(Slide 1)THE GLORY OF THE RESURRECTION

(We Shall Be Like Jesus)

 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Key Verse: 15:49

(Slide 2)"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."

Good morning! It is such a joy to be with you in person and celebrate together the victory that Jesus gives through his resurrection. We need this message of Jesus in our times. The Covid pandemic has killed many and totally disrupted life and livelihood, bringing a sense of defeat. Unspeakable atrocities are taking place in Ukraine, bringing a temptation to fall into a victim’s mentality. (Slide 3) Recently, I heard the testimony of Darina–a young Ukrainian student–during an online prayer meeting. She confessed that after hearing a few bombs drop in her city she was traumatized. Then everything sounded like a bomb–even the slamming of a car door. At first she felt like a victim. But as we all prayed together, the Spirit of Jesus came to her and she could overcome her fear, anxiety and sorrow. She was filled with joy and peace. She became a victor in the midst of tragedy. This morning’s passage is the apex of the glorious resurrection chapter. It teaches us the resurrection principle, and the glory of the resurrection. This glory will be revealed universally when Jesus comes again. Let's envision the glory of the resurrection and live as victors in our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Slide 4) First, a resurrection principle: death before resurrection (35-36). Look at verse 35. “But someone may ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’” Since the fall of Adam, humankind has been subject to the power of death. Everyone has been swallowed up by the power of death. This is reality. In this reality, the resurrection was inconceivable to the Corinthians. Even more inconceivable was bodily resurrection. Whether they believed it or not, the resurrection of Christ was a historical fact, and the bodily resurrection of each person will occur. Jesus said in John 5:28,29, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out–those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” As Paul taught the certainty of resurrection, some asked, “With what kind of body will they come?” To them it was horrible that the dead would be raised and walk around. They imagined a world of zombies like “The Walking Dead.” They thought it would be a continuation of life in this world with all its miseries and agonies. They did not want to continue the pains of this life indefinitely. So they asked, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” These questions are basically the same.

In essence, these questions came from their fear of death. They did not want to die. Even if they had to suffer endlessly, they wanted to live in this world. Recently, journalist Benjamin Hall was badly injured while reporting on the war in Ukraine. He lost a leg, the other foot and most of an arm. His quality of life can never be the same as it was. However, he did not wish he had died. He was thankful to be alive. Most human beings want to live even if the conditions are very unfavorable. The desire to live in this world forever hinders us from accepting the glorious resurrection. This is why some of the Corinthians were hard-hearted toward Paul’s gospel message.

Paul called them foolish. In Greek it implies “ignorant, senseless, without reason.” Why did he call them foolish? It is because they ignored the truth about resurrection even though it is clearly manifest in nature. He told them explicitly in verse 36: “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” The act of planting seeds and watching new growth come from them teaches us that death precedes resurrection: unless the seed dies, there will be no harvest. Simply speaking, without death there is no resurrection. “No pain, no gain,” or “No cross, no crown.” It is not easy to accept this truth. But those who do discover an amazing new life.

(Slide 5) A man named Nicholas Herman lived in 17th century France. As a poor man, he joined the army for the guarantee of meals, lodging and a small stipend. One hard, cold winter, he looked at a barren tree, stripped of leaves and fruit, waiting silently, patiently for the sure hope of summer abundance. Through that tree, Nicholas grasped God’s grace. He was like that tree, cold and barren, but the turn of seasons would bring him new life and fullness. Through nature, he grasped the principle of resurrection. Love for God began to burn in his heart. Later he joined a monastery and served many people sacrificially with God’s love. He is known as Brother Lawrence.

(Slide 6) Jesus’ top disciple Peter learned the resurrection principle in a different way. He loved Jesus and wanted to follow him. But when Jesus taught that he must suffer, die and rise again, Peter reacted strongly against Jesus’ words. Jesus rebuked him, “Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then Jesus taught clearly, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mk 8:31-35). After Jesus died and rose again, through the work of the Holy Spirit, Peter finally accepted the resurrection principle. He became a good shepherd who told suffering believers: “...rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1Pe 4:13).

As we grasp the resurrection principle, we gain an eternal perspective. For example, St. Paul suffered a great deal to follow Jesus and carry out his God-given mission. Yet he wrote, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2Co 4:17). Those who accept the resurrection principle are filled with the glory of God and can serve God joyfully, courageously and sacrificially. On the other hand, those who reject this principle are under the shadow of death and spend most of their time trying to avoid suffering. Let’s accept the resurrection principle, see the glory of God, and live a dynamic life for the glory of God.

(Slide 7) Second, the earthly body is the seed of a spiritual body. (37-41) After reminding them of the resurrection principle, Paul continued to explain through nature the resurrection body. Look at verses 37-38. “When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.” Seeds are not attractive. But the bodies that come from seeds are beautiful, like flowers and all kinds of plants. As we consider the resurrection body, we should realize that God will do something miraculous, mysterious and beautiful that is beyond our imagination.

Paul continued in verses 39-41: “Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.” Here Paul explains that God created all things, giving each its own kind of body and its own splendor or glory. Each body is different and has its own kind of glory. Our resurrection bodies will have a glory that is wisely and perfectly suited to us. And it will be quite different from the glory of our physical bodies.

What is the glory of our physical body, or life in the flesh? It can be summarized as love, wealth, honor and fame. People who pursue and attain these things live their best life in this world. People exert great effort to achieve this kind of glory. Nevertheless, it does not satisfy the human soul. And people die too soon before enjoying it. Only the glory of heaven satisfies human souls. God created people in the image of God with both body and spirit. Since we have physical bodies that belong to the earth, we need physical glory, even though it fades away too soon. But as spirits we also need spiritual glory. We must know that our physical bodies are just seeds of a resurrection body. Then we can live in joyful anticipation of heavenly glory. We can realize the eternal worth of our own lives, and of each person around us. Then we can be good stewards of our lives; we can be the best spouses, parents and friends. However, if we think our physical bodies are all there is, we will suffer frustration and meaninglessness. Let’s accept the truth that our physical bodies are just the seeds of our glorious resurrection bodies.

(Slide 8) Third, we will bear the likeness of the Risen Christ. (42-49) Verse 42a reads, “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead.” Paul has already stated that the resurrection body is glorious beyond imagination. So he does not try to describe it in detail. Rather, he tells us of its major traits, in contrast with our present bodies. Verses 42b-44 read, “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” “Imperishable” means “enduring forever.” Our resurrection bodies are not subject to sickness, an aging process or death. There will be no gradual balding, wrinkled skin or memory loss. There will be no autism, coronavirus, arthritis, cancer, heart disease or the like. These resurrection bodies will be glorious and powerful beyond our understanding. They will endow us as glorious heavenly princes and princesses forever. They will equip us to spend eternity with Christ. What a glorious hope it is to be clothed with the resurrection body! With this hope Jesus invited all kinds of wretched sinners to himself. For example, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, shedding his blood for our sins, a criminal beside him was also being crucified. This man was convicted of crimes and he was receiving the punishment he deserved. Then he heard Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they were doing.” He glimpsed the love of God and saving grace in Christ. So he prayed, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:34-43). As his body died on the cross, his soul entered into eternal glory as a prince of God’s kingdom. And he will be raised with a glorious resurrection body. This is the glorious destiny of anyone who trusts in Christ, no matter how wretched they may appear. So we should have hope for all kinds of people–even most unlikely people–to come to Jesus and be transformed into glorious children of God.

Paul was certain about the resurrection body: “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” His certainty rested on faith in Christ Jesus and his deep grasp of what Jesus has done for us. To explain this, he develops the great contrast between Adam and Jesus. Adam and Jesus are the two distinct progenitors of the human race. From Adam we have received earthly bodies that age and die. Without a resurrection body, our lives would be too sorrowful to think about. We would have no real hope and would be constantly tormented by thoughts of death and burial. On the other hand, Christ is a life-giving spirit. He is our progenitor of new spiritual life through the Holy Spirit that is pure and godly. With his resurrection power he also gives us new spiritual bodies that are glorious beyond imagination. Here we see how great the love of Jesus is and how deep his concern for us is. He personally provides for each of us a glorious spiritual body by his life-giving power. Praise Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!

Verse 49 reads, “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” When we have resurrection faith we live in the world with glorious hope. We will all bear the likeness of beautiful Jesus. It is totally amazing. But it will be so. During our lifetime we Christians suffered to run the race of faith, carrying God’s holy mission. We suffered due to fallen man's tendencies in us. But when we die, we are set free from our natural bodies and clothed with the likeness of Jesus. The Risen Christ glorifies our inner man to be holy and beautiful like Jesus. We will be as humble as Jesus. We will be as gentle as Jesus. We will be as obedient as Jesus. We will be as loving as Jesus. We will be as glorious as Jesus. The man from heaven is Jesus Christ. We die in an ugly and weak body; but when we believe in Jesus, we will be raised up in a glorious resurrection body. We will bear the image of Jesus. We shall be like him.

(Slide 9) Fourth, the glory of the second coming of Christ (50-58). Our greatest and most glorious hope is far bigger than our personal salvation. It is the second coming of Christ and the total restoration of the kingdom of God. Look at verses 51-53. “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” The last trumpet signals Jesus’ second coming. This time he does not come humbly and gently as a servant, but as the Judge of the living and the dead. Many people abuse God's long-suffering patience, saying, “Where is God's judgment? Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” It is a great mistake. When Jesus comes, there will be the bodily resurrection of all men. Those who thought death is the end of everything will find they were wrong. The cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magic artists, idolaters and liars cannot hide anymore in their graves. They will be resurrected and judged according to what they have done. On the other hand, Jesus' people will be changed to be like him, will inherit the kingdom of God, and will live forever with the Risen Christ in peace and love.

(Slide 10) Finally the last enemy, the power of death, is destroyed. Death will be swallowed up in victory. So Paul cried out to this power of death, “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” Sin stings like a bee, injecting a poison. The law works through this poison to cause death. The power of sin and death have crushed humankind. We could not defeat these enemies with our own wisdom or strength. But Christ died for our sins, rose from the dead, and will come in great power and glory to defeat death forever. This is God’s love and one-sided grace for all who believe in Jesus. So Paul said, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Let’s give thanks to God every day for his marvelous grace to give us victory!

Look at verse 58. “Therefore, my dear brothers, 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.” The words “in vain” have a deep spiritual meaning. In light of eternity, only labor in the Lord is not in vain. Worldly people make money and enjoy pleasures freely. But without resurrection faith, it is in vain. They live in deep inner despair over the power of sin and death. On the other hand, labor for the Lord is most meaningful; it bears everlasting fruits. We have this conviction based on resurrection faith. One who is convinced that his labor in the Lord is not in vain will someday be clothed in the image of the Risen Christ. He will receive the kingdom of heaven as his inheritance. May God help us to enter the glory of God through the resurrection of Christ.