

Last week we talked about death.

We saw that death is the entrance into the realm of God’s wrath and curse.
When you die, you don’t cease to exist.
Your body and your soul both die –
but neither your body nor your soul ceases to exist!
That’s why Jesus says in John 11 that the one who lives and believes in him
will never die.

Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus, and said to Martha,
“Your brother will rise again.”
Martha replied,
“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”
Jesus said to her,
“I am the resurrection and the life.
Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and the one who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Think about that.

If you believe in Jesus, then in *one sense*, yes, you will die.
There will come a day when your soul will depart from your body,
and your body will be buried six feet under.
But Jesus says that the one who lives and believes in *him* will never die.
In other words, if your body and your soul both belong to Jesus,
then you will not experience death as the horrific curse that it is.

That’s why Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 15 that there is no sting of death for the believer.
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
It’s why Paul refers to the believer’s death as “sleep” (like Jesus did in John 11).

After all, the wages of sin is death.
If Jesus has taken our death upon himself,
then the one who lives and believes in Jesus will never die.

Question 38 of our Shorter Catechism asks:

Q. 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A. At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

Question 38 concludes part 1 of the catechism.

There are two parts to the catechism:

“what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”

We started with the question, “what is the chief end of man?”

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Too often, when we think about “glorifying” God,

we think about what that means in terms of our *obedience*.

We need to remember that our chief end – our primary purpose and goal –

is to glorify God *and* to enjoy him forever!

The full enjoying of God is just as central to our existence as our glorifying him!

The theme of enjoying God – of delighting in him –

is also found in Psalm 16, which we sang earlier.

Psalm 16 is a prayer for endurance.

David rejoices because he has confidence that God will indeed preserve him.

The last verse is especially significant:

“You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

David’s eschatological vision is both future and present—it is already and not yet.

David dwells secure in the present because he is confident of his future.

“The path of life”—the way in which he must walk today—

is known to him because he sees by faith the promise of the resurrection.

Jesus is the singer of Psalm 16.

David had said, “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.”

But David died – and stayed dead.

David saw, by faith, that there must be a holy one who would not see corruption.

There must be one who would triumph over death and the grave.

As Peter says in Acts 2, after quoting Psalm 16,

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David
that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him

that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,

he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ,

that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.” (Acts 2:29-32)

1. Raised Up in Glory: the Resurrection of Jesus and Our Resurrection (1 Cor 15)

a. The Resurrection of the Body: from Adam to Christ (v1-49)

Let me summarize Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 15.

Paul starts by reminding the Corinthians of the *gospel* –
the good news – the message of which Paul was a herald.

And he lays out what is of *first importance*:

this is what is most important – what belongs in every creed!

“that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
that he was buried,

that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (v3-5)

and then to the rest of the brothers, etc.

In other words, the gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done in history.

The message of the gospel is not primarily an appeal for *you* to do something.

The message of the gospel is a story about what God has done.

Greek philosophers went around telling people how they ought to live.

The apostles used an entirely different method.

As J. Gresham Machen puts it,

"the strange thing about Christianity was that it...transformed the lives of men
not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story;
not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event."

(J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p47)

If this story didn't really happen, then the whole Christian message
isn't worth the paper it's written on.

As Paul says, “if Christ has not been raised,

then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” (v14)

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (v17)

The resurrection is the single most important event in history.

If the body of Jesus is still in the grave, then that means that *no one* can escape death.

If the body of Jesus did not rise in triumph,

then sin still has dominion.

But in fact Christ *has* been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep
(notice how Paul follows Jesus' example in speaking of death as “sleep” for the believer).

Jesus is the firstfruits of the harvest.

All those who belong to him will be raised with him at his coming.

Only then will the last enemy (death) be destroyed. (v26)

After all, what is the point of *anything* in the Christian life, apart from the resurrection?

If the dead are not raised – then do whatever you want!

But if Christ *has* been raised,
then “Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.”

Both Christian doctrine and Christian morality are rooted in the event of Christ’s resurrection.

Paul then turns to the question of the resurrection body.

“With what kind of body do they come?”

And Paul distinguishes between the different kinds of bodies –
humans, animals, fish all have different kinds of bodies;
there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies –
each with a different kind of glory.

And Paul describes the resurrection in terms of seed that is sown.

“What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.

It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”

Paul is not contrasting *physical* with *spiritual* –

the word “natural” comes from the Greek word *psuche* –

from which we get our word “psyche” – it means “soul.”

Paul cites Genesis 2, which says that Adam became “a living soul.”

Therefore a “natural” body refers to a “soulish” body –

and so the first man – the man of dust – Adam –

had a body characterized by soul.

But the second man – the man from heaven – Christ – the last Adam –

had a body characterized by Spirit (*pneuma*) –

because in his resurrection he has become the life-giving Spirit.

The work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit is so closely identified,

that Jesus can be called the Life-giving Spirit.

In his glorification the Holy Spirit declared him to be the Son of God with power

by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

Or as Peter said on the day of Pentecost,

“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God,

and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,

he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.” (Acts 2:33)

So when Paul calls Jesus the “man from heaven,” (15:47)

he is saying that NOW, in his glorified humanity, Jesus is the man from heaven.

For the first time in human history,
a man actually sits at the right hand of God.
Adam was the son of God, it is true.
But Adam was never glorified to the right hand of God.

David's throne was figuratively said to be at the right hand of God (Psalm 2:6; 45:6; 110:1),
but no man had ever been raised from the dead,
and exalted to the right hand of God!

In the several resurrections of the OT (and in the resurrections performed by Jesus),
the people who raised from the dead lived for a few more years,
and then died again.

Raising someone from the dead is a very impressive miracle,
and I don't mean to diminish it in the least;
but remember, they all died a second time!

Jesus was the first man to be raised from the dead, never to die again!

But Jesus was raised, as Paul said earlier,
as the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (15:20)

And because Christ is called the "firstfruits" you know that the full harvest is coming.

Notice how it's all about Christ.

Apart from our union with Jesus Christ,
we have nothing.

All of the benefits of redemption are rooted in Christ.

b. The Imperishable Inheritance: from Christ to the End (v50-58)

But watch where Paul goes with this.

Paul says that we shall be changed.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

These mortal bodies cannot live forever.

We must be changed.

"This perishable body must put on the imperishable,
and this mortal body must put on immortality." (15:53)

What does an imperishable, immortal body look like?

It looks like Jesus.

"We shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (15:49).

I can't tell you any more than that about what it looks like.

But it is a true, human body.

Paul does not say that we will *exchange* our mortal bodies for immortal bodies.

Paul says that we will *be changed*.

This perishable body will "put on the imperishable."

How?

Well, is this part of the application of redemption?

Yes.

Then it must be through union with Christ!

Every part of redemption is *in Christ*.

Because Jesus has been raised to the heavenlies,
and sits at the right hand of the Father,
therefore, all who are in him will bear his image.
And if he has a spiritual body, then so will we.

And in that day of harvest:

“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.’

‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” (15:54-55)

These two passages are taken from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14.

Those passages were talking about the exile.

Isaiah 23-27 spoke of the destruction of the enemies of Israel,
and the glory of Mount Zion,
when God would restore the fortunes of his people.

Isaiah 25 declared that even death would be swallowed up forever
when God vindicated his people.

Hosea 13:14 declared God’s judgment against Samaria—
against the northern kingdom of Israel.

God would judge his people for their sins,
as verse 16 declared, “Samaria shall bear her guilt
because she has rebelled against her God.”

This was the problem Israel faced throughout her history.

If God would always judge his people by the law,
then they would always bear their own guilt.

Death and exile would always be our lot.

After citing Hosea 13:14, though, Paul goes on to explain why he chose such a passage!

“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.” (15:57)

Because Jesus has taken the penalty for our sin,

because he died for our sins,
and was raised for our justification,
we now have the victory.

We have the promise of the resurrection—death’s sting has been removed.

And notice how Paul concludes the chapter.

He does not merely tell the Corinthians to think about how wonderful this will be.
Rather, he urges them to action.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:58)

The hope of the resurrection ignites us to action.
It inflames us with confidence to labor diligently.
Because we *know* our work is not in vain!

What is our work?

What is “the work of the Lord”?

What did Jesus say?

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your heart, and with all your strength.
And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Because you share in Christ’s life,
you are to look more and more like him.

As we have been united with Christ in his death,
so will we be united with him in his resurrection.

As we have suffered with Christ, so also will we be glorified with Christ.
The imitation of Christ itself is rooted and grounded in our union with him.
Imitation is grounded in participation.

The hope of the resurrection impels us to live godly lives.

2. Openly Acknowledged and Acquitted in the Day of Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)

That is why the catechism tells us that we

“shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment.”

What does this mean?

I’d like you to turn to the very end of the Bible – Revelation 20:11.

At the end of the book of Revelation, John tells us:

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.
From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.
And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne,
and books were opened.
Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.
And the dead were judged by what was written in the books,
according to what they had done.
And the sea gave up the dead who were in it,*

*Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them,
and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.
Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.
This is the second death, the lake of fire.
And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,
he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Scripture consistently tells us that at the final judgment
we will be judged according to what we have done in this life.

How can we stand in that judgment?
Notice that there are many books opened.
And then there is *another book* – the book of life.

The Lamb's book of life contains all the names of those who belong to the Lamb –
those whose names have been written in the book of life
from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8, 17:8).
The Lamb has ransomed them for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9),
and he has full paid for all their sins.

Therefore, when the books are read, all their sins are covered.
If their names are in the Lamb's book of life, then there is nothing against them!
The only record that will be read on that day
will be the record of their good deeds –
(as Revelation 19:8, says, "it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen,
bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.")

Yes, believers and unbelievers will all be judged according to what they have done –
but since Christ has paid for all the sins of his people,
therefore they will only be judged for their good deeds –
and thus they will be openly acknowledged and acquitted on the day of judgment.

That's what Jesus says in Matthew 25, when he speaks of the final judgment.
He says in verse 37, "then the righteous will answer him..."
These are not the self-righteous who are condemned throughout the gospels.
No, these are the truly righteous.
They are those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb,
and have had all their sins forgiven.
What do you call someone who has had all their sins forgiven?
Righteous.
The righteous are those who have been forgiven,
and therefore respond with joy, love—and *new obedience!*

That's why the righteous are said to be those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger,
clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned.
That's why James calls true religion, "to visit orphans and widows in their affliction,
and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (James 1:27)

Because when you care for the "least of these my brethren"--
when you care for those who have been united with Christ,
you are caring for Jesus.
And if *you've* been united to Christ,
and you have been raised with him, and seated with him in the heavenlies,
then you simply can't be the person you used to be!

The resurrection changes our focus.
We realize that the pursuit of wealth, status, and prestige is hollow.
Jesus Christ is seated in glory, with the name that is above every name,
but he didn't get there by pursuing wealth, status and prestige.
He humbled himself, serving the poor, the widows, the orphans,
and even the tax collectors and prostitutes.
Because he knew that the only route to glory was through the Valley of Humility.

The resurrection calls us to see the glory that shines through the midst of suffering and humility.
As Paul says:
"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

3. Made Perfectly Blessed in the Full Enjoying of God (Revelation 21:1-22:5)

Because in the resurrection we will be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God
for all eternity.

John describes this in Revelation 21.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.
He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,
and God himself will be with them as their God.
He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,
neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore,
for the former things have passed away. (v1-4)*

How do you describe the new creation?
Well, how do you describe the resurrection body?

When you think of the glorification of Jesus –
that is something like the glorification of creation.

The first heaven and the first earth will pass away – and the sea will be no more.
Some people think that this will mean that this creation will be obliterated,
and God will start over.
But that does not fit with Paul’s analogy of the resurrection body –
it is sown mortal, it is raised immortal.
Because Paul’s point is that there is continuity between *this* body
and the resurrection body.

So it would seem that there is some continuity between this creation and the new creation.

But others go too far in the opposite direction.
They want to say that this creation will simply be purified from sin,
and so all the “best parts” of this creation – and man’s handiwork in it –
will be preserved.

I suspect that C. S. Lewis is closer to the truth in the Narnia series
when he portrays the new creation as the *real thing* to which this creation pointed –
and in which this creation participates as a shadow to the reality.

And the best thing about that glorious land
will be the fact that *he* will be there.

If you have spent your whole life running and hiding from him –
then I don’t suppose that sounds very attractive.

I know that some people are looking forward to “heaven”
chiefly because they’ll get to see their “dearly departed” loved ones again.

Be careful.
Because what that means is that you have loved them more than you have loved God.
Revelation 21-22 urges us to have a different perspective:
you should long for the heavenly city
so that you can see Jesus!

What we need to be doing *now* is cultivating our love *for him*.
Delighting in God – enjoying him –
rejoicing and being thankful for all his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.