

Christ Reformation Church

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Christian, You Have Nothing to Fear

(Some Thoughts on the Intermediate State of the Body)

October 25, 2015

Sermon Text: Various

Scripture Reading:

1 Corinthians 15:35ff

Introduction-

We fear not being in a physical body, and rightly so. When the Lord created man, He created him soul AND body. You cannot live in a physical world without a physical body. Our fear of being “unclothed” as a mere spirit is perhaps reflected in the universal fear of “spirits.” Halloween is approaching and the very basis of it is focused on death, ghosts, spirits, and “other-worldly” beings, all of which cause *fear*. Remove fear from the world’s celebration of Halloween and you neutralize the thing itself.

All of this to say that when it comes to our thoughts of heaven and of the nature of what we will be when we leave this present world, we must admit, we are afraid. Not just afraid of death itself, but of the unknown that lies the other side of it. And largely, I suggest that this fear resides in the notion that *we don’t want to be ghosts*. That is to say, we do not want to live in a place where people are spirits and where things are just *weird* and unknown to us. I want to see people. I want to shake their hand, hug them, talk to them, and recognize them.

We don’t look forward to living in a dream.

We all know and look forward to the resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:49-52 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (50) I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (51) Behold! I tell

you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

And yet I think that we tend to entertain thoughts of what is often called *the intermediate state* in just such a way – that it will be like living in a surreal dream that isn't, well, all that *real*. This is wrong thinking. It is not in accord with Scripture. And I want to show you that this is the case this morning. Namely,

When the Christian dies and leaves his present body, before the resurrection and return of Christ, he will be real and recognizable. You will be you! In fact, he will have what I would call, the intermediate body.

Different Kinds of Bodies

Listen once more to Paul in 1 Cor 15 –

1 Corinthians 15:35-41 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (36) You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other

grain. (38) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. (39) For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. (40) There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

Now I know that Paul is primarily speaking here in this chapter about the final body that we will have at the resurrection. He was dealing with people who were saying there is no such thing as the resurrection of the body, but that heaven has to be totally "spirit" because, they said, all physical "stuff" is evil and limiting to the soul. Not so says Paul. Christ is risen! His body was and is *real* with scars, with the capacity to eat, be seen, be recognized, and so on.

But I also think that this statement of Paul's – *For not all flesh is the same...there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies...God gives it a body as He has chosen* – tells us that the Lord is quite capable of giving us some kind of body which is suited for life in His presence, even before the resurrection.

And this subject is not merely one of theory and hypothesis and theological speculation fit for doctrinal cud-chewing in academia. It has very, very important and practical implications for us. *Christian, you are going to be you and you are going to have a body that is recognizable as you.* Call it temporary housing if you will, but it is real. Let me show you:

The Case of Samuel 1 Sam 28:3-25

1 Samuel 28:3-25 Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. (4) The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. (5) When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. (6) And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets.

(7) Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor." (8) So Saul disguised himself and put on other

garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." (9) The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?" (10) But Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."

(11) Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." (12) When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." (13) The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." (14) He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

(15) Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I

am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do." (16) And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? (17) The LORD has done to you as he spoke by me, for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. (18) Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. (19) Moreover, the LORD will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The LORD will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines."

(20) Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. (21) And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, "Behold, your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what

you have said to me. (22) Now therefore, you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." (23) He refused and said, "I will not eat." But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed. (24) Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread of it, (25) and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

Now, I do not know (no one does) exactly what this woman saw when she saw Samuel. He frightened her. But we also know that *it was Samuel. He looked like Samuel. He wore a robe like Samuel.* He was known as Samuel. He knew Saul. He was not some spectre or spirit apparition. He was not a ghost. He was Samuel.

And there are many other such accounts in Scripture.

Appearances of the Angel Gabriel

Angels are another type of created being, and yet as they interact with the rest of the creation, they do so as *men*.

Daniel 8:15-18 When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. (16) And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." (17) So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end." (18) And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up.

And again-

Daniel 9:20-22 While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, (21) while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. (22) He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

Similarly you have the appearance of angels, one of whom may well have been the pre-incarnate Son of God, in the case of Abraham:

Genesis 18:1-8 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. (2) He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth (3) and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. (4) Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, (5) while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on--since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." (6) And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." (7) And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. (8) Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

And Lot –

Genesis 19:1-3 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth (2) and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." (3) But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

These are angels interacting with human beings. Daniel could recognize Gabriel "the man" when he saw him the second time. These angels, says the Apostle to the Hebrews, are ministering spirits for the benefit of Christ's people –

Hebrews 1:13-14 And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? (14) Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Are they some kind of vapory "ghost being" when they are not visible to us, or is Gabriel, for example, the same as

he was when Daniel saw him? The point of all this is to say that to be with the Lord once we die and leave this present mortal body, does not inject us into some kind of unreal, surreal place with weird lights, totally unknown things, and voices coming out of mist are the norm. No. We will be us. We won't have to wait until the resurrection to see Daniel, Moses, Abraham, Paul, Peter, and those we have known and loved in this life who departed in Christ.

But there is more.

Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-26 "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. (20) And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, (21) who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. (22) The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, (23) and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (24) And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue,

for I am in anguish in this flame.' (25) But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. (26) And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

Consider these points:

1. Both the rich man and Lazarus remained themselves after they died. Their positions changed (“reversal theology”), but they did not in regard to their identity.
2. The rich man, in torment, could *see and recognize* Abraham and Lazarus. He even addressed Abraham, and Abraham spoke to him.
3. The rich man was able to sense thirst, asking for water.

Whatever “body” we have in the intermediate state, we will be us. We will be recognizable as us. We will be “comforted.” All this even before the resurrection.

The Bible never presents what we will experience the moment we die as some

radically different, frightening, ghostly place. In fact, then, this means *there will be so sense of fear at all when we die and see the Lord*. We will be home. Not fully until the resurrection, but it will be home more than anything we have ever known as home in this world.

And that isn't all.

The Mount of Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-6 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. (4) And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." (5) He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." (6) When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. (7) But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." (8) And

when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

NOTE: We are meant to see Mt. Sinai here. The thundering, terrifying voice of God so that the people were terrified. BUT notice the difference this time: JESUS! He comes, He TOUCHES them, and says “have no fear.” This is the gospel as opposed to the thundering of the Law. Also note that Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets) are seen here to point to Christ. The Bible, both Testaments, are unified and in agreement.

Now, Moses and Elijah appeared. They were speaking with Jesus. The disciples recognized them. It WAS Moses and Elijah. You could see them. You could hear them. They weren't disembodied, vapory ghosts *even though the resurrection has not yet taken place*. This, I believe, tells us once again that we will have some kind of intermediate pre-resurrection body fit for a real place even though the New Heavens and New Earth have not yet come.

Why is this important? Because it removes fear. It shows us that our fears of what awaits us are unfounded *if we are in Christ*. We are surely going to find that this great truth is indeed, *great truth*:

1 John 4:17-18 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.