

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

### 1 CORINTHIANS 15

<sup>51</sup>Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled:

Death is swallowed up in victory. <sup>55</sup>Death, where is your sting?

Grave, where is your victory?

<sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!



Easter! It is the oldest of all Christian festivals. The early Christians were often in sadness, because their lives were so frequently endangered, but on Easter day they lifted up their heads to say, “The Lord is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” This is the most glorious piece of news contained in the whole gospel. He who bled for our sins, who for our guilt was laid in the tomb, cold and dead, He is risen in glory. He lives to die no more.

There was a bee in the car. The daughter screamed. As the bee flew around the father, keeping an eye on the road and his hand on the wheel, found a moment to capture it. The father winced; then he let the bee go. His daughter screamed. The father explained, “Not to worry, the stinger is gone.”

Today we recognize that fatal flaw in death: It is the return of life! And it is not just the springing of spring or the end of winter or the suggestion that our problems will get better, in some demythologizing of Easter joy. No, it is the promise of bodily and physical life again! Life returned in Jesus’ body, for death had no power over Him. Life will return for those who trust in Him, too.

There is ...

### No Sting For Easter Believers

Here is He who came down from heaven and taking part in our nature, allied Himself so closely to us that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He has redeemed us to God and made us worthy to partake in the inheritance of saints. His enemies conspire and plot in vain; meanwhile the One enthroned in heaven laughs, and in our lesson today He seems to taunt death, “*Where is your sting? Where is your victory?*”

Death truly does sting, doesn’t it? It’s as if death were an animal or creature, coiled and hidden to strike. The bite or poke of small creatures would not always bother us if it weren’t for their stingers. Bees are truly magnificent and productive creatures. But when this tiny flying bug gets close, many of us scream and hide. We aren’t so afraid of the bee, but the reaction our skin will have when stung. Some of us even have allergies that make bees deadly. There are stronger stingers, like jellyfish, scorpions, and stingrays. Often there are barbs that hook in and release the venom.

So death's barbs hook in and release its worries, its sorrow, its confusion. We know the sting of death by its lasting results. The gripping thought that we will not see a loved one again; the frustration of an early death or a death that seemed to come before that person's time; the awful feeling that we did not reconcile with the deceased; the looming ache that maybe this is all there is, and that when death comes there is no end – these things sting along with the tears bubbling over our eyelids onto our cheeks. What's more, we fear that life is so fragile that maybe it was an accident in the first place.

But we are told that "*the sting of death is,*" in fact, "*sin.*" This reminds us that this world was not created for life to end. This world was created for life to continue in a paradise of union and communion with God. And when our first parents **sinned**, **death** entered as punishment because of God's **Law**, "*If you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die.*" Once sin got its foot in the door, it was open enough for death to waltz on in.

So Jesus removed the sin. He took its punishment, He bore the sting of death on His body, He became sin for us. He died once for all that the many might receive righteousness. But He wasn't a sinner, so there was a problem for sin and death. The Law was stuck on Him, because He was perfect. His perfection meant death really had no business stinging Him. So the stinger was left on Jesus death, for sin was removed on His perfection. Even though a bee may survive after it stings, it has lost its defense.

The proof of this is Jesus' resurrection! He who is the Sun of righteousness broke the bonds of death, bringing light and healing to the world. Joyous day! The powers of darkness are overcome; the Lord is the Victor!

So you and I may see the appearance of death, like a bee in our bonnet. It may flap and buzz and bother, but it is only there to suggest fear. Its sting is truly gone. It has no attack on those who believe in today's promise.

Do you still feel the stinger? Do you still have those chronic aches life has ended, may end, in destruction? When will the bee finally die? I know that it seems slow. But when it happens, the bee dies quickly. Death, with all its worries, sorrow, and confusion, will disappear fast. In an atomic, indivisible moment, like the flutter of an eyelid, the bee dies.

There will be a last trumpet. There will be a final call. It will sound lively for those who are alive in Christ. You will see Jesus again. His death came early in life so that you will live beyond any span of years. God reconciled with you in Christ. There is more to come after this. You are a stranger here; at home in heaven your tears will have no sting. Do you know what that's called? That's called victory, a victory robbed from death in Jesus, removed along with its sting, revealed to us by faith.

Victory says Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! He lives! So victory says believers too will be raised in glory. Though you too may be laid in a tomb, though you too may be martyred because of your faith, though you too may bleed, You too live to die no more. Amen.