

Be Steadfast

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[0 : 00] It's so good to see you. Emily is going to come and she's going to read our scripture text. It's 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and from verse 51 down through 58.

Listen, I am telling you a mystery. We will not all fall asleep, but we will 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 will be changed. For this corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility. And this mortal body must be clothed with immortality. When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility.

And this mortal body is clothed with immortality. Then the saying that is written will take place. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where death is your victory. Where death is your sting.

The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work.

[1 : 08] Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Isn't that a beautiful text? Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word.

Thank you for sending Jesus.

The word made flesh. Thank you that we have had the privilege of enjoying this season of Advent. And thinking about Jesus coming for the first time.

And also anticipating the wonderful, wonderful hope that Jesus will come again. Thank you for this text from the book of 1 Corinthians.

Please help us. Please have your spirit work in and among us. Please have your spirit work in my heart and help me with the things that are said.

[2 : 09] Please teach us from your word the things that we need to know and to believe and to obey. We ask that you would do this for your glory and for our good.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. I wonder, kids, if you would rather hear your mom say maybe or I promise.

What's better? If mom says maybe or I promise. It works the same for dads. Like dads could also say maybe or I promise.

I think most of us would prefer to hear I promise, right? Because there's some certainty in that. There's something about I promise that you can say, I believe that dad is going to come through.

I believe that mom is going to come through. Whereas if it's maybe, you're left kind of wondering. I'm not really sure what's going to happen. Most of us adults would choose firm commitments over tentative plans.

[3 : 20] We like to get things kind of locked into our calendar so we know what's coming up. And things that hang out forever in just sort of tentatively, that can feel very stressful.

Even if you are very adventurous, I suspect that you still try to reduce your risks when you go snowboarding by wearing a helmet.

Or maybe if you go hunting, you want to reduce your risk by wearing blaze orange, right? Warranties, guarantees, good insurance policies.

These are important things to have, aren't they? Why? Because life is full of uncertainty. What will happen tomorrow?

What will life be like in one week or one month or one year? It might be entertaining and it might even be wise for us to think about the future.

[4 : 23] But the fact remains, there is just so much that we can't know for sure. Here's the good news for us from God's word today. Even when life is uncertain.

Even when much of life and much of our future is unknown. And even when our present can feel very disorienting because we don't know the future with any kind of certainty.

Those who believe in Jesus are assured victory in the future. And we also can enjoy that same victory right now.

I want to try to show you that from God's word today. Here's what I would love for us to know and to believe. That faithfulness to Jesus guarantees fruitfulness for Jesus.

Does that sound like good certainty? Let's see if we can identify that in our text today. The first verse that Emily read to us contains the word mystery.

[5 : 29] And if we're not careful, then our English definition, the way that we think about the word mystery, might cause us to misinterpret this Bible text.

So, kids, if you can think about this for a minute. When you think about the word mystery, what comes to mind? You can feel free to say it out loud.

What comes to mind when you think mystery? Josie? Secret. Something that's a secret. Yes? Like a mystery, like you have to find something? Yes, you have to find something.

Like something is hidden, right? And it needs to be found. What else? Nothing good. Elam's offering a little bit of a cynical approach to the mystery.

Nothing good. Nothing good can come if there's a mystery, right? Okay? Okay. Maybe when you think mystery, as we think about that word, we think about perhaps like a scary story or kind of a twisty plot that we don't know how this story is going to turn out.

[6 : 35] And there's kind of these plot twists. Did you have another one, Josie? Like Sherlock Holmes, where you've got to discover the clues. Do you have an idea? What is it?

Yeah, like something is lost and needs to be found. Maybe a strange riddle. This is how we think about the word mystery. This is not how the Bible uses the word mystery.

In fact, I don't want you to miss this. The Bible actually uses the word mystery in almost the opposite way that we think about it. When you see the word mystery in the New Testament, it's not something that's hidden that we need to try to discover.

It's actually a truth that God has been pleased to very gloriously and graciously reveal to us. It's not something that we have to work hard to figure out what's going on here with, you know, maybe someone says there's like cryptic verses in the Bible that we have to figure out.

That's not the way that the Bible uses the word mystery. A mystery is a truth, perhaps hidden in ages past, but now gloriously revealed by God's word, by God's spirit, and by our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 56] A mystery in Bible terms is a truth that we would not have figured out on our own. We needed God to reveal it to us.

Isn't it kind of God to reveal truths to us in his word? How kind of God? So many things we would just not know had God not written it down in his word for us.

What is the truth that God is revealing to us in his word? Look at your Bible again and find verse 51. Listen. Some of your Bibles might say, behold.

The idea is to catch your attention. Listen. Behold. I am telling you a mystery. Here's something that God wants us to know.

Something that God has revealed to us. We don't have to work hard to figure it out. It's right here. Here's the mystery. Here's the truth. We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed.

[9 : 01] 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 will be changed.

Benjamin Franklin famously remarked, in this world, nothing can be said to be certain except, what? Death and taxes. Paul would like a word with Mr. Franklin, wouldn't he?

Paul says, not so. Taxes may be certain, but death, not so. Some Christians, the Bible tells us, will be alive when Jesus returns.

That's good news. That's good hope for us who are alive right now. We could be among those Christians alive when Jesus returns.

Death is not a guarantee. But, here's the corollary to that. Whether you are dead or alive, child of God, your future is certain.

[10 : 10] Do you see the words in your Bible or on the screen, will not and will be? Do you see those words? These are certain words. These are words that should help us realize and give us confidence in what God is saying.

This is not a maybe, kids. This is a for sure thing. Sorry, 2,022 some years have passed since Paul wrote down these words.

Now, I guess, 2023 some years, right? Since Paul wrote down these words. And yet, the future for followers of Jesus is no less certain.

Why? Why is it that our future is no less certain than when Paul first wrote these words? Because this is the eternal word of the living God.

It cannot and it will not fail. When God says, we will not all sleep.

[11 : 24] We're not all going to die. But we will all be changed. This is good certainty for followers of Jesus.

Right now, right now, we experience pain, don't we? Suffering, loss, grief.

But hear this. One day, all of that will be gone. Gone. Now we cry. Now we ache. Now we groan with the rest of creation suffering because of sin.

We may even die. But in a moment, all of that will come to an end. Your future in Christ is certain, child of God.

And your future will be characterized not by suffering, pain, and death, but by eternal life. Look in your Bible again and spot verse 53.

[12 : 32] For this incorruptible body, notice the certainty of these words, must be clothed with incorruptibility. and this mortal body must be clothed with immortality.

What's Paul talking about? He's talking about this change that he has said is going to happen. What kind of a change do you think this is? Is this like maybe I'll have hair again?

Is it like maybe the kind of change where my teeth will finally be properly straightened? Is that the kind of change that Paul has in mind? Maybe my acne will go away finally or I won't have to cover up blemishes on my face with makeup if I were a lady, right?

Is that the kind of change that Paul has in mind? I don't think so. This body and your body is unfit for eternity and it doesn't have anything to do with crooked teeth or acne.

We just know this, don't we? And the older we get the more we realize that it's true that this body is breaking down it's weak it's susceptible to all kinds of viruses and bacteria and diseases.

[14 : 02] It is not fit for eternity. And Paul has us thinking about the future. He has us thinking about eternal realities.

And he wants to make this connection for us because some people are going to hear Paul say about the certainty of the future and what that looks like and they're going to say but my body is so weak and it's so broken down and I'm so old I'm so near death and Paul says don't miss it here's this mystery it's been hidden now I'm telling you the truth we're all going to be changed.

We're all going to be changed. This body is weak it is natural it is mortal it gets tired it gets sick it is wearing out it may very well eventually die and in order to last forever in order for me to inhabit a body which God has promised for all those who are in Christ for all eternity my body and your body needs to undergo a fundamental change not a cosmetic change a systemic change your body needs to be changed from weakness to strength from corruptible to incorruptible from dishonor to glorious from natural to spiritual from mortal to immortality this is the type of change that Paul promises that Jesus promises to those who are safe in him what is

God's revealed truth what is the mystery that God is teaching us today first your future is certain and second your future is eternal life with an incorruptible immortal body in other words kids if you're wondering about the word incorruptible a body that won't rot it won't go into the grave and dissolve into a puddle of goo an incorrupt that was just for the kids to make sure they're still listening an incorruptible body that will last forever a body that is fit for eternal worship and service in God's kingdom your future is certain your future is an eternal life with a new body and finally your future is victorious look at verse 54 when this corruptible body this body that can rot and will rot unless if

Jesus changes it this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility and this mortal body is clothed with immortality then the saying that is written will do you see the certainty in that phrase again will take place death has been swallowed up in victory where where death is your victory where death is your sting what does it look like when death is swallowed up in victory I'll tell you what it does not look like it does not look like cookie monster stuffing cookies into his mouth do you know why because crumbs fall everywhere when cookie monster eats cookies he makes a big mess doesn't he when death is swallowed up in victory it does not look like a little child like maybe a little baby sort of nibbling on a little teething cookie you know taking little bites of it when death is swallowed up in victory it does not look like the way that some of us perhaps taste vegetables that we don't like too much you know and you sort of just touch it to the tip of your tongue but you don't really want to eat the whole thing because you don't know if you're going to like it that's not what it looks like let me try to give you a picture of what

[18 : 35] I think it could look like like a massive blue whale opening up big old jaws a big old mouth and sucking in all that is around it and leaving nothing left behind no food left behind like when the whale opens its mouth and gets what it wants it gets it it gets it that's the victory that will swallow up death no cookie crumbs left behind when death is swallowed up in this victory child of God your future is certain your future is eternal life in a new glorified body and your future is victorious victorious now perhaps you are thinking that's all fine and good in the future but how does that help me right now how does the certainty of my future matter right now in my present that's a good question isn't it because right now we are still tempted by sin aren't we and and we still give in to sin because of the weakness of our flesh that still resides inside of we still give in to sin sinful temptation sometimes right now we deal with the consequences of sin the consequences of our own sin the consequences of the sins that are committed against us right now we suffer and we cause others suffering right now my body is weak right now

I get sick some Christians won't die but most of us will so how does this certainty in the future matter to me right now in my present Jesus has good news for you though your present may be sinful though your present may be full of grief and pain and loss your present like your future is gloriously victorious notice this in verse 56 the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ gives present tense right now right now when we're still tempted by sin right now when we still give in to sin right now when we feel weak and broken down and we deal with the suffering caused by others and the suffering that we cause others right now thanks be to

God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ you are not victorious because you are so smart or so strong or so spiritual or so successful I hope that doesn't step on your toes too much if it steps on your toes a little that's okay you are not victorious because you are so smart or strong or spiritual or successful where does this victory come from Jesus lived in perfect obedience to God's law Jesus humbly died in your place in glad submission to the Father's will Jesus was raised again from the dead in order to ensure that sin's power over your present and your future is totally swallowed up this is the victory for all those who are in

Christ when was the last time you thanked God for giving you this victory Paul says we should thank God that's what he says thanks be to God he's not just saying that rhetorically he means it we should thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ victory right now victory over sin victory over death I wonder my friend if Jesus is your savior kids is the Lord Jesus Christ your savior are you I'm so glad I am so glad are you trusting in Jesus listen if you die and stand before

God without Jesus by your side how awful would that be to enter into eternity without your sins forgiven what a terrifying thought but you don't need to be afraid of the future come to Jesus trust in Jesus receive God's grace to you in Jesus Christ because our future is so certain and because our present is equally victorious how does the spirit want this to change our lives verse 58 do you see that word therefore that's a little clue for us that the things that we have heard so far have a point and he

[25 : 22] Paul is the apostle Paul is now going to give us here's the point here's all that he has been working up to is to get to this point all of the work that he has done to lay the foundation of these truths all of the revelation that he has offered us of God's mystery now revealed to us gloriously revealed here's the point here's how the Holy Spirit wants this to affect our lives today verse 58 therefore my dear brothers and sisters be steadfast immovable always excelling in the Lord's work to be steadfast does not mean to be successful it doesn't mean to be flashy to be steadfast means be faithful be faithful steadfastness is not dependent upon size or popularity or efficiency steadfastness is ongoing faithfulness it's faithfulness through ups and downs it's faithfulness through good and bad it's faithfulness through reviling and healing it's faithfulness through sin and suffering it's faithfulness through trial and triumph be steadfast!

And be immovable! This is such an interesting little word it's it's it's this idea that if you're heading in a direction no one is able to knock you off of that you you are you are steadfast and you are immovable you're in a place where you're not about to be knocked off course you're committed be faithful even against opposition be faithful even when others quit and maybe you feel like joining them be faithful even when life isn't fair be faithful even when you suffer unjustly be be steadfast be immovable and always excelling in the Lord's work whose work in the Lord's work the work of saving sinners the work of growing disciples the work of building the church this is the

Lord's work and he invites us into the work that he is doing to participate in his work and I love this little phrase always excelling or your Bible may say always abounding in the work of the Lord here's why I love it because the Bible illustrates this word for us let me offer you three very brief illustrations!

because I think it really helps us to capture what it would look like for us to be always excelling in the Lord's work the first illustration is this do you remember when Jesus fed the 5,000 men and that means there may have been 12 15 thousand people with the little boys lunch and then they went around and gathered all that was left over from Jesus creating all of this food do you remember what they gathered up 12 baskets and the Bible uses this word left over that's the same word that Paul chooses to use here for always excelling in the Lord's work everybody ate as much as they wanted to eat and they had so much left over the food was always excelling always abounding here's the second illustration perhaps you remember the prodigal son and

I'll just fast forward all the story he's in the pig pen things are really bad he has no money he has no friends he has an awful job that he doesn't really want he's feeding!

[29 : 45] he has no food he's very hungry and the Bible gives us this picture that he he has this moment of clear thinking the Bible says he came to himself suddenly he just is thinking clearly for a moment he has not been thinking clearly for a long time but now he is thinking clearly and this is what he thinks how many of the servants in my father's house have bread enough to eat what's he saying the bread that the servants eat in my father's house it's always abounding it's always excelling there's always more than enough of it here's the third illustration it's from Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 8 where Paul writes about God the father lavishing his grace on his children how is it that we receive

God's grace grace it is in an always abounding always excelling way this is not a little involvement in the work that God has called us to this is joyful wholehearted abundant overflowing excelling it's so much involvement and commitment and faithfulness to what God is doing and getting ourselves plugged into whatever God is doing why would we do this we would do this out of deep gratitude for the victory that Jesus gives us we would do this out of the confidence of the certainty of our future hope and we would do this anticipating new glorified bodies that are fit for eternity therefore my dear brothers and sisters be steadfast immovable and always excelling in the

Lord's work Paul could quit right here couldn't he he could quit right here and this would be enough for us but I'm so glad that he doesn't remember we like warranties guarantees and insurance policies don't we and Paul gives us Paul closes this portion with an astounding guarantee!

Here's the guarantee faithfulness to Jesus guarantees fruitfulness for Jesus look at your Bible again 1558 here's the last half of the verse Paul wrote to the Corinthians because you know you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain that's the guarantee when you commit to being steadfast immovable and always excelling in the Lord's work the guarantee that comes with that is that that work is not in vain what is this labor you see that word labor in the verse this is work that is tiring it's burdensome it's the kind of work that makes everything inside of you scream

I want to quit I can't keep at this whatever whatever that labor is whatever it is it is not in vain it may be disciplining children it may be disciplining other brothers and sisters it may be working at home or perhaps being an excellent testimony work it could be going to school getting an education could be going to the store running errands that need to be run on behalf of your family loving your spouse caring for your neighbor gathering for worship with God telling others about Jesus whatever this labor that you do for the glory of God that you say I am so exhausted I just want to quit whatever that labor is God's good word to you today is that it is not in vain it's meaningful it's important it's full of

[34 : 24] God's good purposes your labor is not in vain even if your labor seems insignificant and unimportant in the moment even if it seems like I don't even know what the value of this is for the long run you be steadfast for the glory of God and you let God work out the details of his good purposes in your labor because he has promised you it is not in vain fruitfulness hear this church fruitfulness is not contingent upon success but on faithfulness faithfulness to Jesus guarantees fruitfulness for Jesus and therefore let's be steadfast can we pray about that together perhaps take a moment if you would and ask the

Holy Spirit to do work that needs to be done in your heart we know that the Holy Spirit brings conviction! He brings clarity!

He brings comfort! He brings assurance! He is our helper! Let's invite the Holy Spirit to do work in our hearts right now just take a few moments and be quiet before the Lord there is a sin to be confessed if there is a truth to be claimed there is a hope to be anchored to ask the Holy Spirit to do that kind of work in your heart right now and then I'll pray in just a few moments father this world is full of sickness and suffering and death and we are present and part of this broken world you know our hearts you know our hearts better than we know our own hearts you know where we need to be corrected and convicted and where we need to be built up and encouraged and edified you know where we need to be comforted thank you for doing this work in our hearts through the

Holy Spirit would you please continue to do this work as we continue with this worship gathering and even after we leave this place please continue to use your word and bring it to our minds and change us for your glory and for our good we pray we ask all of this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ Amen