

Happily Ever After

- 1 Corinthians 15:50-57
- Which one of these is most accurate to real life as we know it. “Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” That’s Macbeth. Or, “And they lived happily ever after.” That’s Cinderella, among other fairy tales. It’s Cinderella! I believe the reason fairy tales often end with, “And they lived happily ever after” is because there is a longing for that in all of our hearts. It is baked into our DNA, put there by God. Solomon got a glimpse of this and wrote about it as an old man: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning and the end.” -Ecc. 3:11 Some of the mystery that was unknown to Solomon in the Old Testament has been revealed to us in the New, including the truth that we will live happily ever after with God. There is a prince, the Prince of Peace, and there is a beautiful bride, the church, and we know just enough about the last Day, when Jesus will return for his bride, to know that there will be perfect transformation and eternal celebration. Let’s look at this text today under those two main points.
- **Perfect Transformation (verses 50-54)**
- First, why do we need to be transformed on the last day? Because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” We cannot enter heaven in natural bodies. Heaven was not made for that, and no man in his own sinful flesh can see

God and live. And yet, we were created for heaven, and as Paul said, our citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20) We are already citizens of our eternal home; we just haven't moved yet. Good news for you who are in the middle of a moving or a building project, or both. Your final move will be so easy. In fact, you will not lift a finger, but God will do it all for you. We won't need the Antioch moving crew on the last Day. God will have everything covered. On that day, perishable will put on imperishable, and mortality will put on immortality. (53). This is the culmination of a thread we can trace all the way through Scripture. When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to cover their own flesh with leaves. God killed the first animal to cover them himself. Joseph's coat of many colors set him apart and was the catalyst for him ending up in Egypt. After the exodus, God told his people to wash their clothes. They were about to receive the Ten Commandments. The details and the colors used for the priestly garments was a picture of a human being preparing himself to go before a holy God to make sacrifices for the people. It pointed toward the clothing of righteousness that we can only receive from the High Priest who was himself the sacrifice. On that Day, we will finally and forever be clothed with a new and perfect body

- Second, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, so why do we stress so much about trying to transform ourselves? As Jesus said, "Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (Matthew 6:27) He used birds of the air and lilies of the field as examples of two of his creations that don't worry. They just do what

birds and flowers do, and the Father takes care of them. Anne Lamott wrote, “Perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won’t have to die. The truth is that you will die anyway and that a lot of people who aren’t even looking at their feet are going to do a whole lot better than you, and have a lot more fun while they’re doing it.” We will be transformed, and we are being transformed, and yes, we play a part in that by walking in obedience. But being anxious does not help speed up the process; it just makes us miserable.

- How will that perfect transformation take place? Paul gives us several clues in unfolding this mystery. First, (51) “We shall not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” That’s a great sign to put on a church nursery door, but it means that though not all believers will taste death, all believers will be transformed. The verb is passive: we will be changed. The only hope for our glorification is God. Just as the only hope for anyone’s salvation is God. And because Jesus is the firstfruits of those who sleep, there is absolutely no chance that any who belong to Christ will be lost. The angels will not come back to the Father with a sad report that some bodies or ashes just could not be found. We will all be changed. Transformed. Glorified. This was promised by Jesus: “And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:3)
- Second, it will happen in a moment. (52) The word for moment is “atomos” from which we get atom. It refers to an indivisible fragment of time. We would call it a split

second. This is great news for all of us, because unlike the aging process that IS a struggle on this side of the veil, the transformation of our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body will take no time and no struggle.

- Third, it will happen when the trumpet sounds. (52b)
Jesus says the same: “They (the people on earth) will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another.” (Matthew 24:30-31) Paul writes, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1Thess 4:16)
Remember, Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it, and the trumpet to call the dead in Christ back to life may be a final fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee, when liberty was proclaimed throughout the land. “Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month.” (Lev 25:9)
- That is perfect transformation, and it is followed by...
- **Eternal celebration (verses 55-57)**
- First, death is swallowed up in victory. This is no small celebration. We humans know how to celebrate victories, silly things like World Series championships or Super Bowls, or the World Cup. But death being swallowed up? The world has not seen the likes of that celebration. We have no point of reference. No one will turn to his buddy and say, “You know, this reminds me of when it looked like George Foreman was going to knock Ali out...”

- Victory like this is understood better in the context of war, not sport. Winston Churchill said on May 13, 1940 in his famous “Blood, Sweat and Tears” speech, “You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: victory; victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.” That is a small taste of what the victory we will witness with our own eyes will be like.
- Isaiah 25:8 is Paul’s reference and God’s promise. “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord will wipe away tears from all the faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.” Wow, we could spend the rest of the day just unpacking that promise that will be fulfilled on the Day Christ returns. Let’s just say that it is the end of sadness for the people of God and the beginning of eternal joy.
- Paul continues his celebration with a little bit of taunting. (55) A little smack talk. Wait, what is Paul acting like he’s breaking over his knee in the endzone? Oh, it’s death! He’s calling out death! “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The reference is Hosea 13:14, where God is calling to Death and Sheol to bring punishment to Israel because they have turned away from God! Paul takes those verses and turns them around to punish death. **Death is not being called on here to do its worst, it is**

being destroyed. There's no comparison in the sports world for this surprise victory. This is not Appalachian State taking down Michigan in football. This is not Evansville beating Kentucky in basketball last week, though that was pretty cool. No. You could send the Turrentine Middle School cheerleaders up to Lambeau Field and have them destroy the Packers 72-0, and the world would shrug, in comparison to the surprise victory that every dead follower of Christ will have over death. Listen! This is certainly not a surprise for God, nor is it a surprise for the people of God who know their Bible. But it will come as a complete surprise for everyone else. The world will stand in amazement and in horror when death is swallowed up for believers and then they, the unbelievers, are judged by God and then sent to what Revelations calls "the second death, the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:14)

- How is this possible, this great victory over death? Paul explains it. (56) "The sting of sin is death, and the power of sin is the law." This single verse, Simon Kistemaker writes, "explains the doctrines of sin, the law, and death!" The law was given as a mirror to show us our sin, and sin brings forth death. Paul explains this in Romans 7. Here's one verse: "For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment (law), deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." (Romans 7:11-12) The law could not save us but only drive us to Christ. Christ saved us from sin through his death, burial and resurrection. And though death has continued to reign on the earth because God has

ordained it, on that Day, death will meet its inevitable end. Death started feeling sick when Jesus breathed his last on the cross, and death caught a deadly disease when Jesus rose from the dead, and when Jesus splits the sky with a shout, death will be swallowed up forever. For whom? For us.

- “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The victory is ours already and will continue to be ours through the struggle in this life and through that great final victory over death. We are more than conquerors through Christ who saved us. Nothing left but the shoutin’
- And that, children of God, is how we who are in Christ will live happily ever after.
- Prayer