



Bethany Bible Church; January 26, 2020  
1 Corinthians 15:50-57

## **BEHOLD, I TELL YOU A MYSTERY**

Theme: We who are in Christ will not all 'sleep', but we will all be changed.  
(Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible,  
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This morning, I ask that we read in the Bible about the revealing of a mystery.

I don't mean 'mystery' in the literature-genre, Agatha Christie, 'who-done-it' sense. Personally, I have always had a hard time getting myself to enjoy those kinds of stories. They frustrate me. They are intentionally written in such a way as to keep you from knowing the whole story until the end—so that you have to work at figuring it all out. Some people enjoy that; but I'm afraid I don't. In fact, whenever my family watched Perry Mason re-runs, I wouldn't join them until the last five minutes of the show. That way, we'd all get right to the point, and I wouldn't be quite so frustrated.

The kind of 'mystery' that we will be considering this morning isn't like that. In fact, a 'mystery' in the Bible is, in some ways, the very opposite of a 'who-done-it' in a book or a movie. It is meant to make sure you know everything that relates to 'the mystery' right from the very start.

There are lots of such 'mysteries' in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus, for example, told His disciples that it was given to them to know 'the mystery of the kingdom' (Mark 4:11).. The apostle Paul wrote about 'the mystery of godliness' (1 Timothy 3:16) , and warned his readers about 'the mystery of lawlessness' (2 Thessalonians 2:7). The Greek word that is used is *mustārion*; and it simply means a spiritual truth that was previously unknowable to the human mind, but that is now graciously made known to those to whom God chooses to reveal it. I think that the best definition would be the one that Paul gave in Colossians 1:26; where he spoke of a mystery “which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.”

It's that kind of 'mystery' that Paul shares with us in 1 Corinthians 15. And it's about one of the most astonishing and glorious things that we could ever think about. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, he wrote;

*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

*“O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?”*

*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-57).*

Can you see Paul's reference to the 'mystery' in this passage? You find it in verse 51. It's something that we human beings could never know unless God had graciously revealed it to us; but, because we belong to His Son, God now reveals it to us through Paul so that we can have joy in our life with Jesus and can live for Him more effectively. It's the amazing truth that not all of us who belong to Jesus will die. Paul speaks of death for the believer as “sleep”; and not all of us who belong to Jesus will “sleep” in the grave. But we *will* all be changed. All of us who are in Christ will experience the bodily transformation into glory that will make it possible for us to live eternally with Jesus. All of us will be made to be like Him. But not all of us will have to die before that happens.

And this remarkable expectation is to be a great motivation to our Christian living. We won't study the last verse of this chapter until our next time together in 1 Corinthians 15; but look at what he wrote in verse 58;

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (v. 58).*

We very much needed to have the encouragement that comes from having this 'mystery' revealed to us. And praise God!—it has been!

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Now; the apostle Paul had been writing to the Corinthian believers about the subject of 'resurrection'—not only the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but also the promise of the resurrection of those who believe on Him.

The Christians in the ancient Corinthian church had been taught that the Lord Jesus had

been raised from the dead. But it seems that they had, somehow, set aside their confidence in the promise that they too will one day be raised along with Him at His second coming. This was a serious problem. If they had set aside their faith in the promise of their own resurrection, then they would have also set aside one of the great motivations for Christian devotion and service.

And so, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15 to restore this hope. He first established to them that the resurrection of Jesus was a key part of the gospel—and that it was established as a fact. Jesus had risen from the dead; and He was seen by eyewitnesses. Paul then went on to show that we who believe on Jesus for our salvation will also one day be raised bodily with Him from the grave. This is the promise of the scriptures. To deny this would be to deny our hope in the gospel; and would render the Christian faith meaningless. He went on to show that it was very reasonable to believe that God is able to raise those who trust Jesus, and to glorify their bodies, and make them fit to dwell with Jesus eternally.

But all of this brought Paul's readers to a question. It was as if the Corinthian believers would say, “Okay; so we believe that when Jesus returns to this earth, He will call forth His redeemed ones from their graves. He will glorify their bodies, and make them fit to live in eternity with Him forever. But what about those of us who have not yet died? What if we are alive at the time when Jesus returns? What will happen to us? Do we miss out on the glory of the kingdom of heaven? Or when He comes, and we see Him, will we have to first die, and *then* be buried in a grave, and *then* be raised up in glory? How will it work out for Christians living on earth at that time? What will happen to us if Jesus returns today?”

This has the makings of a 'mystery'. But it's a mystery that Paul—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—fully revealed to his brothers and sisters. He didn't leave them to figure it out for themselves; but he let them in on the truth.

He revealed to them a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

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Now; let's look at what is revealed to us in this wonderful passage. The first thing to notice is ...

### **1. THE NEED THAT IS BEHIND THE MYSTERY.**

The thing that is in the background of this mystery—this glorious revealed truth—is that, in our present bodily condition, we could not enter into the eternal glory of the presence of our Lord in His kingdom. If Jesus were to come today and scoop us all up and take us to heaven as we are right now, we would not survive the glory of it all. Our frail bodies—as they presently are—are not appropriate to a heavenly habitation; and they could not endure it. Paul put it this way in verse 50; “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

When Paul speaks of “flesh and blood”, he isn't talking about our sinful nature. It's true that in some of his letters, he uses the name “flesh” to describe our sinful nature. But here, he

speaks of flesh *and* blood. And the two together describe our frail human bodies. These bodies of ours are weak and frail and earth-bound. In their present state of being, they cannot take part in or receive a share of the heavenly dwelling of our Lord.

And what's more, these bodies of ours are corrupt. They suffer the impact of sin. When our first father Adam sinned in the garden, he brought about the curse of sin—not only upon the bodies of all his offspring, but upon all of creation. Because of our fallenness in Adam, these bodies of ours get sick. They are often injured. They often get tired and hungry. Eventually, they grow old and die. They are subject to corruption; and corruption does not inherit the incorruption of the heavenly realms.

I don't know if you noticed the careful way in which Paul said this. But look again. He said that flesh and blood “cannot” inherit the kingdom of God, and corruption “does not” inherit corruption. One is *not able* to do so, and the other simply *does not* do so. That's the situation that our current state of being puts us in. That shows us the need that stands behind this mystery.

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Now; did you notice in the previous verse that Paul referred to his readers as “brethren”? That's very important. Paul is not speaking of all people in this world when he revealed this glorious mystery. It's not a thing that just 'anyone' can claim to themselves—regardless of whether they believe on Jesus or not. It is only meant for those who have placed a conscious, decisive faith in Jesus' death on the cross, and who depend upon Him for their salvation, and who are redeemed by His blood. It would be inappropriate for the glorious truths of this 'mystery' to be applied to anyone else.

But to those who are “brethren” by God's grace—to those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and are walking on this earth as His people, but who are still in a body that is incapable of inheriting the kingdom of God—Paul then goes on to give ...

## **2. THE DECLARATION OF THE MYSTERY.**

In verse 51 he wrote, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” In other words, we who are in Christ will not all die; but we will all be changed. We all will be transformed in our bodies from this frail condition to a glorious condition fit for eternity—and we will not all have to die in order for that to happen!

Think of our Lord Jesus. When He was raised from the dead, He was raised in the same body that was crucified. His body still bore the prints of the nails in His hands, and the mark of the spear that pierced His side. But it was a glorious body—a body fit for eternity. He ascended in that same body; and sits right now in that body at the right hand of God the Father. He will return in that same body to reign over this earth for a thousand years. And then, He will dwell in that same glorified body in the new heavens and the new earth—in the new Jerusalem that will descend from God the Father. And we are told in the Bible that “when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

And the mystery now being revealed to us is that we—who are alive at His coming—will not have to experience death in order for our bodies to be transformed into glory!

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Paul then goes on to tell his readers about ...

### 3. THE TIMING OF THE MYSTERY (v. 52).

He went on in verse 52 to explain that this will happen “in a moment ...” The word that he used for “moment” in the original language is actually the word we get the English word “atom” from. It describes a unit of measurement that is the smallest imaginable—too small to be measured. He went on to say that it would be in “the twinkling of an eye”. I read that someone once tried to measure the speed at which an eye 'twinkled'. I'm really not sure how in the world they could do that. But Paul probably simply meant for us to understand that the transformation would be sudden, immediate and complete. It won't be that we will look at each other, and notice a gradual change. We won't say, “You know; for some reason, you've been looking different this week.” It will be instantaneous. One moment, frail flesh and blood; the next instant, glory! One moment, corruptible; a nanosecond later, incorruptible.

And Paul said that this will happen, “at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” This “last trumpet” is what will declare the Lord's return to this world. Jesus once said that

*the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).*

It's at the time of this trumpet blast—at the time of our Lord's return, when He gathers His elect ones to Himself—that this glorious transformation happens. Then, the one's who have died in Jesus will be raised 'incorruptible'; and we who are alive at His return will be 'changed'. The apostle Paul put it this way in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17;

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).*

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Now; at the very beginning, Paul told us the need that stands behind this mystery. Flesh and blood, he said, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Something has to happen. We have to be changed. And so, in verse 53, Paul went on to affirm ...

#### **4. THE REASON FOR THE MYSTERY.**

He wrote in verse 53; “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

When Paul used the word “this”, he was using his own body as an example; and was speaking of your and my present state of being. And why “must” it be that this transformation happen to us? Why is it necessary that our bodies be made incorruptible and clothed in immortality? It's because our Lord cannot enjoy eternal fellowship with us in any other way than by our being brought into the full glorification that He enjoys.

When you get right down to it, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it “must” be so because He loves us—and wishes to love us eternally. Do you remember what Jesus said to the Father when He prayed for us—just before going to the cross? He prayed,

*“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).*

The only way that can happen is if you and I are glorified in body—just as He is. He told us that He went to prepare a place for us in His Father's house, “that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

Just think of how much He loves us! That's the real reason for this mystery!

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And then, look at ...

#### **5. THE RESULT OF THE MYSTERY (v. 54).**

In verse 54, Paul wrote, “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'” This is a quote from Isaiah 25:8. It is meant to show us that—when our transformation occurs at the return of the Lord, death will be forever gone for God's people. None of us who are in Christ will ever die again. It will have gotten 'gobbled up' by victory; and it will never again be seen.

Now; that does not mean “death” itself does not still exist. Sadly, it will still exist for those who are outside of a relationship with Jesus by faith. Death will still occur for them after Jesus' return. And then, as the Bible tells us, they will be raised to stand before our Lord at the

great White Throne judgment—to be judged according to their works, and to then be cast into the lake of fire. This, the Bible tells us, is the 'second death'.

But for the follower of Jesus, there is no second death. Jesus' return means our transformation; and our transformation means death is swallowed up in victory—forever gone!

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Paul went on, then, to declare to us ...

## 6. THE VICTORY OF THE MYSTERY.

He quoted from another Old Testament passage—in Hosea 13:14—and wrote;

*“O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?”*

It almost sounds like a taunting song; doesn't it? “Hey Death; where's your 'sting' now? You used to have a stinger—like a scorpion. It used to hurt, and you used to cause a lot of suffering. But your stinger has gotten ripped out! Where's all the hurt now? And you Hades; where's your victory? You used to boast, because you were the place of the dead! You used to be the great terror! But where's your victory now?”

Why was it true that death used to have a sting—and that the grave used to boast of victory? It was because of sin. Paul went on to explain in verse 56 that “the sting of death is sin”. The Bible teaches us that the soul that sins shall die. God told Adam that on the day he ate of the fruit of the tree that was forbidden to him, he would surely die. And he ate—and he suffered a severing of his relationship with God. From then on, he began to die. And all of his offspring—you and me—have all been experiencing death ever since.

And Paul went on further to say, “and the strength of sin is the law.” God's holy law was righteous; but as soon as we encountered it, it aroused the sinful nature within us that we inherited from Adam. Paul put it this way in Romans 7;

*I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me (Romans 7:7b-11).*

But Jesus has died for sin and has risen from the grave. Now, the stinger of sin has been removed, and the boast of the grave has been taken away. This will be fully put on display on the day when Jesus returns—and the dead are raised, and we are changed!

What a gloriously victorious thing this 'mystery' is that is being revealed to us! It is

victory in the ultimate sense!

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And that leads us to one more thing; and that is ...

## **7. THE ONE TO THANK FOR THE MYSTERY.**

Paul concludes in verse 57; “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There is therefore now 'no condemnation' for those who are in Christ Jesus. God the Father gave His Son to pay the full debt for our sin in His own body on the cross. And as His body was raised from the dead in glory—in order to show us that our debt is fully paid—so will our bodies be raised, if we trust in Him.

Dear brothers and sisters; this mystery is being revealed to us so that we will experience the full joy of our Christian life—and so that we will be fully motivated to give our all to Him. So; whether we live in this frail condition until these frail bodies are placed in the grave—or whether we alive on this earth at the time of the Lord's return—let's give our all to Him.

Let's “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”