

## Hope of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:35-44

We don't know the historical details as to why Paul wrote what we know as 1 Corinthians 15, but it is obvious from what he wrote, that there were some in the Corinthian church that were having a real problems dealing with death and what Christ's resurrection means for our own hope of resurrection and eternal life. Apparently, some were even saying that Christ didn't really rise from the dead.

Throughout history, there have been those who have claimed that Jesus' resurrection was a spiritual resurrection. That he was resurrected in the hearts and minds of his followers. That it wasn't actually a body resurrection. It's obvious from 1 Corinthians 15, however, that the apostle Paul was having none of it. We have hope as Christians of a resurrected, eternal life, Paul assures, because Jesus, himself rose from the dead.

It is only human to have questions. When we're in a hospital watching life slowly drain from a loved one and our earnest prayers seem to go unanswered. When tragedy strikes suddenly and inexplicably, we have questions. Losing a loved one is always painful and difficult to face, but this was causing the Corinthians to question their hope. In the face of death is there any hope of eternal life? Is there any hope of resurrection?

But the Corinthians weren't the first, and they certainly weren't the last to be uncomfortable with death. We are uncomfortable with death. We've honed our unease with this inevitable fact of life into an art form, and we've turned into big business.

First, there is the healthcare and pharmaceutical industry. Certainly modern medicine and drugs have made a huge impact on the quality of our lives. We're living longer now than ever before, but undoubtedly much of our efforts are directed at fighting off and undoing the constantly creeping signs that death is on its way.

Then there is whole diet-nutrition-supplement angle. How many diet books do we buy? It seems that best-seller after best-seller is a diet book. How much food is marketed as low-fat, low-cal, low-carb, high-energy, high-nutrient, gluten free, all natural or organic? Slap one of those labels on a package and we'll happily pay more for it.

Vitamins and supplements are a 7 billion dollar a year industry in the United States. More than half of us take them on a regular basis in hopes that we can delay the inevitable.

We do these things because we love life, yes, but also because we are uncomfortable with death. I remember one of the very first funerals I had to do as a young minister...

Paul goes to great lengths in 1 Cor. 15 to establish that Jesus rose physically from the grave. There was continuity between the body that was put in the tomb and the one that came out. Paul says that this is the foundation for everything we believe as Christians, and it is the basis for our hope that we too shall be raised physically. These things he says are of first importance, Paul says. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith is in vain. We have no hope in the future, and we are wasting our time here this morning. There are growing numbers of people who think that this is a complete waste of time. But, if Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, that changes everything. This is why Paul goes to such lengths to establish eyewitness testimony to the resurrected Jesus.

That is what Easter is all about. Jesus was crucified and died on the cross. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, but on the third day that tomb was found empty. It was empty for good reason, because Jesus had risen from the dead. He appeared physically numerous times, to hundreds of people. He walked and talked. He ate and drank. People saw him, heard him, and touched him. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we can have assurance that we will rise from the dead. It will be a bodily resurrection. But what will our resurrection bodies be like? Paul tries to answer that question in 1 Cor. 15.

*<sup>35</sup> But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" <sup>36</sup> How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. <sup>39</sup> All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.*

*<sup>42</sup> So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

*If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

Though there will be continuity between our bodies that are buried and our bodies that are raised, our new bodies will not be like our old ones. Much like the caterpillar that has become a butterfly. It's the same body, yes, but it's new.

- The arthritic 87 year old man who died of heart disease and kidney failure will not be raised an ailing 87 year old man with failing joints.
- The 12 year old that died of Leukemia will not be raised in a cancer ridden pubescent body.
- The crack baby born with spina bifida, won't be resurrected with a deformed back

No, Paul says that the body that is raised will be different from the body that is sown.

I've heard some speculate that we will be raised at the equivalent of our physical peak. I have to admit there are times when I wish I could turn back the clock on my body. I've fantasized about if I knew what I know now, but had the body I had when I was 22, think of what I could do.

But when it comes to resurrection and heaven, that just doesn't quite get it.

I just don't believe physical resurrection means that we will be raised in the 22 year old version of our bodies. I'm not what I was a twenty-two, but I wasn't perfect then. My eyesight was already going to pot. I had six wisdom teeth that had come in. Two of them were very crooked and they wreaked havoc on my mouth. My teenage acne hadn't fully faded away yet, and I got these occasional skin rashes that hadn't yet been diagnosed. It may be a whole lot better than my body now, but I'm not sure that's the body to spend eternity in.

So, just what kind of bodies will our resurrection bodies be? The Bible doesn't picture our resurrection bodies in vivid detail, but Paul does give us a glimpse. He offers a few hints in the form of some comparison-contrasts that he makes in vss. 43-44.

### **I. Perishable - Imperishable**

In 1 Cor. 15 Paul makes it very clear that though we will be raised physically from the dead, our bodies will be of a different nature. Just as the heavens and the earth will be made new, so will we. Paul says that there is one kind of body that belongs to earth, but a different kind of body belongs to heaven (40). The body that dies is perishable Paul says (42). It will be raised an imperishable body. What does that mean? Well a perishable body means that it's subject to the processes of breakdown and decay that affect the entire world. Things wear down and get used up.

- Joints just don't work like they used to.
- Muscles atrophy and lose their strength.
- Hair follicles quit growing hair. Eyes quit seeing. Ears quit hearing

Science calls it entropy. There is a scientific law called the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics that describes the dispersal and breakdown of energy that happens in nature when there isn't an outside force to counteract it. It's a fancy way of saying things fall apart.

The end of this process is death. Working to non-working. Living to non-living. This is what perishable is.

What use would it be to be raised in yet another perishable body? I can see it now. Jesus comes back and we're all raised from the dead. "Okay, everyone, here's your new bodies, but be careful. You've got to make 'em last for all eternity. So just take it easy okay." We'd all have to spend eternity in bubble wrap.

There were several people raised from the dead in the Bible. Elijah resurrected the son of a widow in 1 Kings 17. Elisha raised Shunammite woman's son in 2 Kings 4. Peter raised a disciple named Tabitha in Acts 9, and Paul raised a guy name Eutychus who fell asleep during one of his sermons. Jesus raised a widow's son in Luke 7 and a synagogue ruler's daughter in Luke 8. The most well-known resurrection is probably that of Lazarus in John 11. But all of these people were raised with the same kind of perishable bodies they had to begin with. They boy, now healed and raised, likely grew up into adulthood, but guess what? He died again someday. The same with Jairus' daughter. And how about Lazarus? Though raised and healed from the illness that originally killed him, he only lived to be killed by something else later.

That's not all that our hope is. That's not why we give our lives to Christ. That's not why we pray and worship, so that someday we can get another body that will fall apart again. My hope is that my resurrection body will be something more, that resurrection will do more than just return me to my old life. What will this something more be? This isn't just pie in the sky fantasy.

Paul says that the body that is buried is perishable, but the one that is raised is imperishable. Now perishable we understand. We live with it every day. But what is imperishable? That may be a bit harder to define.

Imperishable is something I don't know. I've never seen it. I don't know what it looks like. Does that mean the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics will be suspended? That nothing in nature will decay or breakdown? That the very principles of the transfer of energy will change? That physics as we know it will be different? I don't know. Does it mean we will be different at a cellular level? Will a microscope be able to detect molecular differences? Will our genetic code be rewritten? Will there be some rewiring at a subatomic level? Could it be we're talking about the mysteries of quantum physics? I don't know.

But Paul uses a word in vs. 51 to describe what will happen when we are resurrected. He says we will be “changed” or “transformed.” The Greek word Paul uses here means to change the form or substance of something. The idea here is metamorphosis. We won’t just be getting our old bodies back as they were. They will be transformed. Our bodies will be raised, but the raised body will be changed in some way. Paul compares our present bodies as seeds. The body that’s buried is only a seed for what’s to come. Yes, our resurrection bodies will still be us, but transformed into so much more. We’ll be getting something else, something better, something more.

Our resurrection will be more than just a medical marvel. We’re not talking about the resuscitation of a body that’s been lacking life signs for a few minutes. Our resurrection means the full recomposition of bodies that are fully decayed and decomposed. It will literally be a re-creation. Adam and Eve were created from the dust of the earth. We will have to be re-created from the dust to which we have returned. This requires nothing more than the full miraculous, supernatural, creative power of God. It is no stretch then, to imagine that God can resurrect us, re-create us absent all of the influence and effects of sin, and with the same kind of glorified bodies as Jesus.

My resurrected body will be me, but it will be more me than I have ever been. Your resurrected body will be you, but it will be you beyond what you have ever been before. It will be us not just renewed and restored, it will be us transformed, glorified and exalted. We will be something more.

## **II. Dishonor-glory.**

Paul adds to comparison-contrast between the perishable body and the imperishable is that ***it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory***. We are a glorious creation. Scripture says that people alone were created in the image of God. We bear His image, His imprint on our souls. But that image was marred by sin. Sin corrupted God’s glorious creation. What God made as the pinnacle of His creation has been tainted by our sin. Our rebellion against God dishonored what he did. We carry the effects of this dishonor all through our lives. We live lives always longing for something more, but not living up to our created potential. We are held back by the numerous consequences of our sin. This isn’t just spiritual. It’s physical. The very fabric of nature has been affected. The Bible says that all creation groans from this dishonor. This affects our bodies. Even the healthiest of us are born with genetic imperfections, little defects, abnormalities that limit us in some way. Some of us face significant

genetic defects, disease, or deformity. Through life we have to deal with crippling illness and the breakdown of our bodies.

But our resurrection bodies won't be like that. Instead of dishonor, Paul says they will be raised in glory. Glory simply refers to brilliance or splendor. Our resurrection bodies will no longer be marred by sin or its effects. In our resurrection bodies there will be no genetic impurities, no viral infection, age related dysfunction, illness or disease. Finally, we will be able to realize our full potential. Will be able to be all that God intended us to be.

### **III. Weakness-Power**

Thirdly, he says our perishable bodies are sown in weakness. They will be raised in power. We know all about weakness don't we? We are so limited. We have to stop for a breather before we climb another flight of stairs. Our shoulders hurt every time we move our arm a certain way. Our leg aches after even a short walk. We can't even walk to the bathroom without putting on our glasses. Someone else has to open the jar for you. Those of you still young enough to think I'm exaggerating. Just you wait. There are many of us here that can only daydream about waterskiing or hiking up a mountain. We know what it is to be weak, to be feeble, to be exhausted, to feel helpless.

But Paul says that our resurrection bodies will be raised in power. We don't know what that's like, but we can imagine. All traces and causes of weakness will be gone. One writer says of our resurrection bodies, *"It will be equal to all the requirements of the eternal life. It will never grow weary; never become exhausted; never have to fail because of lack of strength."* Imagine never having to wonder if you can make it. Imagine never having to calculate just how much it will hurt. Imagine never having again to think, "If only I could do that. " That's being raised in power.

### **IV. Natural vs. Spiritual**

Paul offers one more comparison-contrast. He says that our earthly bodies are natural, but our heavenly bodies will be spiritual. Now the natural body we know all about. They are natural bodies suited to this natural world. Elsewhere Paul calls our natural body an earthly tent, a broken jar of clay.

But what will our spiritual bodies be like? This is the mystery. It almost sounds like a contradiction. What's a spiritual body anyway? Paul doesn't mean that our resurrected bodies will be non-physical, non-material. We live in a place where there is a line between the physical and spiritual. Sometimes it is a big line. Sometimes the spiritual is almost impossible to see. But in our resurrections

bodies on the new heavens and the new earth, the physical and spiritual will be a seamless whole. There will be no line. We will be perfectly integrated beings. There will be no more the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Paul is saying that our resurrection bodies will not be merely natural bodies. Another way to translate this would be to say that our resurrection bodies will be supernatural bodies. They will transcend the physical. They will be beyond nature as we know it.

What form will such a spiritual body have? Of what sort of substance will it be made? What functions will it have? What new abilities might we possess? We can only wonder. Scripture does not tell us.

The one hint we have is Jesus. 1 John 3:2 says, *“what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”* This brings us all right back to Easter. We know that Jesus rose physically from the grave. People saw him, heard him, and touched him. He cooked and ate and engaged in physical activity. His resurrection body was a physical body, but we also know there was something very different about his resurrection body. People saw him, talked to him, and walked with him without knowing who he was until their eyes were opened. He walked through walls. He disappeared from one place and instantly reappeared somewhere else far away. Were these things a part of his resurrection body, or simply miracles he performed as the Son of God? I can't say for sure. Many Bible scholars believe that the post-resurrection body of Jesus wasn't even his fully glorified body. He maintained his pre-crucifixion body as evidence of his resurrection. Remember how the disciples saw and even touched his wounds. These scholars believe that Jesus didn't receive his glorified body until he ascended into heaven.

Whatever kind of body it will be, it is a body that will not die again. Whatever kind of resurrection body that Jesus has, we are promised in Scripture that ours will be the same. Paul says in Phil 3:20-21:

*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Imagine that. What Jesus' body is like now, so shall ours be. My new body will be me, but more. Your new body will be you, but more.