according to theguardian.com, about 4,500 Protestant churches closed in 2019. They don't have data available after that but it's not hard to imagine how much worse it was during the past three years.

Well, we should not feel dismayed, however, because we serve a God, the Lord Jesus, who said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church. The fact that Fil-Am Church is still standing today is a testament to God's faithfulness, Amen?

But times of hardship will come. It will test us and the church. It will make us want to give up. How do we not give up? How do we live victoriously? What can we do so that we can continue on living in victory for Jesus?

Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15 and we're going to read from verse 50 through 58. Please follow along as I read or just listen carefully.

In this passage, I want you to look again at verse 57. What does it say? It says "He gives us the victory"! That's an assurance, a blessed assurance, a firm assurance that we are already victorious. No doubt about it. God promises it. And his promises never fail. Say to the person

next to you, “His promises never fail”. Your spouse may fail you, your children may fail you, the government may fail you, your diet may fail you, your teacher may fail you, your car may fail you, but God will never, never fail you. The Bible says, “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.” (1 Cor. 1:9)

Now, this victory is anchored upon God’s own Son Jesus. It says, “through our Lord Jesus Christ”. And we’ll see why he said that in the previous verses. But note first that, actually, the victory that Paul is talking about here is the victory over sin and death.

You see, Paul was writing to the Corinthians, a church which, we would say, is largely dysfunctional. Corinth was the commercial capital of the Greek state of Achaia. It was rich but also immoral. Paul visited this city and won a number of converts during his 18-month stay there and these converts became the nucleus of the church. So, he left and after 3 years of being away, Paul received urgent information that the church was experiencing deep turmoil. There were factions, immorality, contentions, and false teachings. It seems they were going back to their old ways of being immoral Corinthians. Paul, being the spiritual father of this church, naturally wanted all this to stop and so he wrote them a letter, two letters in fact. He realized that they needed to go back to the basics and that’s why he talked about the gospel which is in the first part of 1 Corinthians 15. Then, he goes on to defend the resurrection of Jesus. He tells them that their faith is useless if Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead.

You see, many of these Corinthian Christians apparently were doubting their faith because they were doubting the resurrection of Jesus. They were losing hope. Paul recognized what was happening. He knew that the Kingdom of Satan, through false teachings, was starting to take over the church. But he knew that the Kingdom of God was much more powerful and he had to convey this message to the Corinthians. And so, he gave a lengthy defense of the resurrection of Jesus. Then, in verse 50 and following, he let them know that the Kingdom of God or Heaven is waiting for them. He let them know that they will be changed, their mortal bodies will become immortal. It was not impossible because it was God who would make it happen. It would happen for sure because Jesus has resurrected and has an immortal and glorified body. He has conquered sin and death forever with his resurrection. Thus, all Christians have the same victory over sin and death. In Romans, Paul says, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

Then, in verse 58, Paul encourages them how to make this victory a reality in everyday life. He gets practical here. He knows that although their final destination is heaven, they must be prepared for the bumps and humps in the journey of life on earth.

So, let's break it down. Let's see how we can live victoriously while still here on earth.

Please read this verse with me.

“Therefore, my dear 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.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

How do you live victoriously?

### **I. Stay Put.**

Paul says, “Stand firm. Let nothing move you.” Other versions of the Bible say, “Be steadfast. Immovable”. “Be steadfast. Unshakable”. In other words, “Be firmly established. Do not be moved” from where you are in the faith.

Paul, in Colossians 1:23, uses these same words. “But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”

You see, the Colossian Christians were people who were being moved from the hope that we have in Jesus in one major way. If we're not careful, it will move us away from our faith as well. I'm talking about being moved from the gospel by a different gospel. A gospel that is not based on orthodox Christian beliefs.

You see, there are, right now, some religious organizations who call themselves “Christians” but actually are not. They think they are Christians and has even the word “Christian” in their church names but they are deceived and are deceiving people.

Years ago, I encountered a guy in a train and he said he was a Christian, he belonged to the Boston Church of Christ, and we exchanged our stories and all that. Until we came to the subject of salvation and I realized that he had a different understanding of Scripture. I then sensed he was trying to convert me to his way of thinking. Basically, the Boston Church of Christ believes that apart from receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior, one must also be baptized by immersion to be saved. This, of course, is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible says that we are saved only by the grace of God through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross,

nothing more, nothing less. I found out that they have branches all across America and they are distinguished by appending the name of the city where they are located like Philadelphia Church of Christ, Los Angeles Church of Christ and the like. As a whole, they come under the umbrella of an organization called “International Church of Christ”. This organization is actually considered a cult by many evangelicals because of some of their aberrant beliefs and ungodly practices.

Paul was so zealous in protecting the truth that he warned the Galatians, *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!”* (Gal. 1:8 NIV)

Another thing that can move us away from the hope we have in Jesus is our lustful passions. In this same book but in an earlier chapter, Paul talks about being careful that we don’t fall. He says in 1 Cor. 10:12, *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”* He is referring to falling into temptation. Prior to this, he was talking about the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality that the Israelites have committed while wandering in the desert.

You know, Christians are always under attack. The enemy, Satan, would like to see us fall. For we become ineffective when we fall. Our testimony suffers and we can even be a disgrace to our Lord. We hear of some high-profile evangelical leaders who have succumbed to the temptations of the flesh and money. Paul is saying, “Be careful. Be steadfast. Be immovable. Don’t be swayed.”

Peter tells us the same thing in his first letter. He says, *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”* (1 Peter 5:8-9)

You see, our character and faithfulness to the Lord is measured by our reaction to temptation. I read the story about how Cecil B. DeMille, the producer of great movies based on the Bible like The Ten Commandments and Samson and Delilah gave Billy Graham a blank contract to star in his Bible movies. Billy put the blank contract in a frame in his home. He did not take the offer. He said, “I have a much greater purpose.” Billy was not moved by this temptation. He could have been a star but he gave it all up for his faith.

But there are times when you will feel alone. Like you’re fighting the enemy alone. You’re not. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are just a phone call away or a text away.

I'm sure they will rush to your aid if you feel like falling down or giving in or giving up. They will help you to be steadfast and continue to fight.

Stay put. That's how you live victoriously. Next is

## **II. Serve Well.**

Paul says, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord." The phrase "Always give yourselves fully" is to "overflow continuously" in the work of the Lord. It's like a river that continuously flows, that is never-ending. It's a difficult command, isn't it! It's like when Jesus commands, "Be perfect!" I mean, don't we get a vacation or a break from doing the work of the Lord? And can't we just do a good deed here and there and get by? Yes, we can take a break every now and then. Otherwise, we will suffer burn-out. The point Paul is making is that a follower of Jesus should not stop doing ministry. He or she should not give up.

Don't you think that it is odd that Paul writes this command and this verse to the Corinthians, of all people? I mean, I could understand if he were writing to a pastor, or church leader. But he writes to the Corinthians these words. You see, in this long letter, he had laid out what type of people the Corinthians were, and the issues in the Corinthian church. There were fights and divisions and tensions in their midst. There is a man in the church who had been sleeping with his father's wife. There was drunkenness. The Corinthians were even abusing the Lord's Supper with gluttony, drunkenness and even greed. Their worship services were out of control with abuses of spiritual gifts.

It is to these people, regular, sinful people like you and me, that Paul writes, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord". That means he still believes in the Corinthians. He loves them and he knows that they are precious in the sight of God despite their misdeeds. That should encourage us. Though we may have made mistakes God has not given up on us. He will never give up on you. The Bible says is **Lamentations 3:22-23, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."**

Now, we are tempted to believe that "the work of the Lord" is reserved for pastors and preachers and teachers. But even if we look at chapter 16 of Corinthians, we see a list of people doing the work of the Lord. Timothy, Apollos, Stephanas and his family, and Fortunatus and Achaius, and Prisca and Aquila. Some of them are not leaders in the church. The work of the Lord is for us all!

Listen to these words from Peter, “Each of you (and he was talking not only to leaders in the church) should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10)

As you work for the Lord, I know it can be discouraging. You may feel tired, you may not get appreciated, or you may not get enough help. Remember, however, that Jesus himself, your master, experienced the same thing.

In our service to the Lord, there are two things I want all of us to understand. First, we do not need public recognition for the things that we do for the Lord. We are not serving the Lord so that we might have the praise of men. No, you might not have the fame and the glory serving the Lord that you would anywhere else, but the benefits are out of this world. We do not need recognition.

Some things we do might be obvious to all people, but some things may never be seen by anybody. There are many people who will never know the things that are done by people. Nobody will ever know how much time your treasurer has spent handling the church finances. Nobody will ever know how many hours others have spent practicing your worship songs. Nobody will ever know the late hours people have spent on the phone trying to talk to people about the Lord. No one will ever know the generous giving of some people in the church.

Today, if you are discouraged because people do not know what all you do, you are in the wrong place. We do not seek praise from men. Recognition from men means nothing in the long run. I think it is important to give honor where honor is due and to recognize the servants that we have among us at times, but a lifetime may go by and no one will ever know the things you did. That does not mean that you are not valued or important to the Lord.

Which brings me to the second thing, God sees all we do. We must realize that God sees all that we do for him, whether it’s little or much. I want to encourage you that though nobody may ever give you recognition here, God sees your faithfulness. God sees and knows how much money, and energy and hours you sacrifice. God sees all that you do, and you can be encouraged to know that you will be repaid and rewarded for what you have done. We do not need to seek praise from men, but we store up treasures in Heaven.

Which brings us to another point in this message. As you follow the Lord in the midst of your struggles and difficulties, you can live victoriously. How? You just

**III. Say “Amen”!**

Why? “Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”. Can you say “Amen” to that? Amen is a Hebrew word. It is one of those words that is adopted universally by major languages in the world like English, German, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, and, even Filipino. Amen is derived from the root “Aman” which means to be firm or solid in the sense of permanency or faithfulness. It connotes stability, firmness, or certainty. Every time we say “amen” we are really saying, "It is certain" or "Yes, it is absolutely true."

And so, we know with absolute certainty that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Our labor is not worthless. It counts. Labor means hard, painful work. That’s why women who are giving birth, we say that they’re going through labor. It’s not easy to deliver a baby, right? It’s hard and painful. My wife went through labor, not once, not twice, but thrice. But she’ll tell you with absolute certainty, it was not in vain. Now, we’ve got three beautiful and talented children who look like their mom but can dance like their dad.

Anyway, if you choose to follow Christ, many times it will feel like hard work. There are temptations to avoid, there are ministries to do, there’s the tithe to give, there are people to be patient with, there are Bible studies to conduct and so on and so forth.

I read the story of a man who woke up grudgingly one Sunday morning. He went downstairs to get coffee and at the foot of the stairs he stopped because he noticed his wife was all dressed up and ready to go. His wife said, “Honey, you better hurry and get dressed. It’s Sunday, we need to go to church.” The man said, “I don’t feel like going to church today. I feel lousy.” “No, don’t feel that way. You must go.” “I’m really not in the mood to go”. “But you must go,” his wife insisted. He said, “Give me one reason why I should go.” And the wife said, “You’re the pastor”.

Truth to tell, sometimes that’s how I feel. But you know what? You know why I keep going? Because I know that my labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Yes, it is hard work, folks. But just keep at it. Don’t give up. Don’t throw in the towel. God has given you a task and he wants you to complete it. Because he wants to be glorified through you. In fact, you may even feel inadequate. But that’s why he chose you. He wants to be glorified through you. As the old saying goes, “God is not looking at your ability but at your availability.” He is looking for RWA people. Ready, Willing, and Able. Moses, David, Abraham, Samson, Peter, Paul and Mary. What do they have in common? They were all ordinary and sinful and felt inadequate. But God used each of them for his glory.

Are you available to do his work? Remember, your labor, your hard work is *not* worthless because the Lord Jesus Christ is your sustainer and rewarder. God will never lead you where his grace cannot keep you.

Now, you will notice that Paul speaks about a lot of things being futile, or useless, or in vain, in this chapter. He reminds the Corinthians in verse 2 that, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” Then in verse 14, Paul says that “*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*” And then in verse 17, he says, “*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.*” And then Paul gives a big, “But” in verse 20, “*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” In other words, my preaching and your faith is worthless if Jesus Christ is dead. BUT He lives! And because Jesus Christ lives, our faith is full of great value. Because He lives, He brings us life, and life abundant. Because He lives, when He returns to raise us up to glory, we will be changed, transformed, given new incorruptible bodies that will see no more pain, or sicknesses, or death, or be subject to our sinful passions. Because He lives, our work in the Lord brings the savor of the knowledge of Christ to every place. Because He lives, our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

I want to close with a story. Some of you might be familiar with Christian singers and song-writers **Bill and Gloria Gaither.**

Bill and Gloria Gaither were trying to be steadfast and immovable, and they saw their music as a work of the Lord. But in the late 1960s, they ran into some difficulties which threatened to discourage them from this very work.

You see, Bill Gaither had gotten sick; his wife had just had a child four months previous and they learned that she was once again pregnant. Bill’s sister was in the middle of a divorce which was a major family crisis and devastated the family. And perhaps to top things off, one of their close friends accused them of using their “work of the Lord” in order to make money. As a result, Bill got very depressed. Maybe he should just give up, he thought.

But, in the midst of these trials, another close friend came to them and prayed over them. And as he prayed, both Bill and Gloria sensed the Holy Spirit come upon them and reassure them. And out of these trials, and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they wrote a most wonderful song with these words:



Because he lives

I can face tomorrow

Because he lives

All fear is gone

Because I know

He holds the future

And life is worth the living

Just because he lives

There will be times when you will get discouraged. You will at times be wondering if staying with the faith in obedience is worth it.

There will be times when you wonder if your life of sin was more pleasant than your life of righteousness. You will at times wonder if the good works that you do are worth it, or if you should just give up. But folks, as Paul says, “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.” I like this version, God’s Word Translation, which says, “*So then brothers and sisters, don’t let anyone move you off the foundation of your faith. Always excel in the work you do for the Lord. You know that the hard work you do for the Lord is not pointless.*” (GWT)