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Welcome to the New Life Podcast and Ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from the apostle Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 50 through 58. I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 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.

01:12

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable. And we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written. Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh, death, where is your victory?

01:40

O death, where 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 beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. This is the word of the Lord.

02:13

Are we the first generation that won't die?

02:18

There's some who think this.

02:21

There's a movement that has been going on mainly in Silicon Valley amongst very rich tech people that are trying to cheat death. One of the persons who's become a little bit famous, for this there was a Netflix documentary done on him, named Brian Johnson. He developed some pay apps and he's become a billionaire. And he's now obsessed with living forever. He's spent upwards of \$2 million a year in order to figure out his body.

02:51

by his, to measure every aspect of his body from his lipid levels to urination speed to brain plaque with the goal of reversing the aging process. He called it Project Blueprint. For every morning between 7 and 11 a.m. he eats the three same vegan meals. Nutty pudding, a blend of nuts, seeds and berries and pomegranate juice. Super veggie, black lentils topped with broccoli and cauliflower. And a third, a rotating dish for some variety I guess.

03:21

consisting of vegetables, roots, and nuts. He exercises for an hour every morning and takes up to 111 pills a day. He claims that his regimen, or protocol as he calls it, has already slowed his speed of aging, giving him at 46, that's how old I am, the maximum heart rate of a 37-year-old, the gum inflammation of a 17-year-old, the facial wrinkles of a 10-year-old,

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according to his website, his biological age he claimed until recently is 42.5 according to the one measurement of changes in DNA which is known as the epigenetic clock. In other words, he has spent about three years shaving off maybe a little more than three years of his life.

04:09

He's not the only one pursuing this. There are others who are pursuing longevity studies, studying people who live a long time, living into their 80s and 90s to see what makes them

live longer. There are people who pursuing medical technologies and medical science, which will help people to live longer, and some claim live forever. Some of the work that is being done is to try to edit our gene code to switch off the genes that cause us to age.

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cause them to go in reverse, kind of a reverse aging situation. So there are some people that believe that we eventually will be able to attain immortality either by reversing aging in our bodies through science or by downloading our brains into something else so that we can live without a body.

04:58

This sort of activity has created quite a stir amongst people. Brian Johnson himself has gathered quite a little following. He does not deny that there's a religious aspect to all of this. He understands, I think, as most of us understand, that if someone were actually able to achieve immortality, were able actually to become immortal, everyone would want to copy them. Everyone would want to do what they do, follow their...

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their protocol, follow their activities, do what they say should be done so they can also achieve immortal life. And people are already doing this with Brian Johnson. He has quite a following in several different cities. They gather for something called Don't Die Gatherings. They have t-shirts on them that say Don't Die. They do meditation. They go on hikes. And for the starting price of \$300 a month, up to \$1,000, they can also buy his food and his supplements so they can live forever. Will this be

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the last generation that won't die, or the first generation that won't die. Color me skeptical if I need to see proof of someone who has conquered death first. Science has yet to produce anyone who has reversed their aging. Science has yet to produce anyone who has passed, you know, going into long life. Maybe science will be able to prolong life. Maybe science will be able to prolong at a good deal. But something tells me that we will be unable to

06:26

completely reverse the flow of aging and that Brian Johnson will die.

06:34

In the text today, we find that there is a discussion along these very same lines about death. Death is something that we all have in common. Every single human being, with the exception of a couple that we read in scripture, has died and will die. It is something that we all face. It is something that we all deal with, either psychologically or ignore if we're young or any other ways of coping with it. But everyone is going...

07:03

to die, we all face it. And for many, this prospect of dying is something that haunts them, and something they try to change, to try to prolong, to try to put off. People like Brian Johnson are trying to cheat death. But we all hold in common this aspect that we're all aging, some of us feel it more than others, and we are all going to die. The claim that is being made in this text today, as I said,

07:32

Color me skeptical unless we can produce someone that has defeated death. The claim in the text today in 1 Corinthians 15, and we're going to be looking at the end of it, but last week we looked at the beginning of it, and we're going to cover, essentially not in detail, but in view as the whole chapter. The claim here is that we do have someone who defeated death.

07:56

We do have someone who rose again. And the claim at the beginning of the chapter is that hundreds of people have witnessed this. Now, this could be a fanciful tale, it could be a made-up story. But the claim of the New Testament is that this happened. That Jesus Christ raised from the dead. And that He appeared to upwards of 500 people at one time. And so

if we do have someone who has verified the fact that they have defeated death, if that is true, as I said earlier in the service,

08:26

the quote from Yaroslav Pelikan, if Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, it changes everything, doesn't it? Just like if this man, Brian Johnson, actually is right and I'm wrong, and his method of eating stuff in the morning, intermittent fasting, all the supplements he takes, exercise that he does, actually extends his life forever, then people will follow him, right? He will have quite a following, and people want to do what he does and...

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do what he eats and follow his ways. And if that's true of him, it's also true, I think, if Jesus did rise from the dead. If it's true that Christ rose from the dead, then we should want to find out how he did it and follow him.

09:11

So this is essentially what we're seeing today. And the claim in the text today is that Christ did this, and if we want to live forever, we need to follow Him and His regimen and His protocol. What is it? Three things we see in the text today. The first is this, that in Christ we can live forever. In Christ we can live forever. Paul says that the fallen human nature cannot achieve immortality.

09:41

The fallen human nature cannot achieve immortality. He says the perishable cannot become imperishable. And the other thing that we all have in common besides death is we all have this flawed body. This is a body that ages. This is a body that gets sick. This is a body that endures pain. We all have a body like this in different degrees. We share it. And Paul is asserting that there's no way for this perishable body to become imperishable.

10:12

And that the only way that we can become immortal is to be in union with the immortal one who has defeated death. There's a phrase that is repeated several times in this passage and I'm going to keep coming back to. It is, Christ. When Paul says in Christ, so he says, in Christ we shall all be made alive. This is in the middle of the chapter and I know that's not printed in your bulletin, but it is in the middle of chapter 15.

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where it says, verse 22, as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Whenever Paul says in Christ, he's referring to union with Christ. How is it that we will all be made alive? How is it that we will become imperishable? It is those who are united with Christ. In Christ means union with Christ. How can we be united with Christ? What is the protocol for union with Him? The protocol, the regiment, the diet,

11:08

if you will. Paul says in Galatians is that we become one with Christ through our baptism and through faith in Jesus. So how is it that we can become immortal, we believe in Christ, and we become a part of his body? In Christ we are all made alive. That's the essence of what Jesus says to Martha, isn't it? We just read that beautiful passage from John chapter 11 about raising Lazarus from the dead.

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And in the middle of that passage, he says to Martha, and we can all empathize with her, and with Mary, her sister, why didn't you come? You could have come. You could have healed him, Jesus. We've seen you heal hundreds of people. Why didn't you come? And Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. What kind of an answer is this? The answer, in other words, is not for them, it's for us. Yes, Jesus could have healed Lazarus.

12:05

But he did this miracle in this way, recorded in John chapter 11, for you and for me. He says, I am the resurrection in life. He who believes in me, though he die, will live again. And he who believes in me will never die. And he says, do you believe this? In essence, how we

become united to Christ is to believe that. We don't have to follow a special diet. Although Paul says, physical training, diet, taking care of yourself has value.

12:35

It has value, it's not to be shunned, but the way we achieve immortality is not by trying to make this perishable body imperishable. The way we achieve it is to believe and trust and be in union with the immortal one. Because the only power in this universe that can change our fallen human bodies to an immortal one is the power of God. The very power that created the universe and the very power that rose Jesus from the dead. So in Christ, we...

13:05

can live forever. But the second thing we see here, and this is kind of the main point of this little passage, is that in Christ we will be changed. We will be changed. Because he says, look, the perishable cannot become imperishable. The kingdom of God does not, the perishable, inherit the imperishable. And he says, look, the perishable

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cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. must become impaired. And how will our fallen, perishable human bodies become immortal? They have to be changed. In fact, we have to be changed. In Christ, we are changed. There's two changes that are being alluded to here. One's already and one's not yet. The first change that we have when we are in Christ, when we are united in Him, is our soul. We have an immediate change of our soul. This is what theology calls regeneration. It's being made alive again.

14:01

The Bible speaks of us being dead in our transgressions and sins. Our natural state is fallen. So how can we be made alive? First, our souls have to be made alive. We experience that when we believe in Christ. We experience that now. When we are in Christ, we are made alive in our spirits, in our souls, and we are enabled to worship God and follow Him. Our wills are freed so that we can choose to do what He desires. But we live in this in-between time.

14:31

We live in what we call the already and the not yet. Our souls have been changed, but our bodies haven't. I don't know if you noticed. My body reminds me more often these days. It has not been changed. Your body has not been changed. And so we long for the resurrection of the dead. We long for our bodies to be changed. Because Paul says, look, this perishable body cannot last forever. And in fact, modern science knows this. The way that they are trying to cheat death and achieve it,

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is by editing the body to change it. They're trying to use a process called CRISPR, which seems to be fraught with danger to actually edit our genetic code in order to reverse, click off the gene that causes aging and reverse that process. In essence, change your body. You will change your body from one that ages naturally to one that doesn't. And that's a different body.

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Science understands that this current body that we have, even if we take care of it, if Brian Johnson is right and he takes care of his body and he slows down the process of aging, even if he lives to be 300 years old, he will eventually die. The only way that you can become immortal is if you change your body completely. And this is essentially what Paul is saying. Without the advent of modern science, he knows that you can't live forever unless your body changes. What he is asserting is that in Christ, your body will change.

15:55

In Christ your soul has changed and in Christ your body will change. In the moment, in the twinkling of the eye, at the final trumpet, the dead in Christ will rise, imperishable with a new body that will never fade and those who are alive will be changed and become imperishable. And that's the only way you can live forever. This body has to be changed. What will it be like? We don't fully know. We have a picture of it in the resurrected Christ.

16:25

who still eats, still talks, still has a physical body, still enjoys fellowship, and he's still the same person in a lot of ways, but he also can pass through doors and do other things. Now, is that because he's Jesus or because he has a glorified body? We don't know the answers to all this. What we know is it will be changed. Some scholars and biblical interpreters have alluded or said it's like a seed that becomes a plant. The seed and the plant have the same DNA, but they're different.

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a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Maybe the outward change will not be as drastic, but the change in what we were able to do and be will be drastically different. But we will be the same person. We will not be raised as some other person, but our bodies will be changed. So in Christ, we can be changed. Both our souls are changed and we look for the future where our bodies will be changed and that's the only way that we can become immortal. But the third thing we see here

17:25

And this is interesting because it is, I think, the point of the whole chapter, and we need to spend some time reflecting on this, is verse 58. In Christ, your labor now is building the kingdom of God. Because, we can all look for the future. And if 1 Corinthians 15 is just about the future, one day you're going to be changed and one day you're going to rise again, okay, we'll wait for that.

17:54

Paul's ultimate point as he concludes the chapter is here's what this does for you now. Look at verse 58. Verse 58 in chapter 15, it's printed in your bulletin, says, therefore, now when I was in seminary, biblical or Bible teachers would say, what's, when you come across the word therefore, which is *gar* in Greek, gamma alpha rho,

18:24

You gotta ask yourself, what is the therefore therefore? Why is it there? A therefore tells us that this has been the point of the whole discourse. What is Paul's conclusion to all this chapter about the resurrection of Jesus and our future resurrection? Verse 58, Therefore,

my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Why?

18:54

Because in Christ, in the Lord, your labor is not in vain. Your labor is not in vain. The point of Paul's telling us all this about the resurrection is, yes, to believe in it, yes, to look forward to it, but to know the impact of the resurrection on your life now is that the work you're doing, and I don't mean just missionaries, I don't mean just pastors, the work that you do every day during the week is building the kingdom of God.

19:24

And that is the mystery that Paul alludes to at the beginning. How is this? It is a mystery, but your labor is not in vain. All the things that we do that seem to not amount, all the things that we do as we sang in the song, the thorns and the thistles that crop up, all the pain and sorrow that we endure in our lives, and we're not sure if it measures up, all the diapers we changed, all the sleepless nights we've had, like all of those things we wonder.

19:52

If it matters, and this verse says it does, it does matter, it matters. All your labor that you are doing in Christ as one united to Christ is not in vain. It is building the kingdom of God. This is such an important teaching for us because so much of Christianity has been awash with super spiritualism that only the people that are like

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really pious people, whatever that means, only the people that are doing ministry, like me, or missionaries, or Bible teachers and professors, or folks that, you know, do this overt, outward service and ministry, those are the people whose work matters. But that is not what the Bible teaches. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that in Christ, your work matters, all of your labor. Not just your praying.

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not just your Bible study, but the stuff you do in the lab, the stuff you do at home, and the stuff you do with your family, and everything else that we may do during the week. Your labor is not in vain. The resurrection means that somehow, in the mystery of the power of changing our lives and changing our bodies, that the work we do today, the work you do tomorrow and all this week, is building the Kingdom of God. Now I think there's a couple of really

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innate human needs that are kind of touched on here. We've already touched on the universality of death. I don't have to explain why that is important. We've touched on the universality of our fallen bodies, how they get sick and they age and so forth. But what about the universality of the human need to matter?

21:42

to make a difference, to do something important. I was reading a story this week and just came across my phone from the Washington Post and it interested me because of where I'm from. Now, when I moved here, of all the surrounding places, I think the only place I'd ever heard of growing up from around here was Watkins Glen. And some of you know why.

22:12

because of the race. There's a NASCAR race in Watkins Glen, and I grew up in the South, and South Carolina and North Carolina is all about stock car racing. So I'd heard about Watkins Glen, and it's interesting, when I moved here, this place, Ithaca, for all sorts of reasons, felt a lot more like home than Missouri ever did. Sorry folks back in Missouri, because I grew up in Appalachia. I grew up in the hills.

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I grew up in this kind of place, and it just felt so much more like home. And the fact that there's a NASCAR race nearby kind of connects us that. Well, this article came across my feed just to give a little local connection, because this person I'm about to talk about raced over there, is about this man named Dale Earnhardt Jr. Dale Earnhardt Jr. was the son of Dale Earnhardt, probably the

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debatable but I'll say it, the greatest stock car racer that ever did it. Dale was from rural North Carolina, just like rural South Carolina, very similar to me. Actually related to Rachel's family in some distant way. He was an amazing stock car racer. He had a son named Dale, Dale Jr. Dale Jr. was pretty much neglected by his dad.

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all his life because his dad was always off racing stock cars. He was always off doing his thing. And the biggest thing that Dale wanted from his father was his love, was his attention. He wanted to know that his father was pleased with him. And so he spent his whole life trying to do that. Most of his young adulthood and teenage years was spent drinking and partying because he was trying to erase the pain of it, like not having a father, whoever it...

24:02

outwardly expressed his love. And when he became a start car driver, then he found a way maybe that his dad would appreciate him. And it says in the article that when he won a race, was about the only time his dad ever came around and expressed his appreciation for him was when he won a race. If you know anything about Dale Earnhardt though, he died at the age of 49 in Talladega. His car ran into the wall in an accident and he died.

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And so Dale Jr. spent the rest of his life chasing the ghost of his dad. I won't go into all the details of this article because you probably won't care unless you care just a little bit about NASCAR or you're from the South. the conclusion of this is where the reason why I'm telling you about it, the conclusion is I think that's something we can, a lot of us, resonate with. Because he wrestled with his dad and wondering if his dad approved of his life.

24:57

Dale turned 50, which meant he actually passed the age of his father when he died. And as he gathered with his family at that birthday, he said it was nearly midnight when his wife and several friends joined. Another party was just getting started. And this reporter asked Junior, that's what everybody calls him, Junior, about a podcast he wants to do, the one that he can never have. In other words, he's hosting a podcast. Who would you want to have on your podcast?

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And he said he would want to have his dad on. And he said, what would you ask your father? He pauses, thinking about it, and smiles. And he would ask him, how'd I do?

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How'd do?

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That question is one I think that is also a universal human question. How am I doing? We long for the approval of our parents. We long for the approval of parent-like people. And ultimately, we were longing for the approval of God. How did I do? How am I doing? I think the beautiful message that Paul is getting through to us here this morning is you're doing great. In the Lord your labor is not in vain.

26:11

If you are in Christ, united to Him, following Him, we are imperfect. All of us. And we all mix sin and good works with bad. We all do it. Christ died for those sins, but He also died to cleanse your labor. And in the Lord, your labor is building the kingdom. And when you go to stand before Him one day at the Last Judgment, when the trumpet sounds, and you go before the tribunal of Christ, He will look at you and say, well done.

26:39

my good and faithful servant, enter in to the joys prepared for you. Because in Christ, for those of us who are united to Him, your labor is not in vain. You will be changed and you

will live forever. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested.

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