

The Resurrection Body of Christ the Lord

(Part 1)

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The Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the triune God, who became the God-man by virtue of His virgin conception and incarnation, is the only human being in the universe who possesses a glorified body.

Consider for a moment the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This was one of the most spectacular sign miracles that the Lord Jesus performed at His first coming. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews were astounded by what Jesus did that day in Bethany near Jerusalem.

John tells us that “many of the Jews who...had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him” (John 11:45). In fact, “a great many of the Jews knew that He was there [in Bethany]; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead” (John 12:9).

But the leaders of Israel were terrified: “Then the chief priests [i.e., the Sadducees] and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’” (John 11:47, 48). So they not only “plotted to put Him to death” (John 11:53), but as well, “The chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (John 12:10, 11).

What a statement of the spiritual blindness of sinful man! No one even questioned that Lazarus had actually died, or that he was now actually alive. Why did not the leaders of Israel investigate the source of Jesus' power and ponder His claims?

The answer is infinitely tragic: “This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). Thus, “although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him” (John 12:37).

Yet, however spectacular the raising of Lazarus really was, it could not compare to the glory of Christ's resurrection. Lazarus was brought back to mortal life. He still possessed a sin nature and died a second time. This was true of all those who had been raised from the dead by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24), Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37) and the Lord Jesus (Matt. 11:5), as well as those who would be similarly brought back from death by Peter (Acts 9:36-42) and Paul (Acts 20:7-12).

Observe carefully what happened when Lazarus was raised. First, the giant stone that blocked the entrance to his tomb had to be moved away so he could come out. Second, his grave clothes had to be removed so he could walk (John 11:39-44).

These things were not necessary for Jesus. The great stone that blocked the entrance of His tomb had been “taken away” (John 20:1) – not to allow Him to come out, but to allow Peter and John to enter in (John 20:3-8).

Likewise, the grave clothes that had been wrapped around His body were not removed by human hands. The apostle Peter entered the tomb first, “and he saw the linen cloths lying *there*, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple [the apostle John], who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed” (John 20:6-8).

What does all of this mean? The conclusion is obvious: Jesus arose with a special kind of body, a glorified body, which could pass through grave clothes without disturbing their position and pass through a large stone without moving it. This is what John “saw” and this is what he “believed” (John 20:8).

How can we be sure of this? The answer: “The same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and . . . showed them *His* hands and His side” (John 20:19-20). In His glorified state, He could pass through a door without opening it. Neither tightly wrapped grave clothes nor a huge stone nor a closed door could block His movements.

Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the realm of the dead to a new, glorious form of human existence. He was “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).

Let us consider this further. Remember first that during the 33 years our Lord walked on the earth no one really doubted that He was a genuine human being. The overwhelming question was about His deity. Even the apostles struggled with this issue from time to time (cf. John 16:29-33). His enemies hurled this accusation at Him as they prepared to stone Him: “You, being a Man, make Yourself God” (John 10:33).

But now the major question that Christians must resolve concerning Christ is this: Does our Lord Jesus possess a genuine human body today and even forever? When He rose from the dead on the third day, was he still fully human as well as fully divine? Or did He simply appear to be human, just as He did on various occasions in the Old Testament?

Beginning at the Garden of Eden, our Lord, the second person of the triune Godhead, appeared as a human being. Adam “heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” and heard Him ask, “Where *are* you?” (Gen. 3:8, 9).

On another occasion, Abraham saw “three men” near his tent in Mamre. One of them was the pre-incarnate Christ, who not only looked fully human but ate a meal prepared by Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:2; cf. v.1-8).

But these were theophanies (appearances of God), not incarnations. Amazingly, during one unforgettable night, our Lord not only looked human but even felt human – Jacob

could testify to this after wrestling with Him by the River Jabbok for hours until he finally surrendered to his gracious and sovereign Lord (cf. Gen. 32:24-32 and Hos. 12:4).

Also, are we aware of the fact that even angels could appear like men? Two angels provided the most spectacular example of this when they sat down with the pre-incarnate Christ to share that meal while Abraham stood by and watched (Gen. 18:1-8; cf. Heb. 13:2). A little later, these angels appeared to Lot in the gate of Sodom and accepted his urgent invitation to spend the night in his home (Gen. 19:1-3). Others in Sodom also saw them and assumed that they were real men (Gen. 19:4-5). But these angels, who temporarily looked and acted like men, were not genuine members of the human race.

In like manner, in His Old Testament theophanies the Son of God did not become a genuine, full participant in Adam's race. He did not fully identify genetically (in DNA coding) with Adam and Eve. Furthermore, without the distinctive physical features of a human person, no one would have been able to recognize His face, eyes or voice from previous appearances.

By contrast, note how carefully the inspired text of the New Testament illumines the recognizable continuity of His resurrection body with His previous, non-glorified body.

First, on the morning of His resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and said to her, "Mary!" She immediately recognized His voice, and replied (in Hebrew): "Rabboni!" (John 20:16). This is significant. His human voice had not changed. Therefore, His glorified body was identical, to this extent, with the body He possessed until His death.

Second, He appeared to the 11 apostles later that day, pointed to the nail prints in His hands and feet and explained that "a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). This was not just the possession of a human body. It was the same body He had before He died!

His entire body, not just His voice, maintained total identification with the human nature of the Jesus of Nazareth who was conceived in the body of Mary, born in Bethlehem and grew to full manhood and ministry for a third of a century.

In terms of Christ's deity, He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). By His absolutely unique virgin conception and incarnation, God's Son became the "one Mediator between God and men, *the Man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2:5).

This is the only way He could give "Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6). Only by becoming a 100-percent member of the human race could He be our representative, our substitute, our kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew - *goel*) on the cross. "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation [i.e., expiation, the full removal of sin] for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

When He ascended to heaven, He did not leave His glorified human nature behind, "for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

He will thus be God and man – two distinct natures in one Person – forever.

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