

If you have a copy of the Scriptures I'd like to invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, continuing our study in this chapter.

I'll say it's a risky prospect at best to try to sum up our life in just a few phrases. But if I were to attempt to do such a thing I might offer something like this: We are thinking creatures who, once aware of our own existence, are continually discovering how to live while hopefully learning along the way how to face our inevitable death with confidence.

Now if accept that simplistic summary statement of our lives, then it depends considerably how we define each of those phrases. How we define 'living well' and how we define 'facing death with confidence.' And what makes the difference between how we define those terms is the difference in lives that bring glory to God or lives that are caught up grabbing glory from God for the creature's sake. The late, great singer Johnny Cash and then eventually the Vegas entertainer Tom Jones both recorded the Claude Eli song written in 1934, "Ain't No Grave." Are you familiar with this tune? I'm familiar with the Tom Jones version. "Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down. Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down. When I hear that trumpet sound, going to get up out of this ground. Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down."

Now what makes the difference in that lyricist is confidence in the One outside the grave. Because if I'm the body in the grave, I've got no power to do anything. Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down. How do you know? Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down. When I hear that trumpet sound, going to get up out of this ground. Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down. Now the confidence that comes is a confidence that comes from the heart of someone who understands the whole arc of the story of redemption. It understands that God created all of us. It understands that in that creation, a perfect environment where Adam and Eve were in bodies--but bodies perfectly equipped to relate to God directly--they sinned against God. The arc of the story of redemption continues, because in that fall, in that fall from grace, God still, in fact, even in that, had his plan of redemption already in view. And he would offer the One who would take on flesh and blood just like us, who would live in a body in order to conquer death and hell, so that his body, raised from the dead, would be the firstfruits of bodies like ours, which will be raised from the dead. So there ain't no grave gonna hold my body down. Ain't no grave gonna hold my--you see the point? It's the confidence that comes in the One who initiates and oversees and completes the redemption story. It's not confidence in us. It's not confidence in this--in what I can do. It's confidence in the One who has done it all. Amen? Now I want that kind of confidence, and I want you to have that kind of confidence. Because if you have that kind of confidence, if you have that faith, then your confident faith helps my weak faith. That's how the community of faith works. We need one another. It is one body, we're joined together. We're not isolated members having that kind of confidence. And Paul desired that kind of confidence for the church in Corinth and for all those who would eventually study and read this letter that he wrote.

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write this letter. It's for the Corinthian church in that first century. It's for us today. So we pick up our study in the 15th chapter of the apostle Paul's first of two recorded letters. The Corinthian church had been heavily influenced by the Greek philosophy that was surrounding their town there, their city of Corinth. The Gnostic philosophy that said that the body is inherently evil. All that's good within us is the spirit, so it really doesn't matter what you do with the body. And the Corinthian church apparently had gotten affected by this in some form or fashion. Paul writes to press back against the creeping skepticism that the bodily resurrection of Christ is not important or didn't occur. So we saw a couple of weeks ago in verses 1 through 11 that Paul testifies to Christ's righteous life. That that righteous life was given as a sacrifice for sinners, that he was crucified, died, was buried and according to the Scriptures on the third day he

rose from the dead. In fact, Paul says there are people still alive at the writing of that letter who you can talk to—500, at least, that have seen him. Paul says this is a historical fact: Christ was raised from the dead. But then he goes on, and Pastor Randy elaborated on this last week, Paul describes in graphic detail how dangerous the denial of the bodily resurrection is. The most devastating of all, if Christ is not raised, then our faith is useless, we're the most to be pitied. Even worse, we are still dead in our sins. But Paul says in verse 20, but indeed, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He has been raised from the dead. He is, verse 20 says, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now we heard a couple weeks ago that the falling asleep is a way that the first century church referred to people who had died. But the firstfruits aspect of verse 20 is where we'll see a lot of Paul's expansion today. It's an agricultural term. It's when you place a seed in the ground, it's that crop that comes up, the firstfruits that comes up—that's the harvest, and all the crops that follow. And Paul says, but in fact, Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. He was the firstfruits, and we are the fruit that follows. We are the harvest that follows. And that's what he's trying to point out. So Paul turns the attention of his readers to the creeping skepticism that denies that something as complex and incomprehensible as the resurrection of these mortal bodies could ever even take place.

Let me read from 1Corinthians chapter 15, and verse 35 is where we'll start, and we'll end in verse 49. God's word for us. "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 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. 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. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. God's word for us.

So Paul begins this argument or this discussion with a question. He's addressing someone, maybe even in the crowd, there at Corinth. So someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Now that's a good question. Paul anticipates the question. How are the dead raised? What kind of body will we have? How can a decayed, disintegrated body--long since returned to the dust of the earth--be raised from the dead, have substance, and the ability to experience existence? Good question. It seems like a good question to me, anyway. But Paul immediately answers with a derisive epithet for the one who still can't see, apparently, what kind of God we actually serve. The God who has revealed himself, this is the God who spoke and all things came into existence. And Paul says, 'You foolish person!' Take a look around you, God does this all the time. He does things just like this all the time. In fact, I just want to point out that in the original language here, in the Greek, 'You foolish person' is in the singular, it's second person singular. So maybe there's just one individual and he's been kind of talking around and stuff, and Paul wants to make sure--somebody might say what kind of bodies do they have? You foolish person. Don't you know the kind of God we serve? It's kind of like kids in the modern day language--Paul would write the letter and he'd say, 'Dude.' Dude, haven't you listened to who God is yet? He would have no problem restoring these bodies to a glory like you have never experienced. That's the God we serve. That's the God who raised Jesus from the dead, and that same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that is at work in us, those who believe.

So Paul says, I'll answer the question. I'll answer it four different ways. Let's take a look at nature, let's take a look at the kind of bodies that resurrection bodies will be, let's take a look at the diversity among earthly and heavenly bodies and see something about the glory that we're supposed to be exhibiting, and let's take a closer look at the differences between Adam and Christ--the first Adam and the last Adam.

So Paul says, take a look around you at nature. What you sow does not come to life unless it dies, and what you sow is not the body that is to be, but it's a bare kernel. It's perhaps a wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. This is the first of a couple of agricultural references that Paul is using in this chapter. Maybe the first was found in verse 20 where he calls Christ the firstfruits of those raised from the dead. Now I don't know if anybody's ever seen a Calla Lily or not. Dana, in our wedding, chose to carry Calla Lilies, and they are beautiful flowers. Anybody familiar with the Calla Lily? Their beauty only pales in comparison to the bride that carried them that day in 1988. But I don't know if you--I don't really assign homework but I'll give you an assignment here. You may be familiar with the beauty of the Calla Lily, but go home today and Google images, Call Lily and Calla Lily bulbs, because the Calla Lily bulb looks like some kind of a freakish onion-race alien, grossly disfigured, that came through the, whatever, vortex of time to destroy our planet. How does that get to that? How does that onion-alien-race bulb get to be the beautiful, delicately, wonderfully colored Calla Lilies that brides choose to carry down the aisle? I don't know. I'm not a scientist and I don't play one on TV. But it has something to do with germination, it has something to do with disintegration. This ugly thing goes into the ground, it gets wet, it gets moist, it's got dirt and muck all over it. And then a process is enacted upon it, a process from the outside, a process that God has been superintending ever since the beginning of time. It takes place, and what bursts from the ground is a glorious, beautiful 'other' product, but it had in its seed form that thing which came. And that's what Paul is trying to say. He uses the passive voice in verse 37. That body which is to be, that body which is to be--it's in the passive voice, because even that body in the grave doesn't have any activity in it. God is going to do something, and he's going to do something like no eye has seen, like no ear has heard, like no mind can conceive. For all of them who love him, who are called according to his purpose God will do it, and it will be glorious. So Paul says, take a look at nature, see the resurrection occurring on a smaller scale all over the place. This is what God does. Paul says think in these terms. It's difficult for the finite brain to grasp the concepts of the infinite. Just go ahead and give yourself that--it's difficult. And Paul says that doesn't make it impossible. It doesn't make it impossible. Jesus alluded to this in his earthly ministry. In John 12 he said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The 'Son of Man' was a term that Christ applied to himself. We see Stephen saying that in the book of Acts. The 'Son of Man' refers to Christ's full humanity. What Jesus is saying there is, the One who is also embodied, the God-man, the one who has flesh. It's time for the Son of Man--when the Son of Man is to be glorified. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth, it remains alone; but if it dies, it will bear much fruit." That's us. That is us, beloved, bearing the fruit of the One who is the firstfruits of them who have fallen asleep.

So Paul describes that, and then he discusses the continuity of what is raised. God gives a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Everything in its kind, according to its kind--it's the language of creation. Verse 39: "For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another kind for animals, another kind for birds, and another kind for fish." You probably see the language of creation again. It's flipped on its head, now, because in Genesis 1 when all the environments were created for these beings to dwell in them, you see first the fish and each according to its kind, and then you see the fowl of the air and each according to its kind, and then you see the beasts of the field and each according to its kind, and then...then you get to see the pinnacle of creation. That which embodied will reflect the image of Almighty God. "Let us make man in our own image," God said. Therefore, we are that. So there's a certain kind of flesh, and that's what Paul's saying. Each according to its own kind will be raised. This is what he's answering the question, still. This is the type of body you'll have. You'll have a type of body that is fully human, but it is perfectly human.

We can't fathom that. We don't know what that means. All we feel is sin dwelling in our members. We feel the pull of sin. We feel the deterioration that is taking place. Paul says the body is a human body, but it's a different kind of human body. I don't know about you, but whenever I hear this question read, whenever you get into this around Easter time, I want Paul to answer my little itty bitty questions, like, you know, will we all be the same age, what about babies who have died, how about the old person, what about.... And then you start to think Paul is answering the question. He's answering the best question. He's saying, listen, the body decays, it disintegrates. That's like a nothing to God, for him to accomplish. He'll gather those scattered ashes. He'll gather all those from across time, and he will raise them in power and in glory and in an imperishable way. That's what Paul is saying. And in keeping with the seed and the sowing analogy, Paul is essentially saying that what is sown is related to, but not identical to what will eventually be grown in the resurrection. We are what we will be, but not completely. That's what Paul's trying to say with this analogy. All the flesh talk in 38 and 39. So God's plan is not that we are freed from sin by changing life forms, but rather, in the resurrection we will be fully human as it was intended all along except there'll be no hint of sin, and there'll be no presence of sin anywhere in our resurrected bodies. Can you imagine such a thing?

Can you even imagine such a thing? Paul says we're made for glory. That's what 40 and 41 are talking about. Paul says, "There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies" and then five times in the Greek and six times in the English we read the word 'glory.' "But the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, the glory of the earthly is of another. And there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory." We were created to glorify God. Sin shattered that. "We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But Christ came in order that resting in his finished work, believing in him, we might be then those that glorify God. Paul says that because Jesus Christ has gone first and he's established the way, and all of us who believe, with no distinction or preferential treatment whatsoever, for all have fallen short of the glory of God, and all who believe, will be saved. There's no distinction, praise be to God. The process of redemption, then, begins through the humiliation of us admitting that we need a Savior. The recognition that he alone is that Savior, and the sanctification process by which he mercifully grows us from grace to grace, from glory to glory, until one day it's no longer humiliation, recognition, sanctification—it's glorification, where we are raised in newness of life--completely, eternally secure. Can you imagine such a thing?

So Paul says things change, and they do not stay the same. You know that old phrase...Things change, things stay the same. But Paul says, things change, and they don't stay the same. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. Here is the agricultural analogy again. Here's the seed being sown, and he says "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." He says, "If there is a natural body, then there is also a spiritual body." Paul says, listen, this is the basics of what Christ came to do. There is a dwelling place. There is a garden. There is a city. There is substance, and we need bodies fit for that heavenly dwelling. And this is the thing that Christ has accomplished. So we got these four examples. What is sown is perishable; it is raised imperishable. It speaks to our permanence, or lack thereof. Apart from the resurrection our physical existence is an exercise in deterioration. You and I both know this. For those of us who are relatively healthy we know this when our bones creak when we get out of bed. We know this when we're fatigued by the end of the day. We know that these bodies are perishable. For those in our congregation, in our families, who are suffering illnesses, even some grave illnesses, we know this even more poignantly. These bodies are perishable. As soon as we are conceived we are subject to the effects of the fall in the garden. Psalm 103 is a sobering reminder of the perishable quality of our bodies. "For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, and then the wind passes over it and it is gone and its place knows it no more." That's how brief and perishable our lives are. You catch this glance every time you cut the grass and you take the blower out. You blow off the driveway to get it clean again. Stop once and reflect: That's my life. That's the brevity of this life that is perishable.

And if my life is that brief and each day is a precious gift, then it doesn't pay, does it, to hold onto grudges or to keep the emotional skirmishes going on, to waste time and energy on endeavors that ultimately will not matter in the least on that day. It doesn't pay for us to run after sin, to entertain sin, to keep a secret sin or two there in the closet that we can pull out for our comfort. If our lives are perishable, if there is a brief time on this planet that we have to bring glory to God, then none of that makes sense. Does the fact that you are perishable make a difference in the way you relate to others, Tim asked himself. And then you get the benefit from my question. I want that for myself. You pray that for me, please, and I'll keep praying it for you. So Paul says what is sown is perishable, but it will be raised imperishable. This is the greatest thing. These four things, this back-and-forth stuff, as you look forward to death do you have the confidence that this is you? Peter reminded us in that call to worship that we read that the salvation that we have, that living hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to the inheritance that is imperishable, he says, undefiled, unfading. It is permanent. Praise be to God.

Paul says it's also in sown in dishonor, but it's raised in glory. This is the seed that's sown in dishonor--our bodies are ravaged by sin, incapable of completely bringing honor to the One who has made us, the One has given himself to redeem us from the curse. We're unable to bring him honor the way he deserves. But Paul says on that other shore, on that other shore when we will be raised without any spot or blemish or any such thing, we will perfectly be able--in bodies that are kind of like this, but different--we'll be able to honor him completely--glorify God once and for all. Can you imagine such a thing? I know your heart. I know you want to glorify God. The ones in this room that desperately long to glorify God, Paul says, there'll be a day--bank on it, there is a day--because Christ was raised from the dead. And because Christ was raised from the dead you will ask experience that. You'll have the euphoric experience for eternity of being able to glorify the One who made you, because of Christ.

But Paul says it's sown perishable, raised imperishable; sown in dishonor, raised in glory. Then he says it is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power. Paul makes much over his weakness, doesn't he? His letters, his writing about his weakness, and he's the least of the apostles, and he's the foremost of sinners. Doesn't Paul know the rules? Doesn't Paul know that you're supposed to claw and bite and gravel, and doesn't Paul know that only the strong survive? Didn't Paul get the memo? Doesn't Paul know that once you get to the top of the heap you no longer use your claws and teeth, you use your heels to keep the people off the top of the heap. Doesn't Paul know any of those rules? Apparently not. Apparently Paul got the memo from Christ, where he told the Roman Christians, listen, at just the right time, while we were weak, while we were unable to do anything about our condition, Christ died for us. So Paul says, listen, I'd rather boast all the more in my weaknesses. I would rather proclaim the fact that I don't have it together and I can't get it together apart from Christ. That's what I'd like to boast in. I will be glad to tell you I don't have it all together. So if Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness, let me ask myself another question: Then why spend so much energy pretending that we're strong. That doesn't make sense. Because if I pretend I'm strong, and you think I'm strong, guess who gets the glory? I do. Or you do if your pretense is better than mine. But if I'm weak and I admit that, and you're weak and you can admit that, then we both can look at Christ together. His power is perfected in our weakness, and we do amazing things. Amazing things for the glory of God. Amazing things on this planet revealing the One who made us and died to save sinners. That's what we're supposed to do, I think. We'll be raised in power. I read somewhere that in that day—listen, the familiar refrain of Matthew 26:41 will no longer apply. Forever, it will no longer apply. We'll never need to fall back on the truth that we experience here and now. Maybe you've quoted Matthew 26:41. I do it all the time: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." We're not going to utter that again. In that day we'll never utter that word that word. The spirit is willing, and the flesh completely agrees, because the flesh now has been raised in power. Isn't that a glorious thing? Can you imagine?

Then Paul says it's sown a natural body, but it will be raised a spiritual body. It's in the vapor or mist. Paul says the body we'll have will be fit for heaven. It'll be fit for that dwelling where there is no sin, but it will have substance. We know that because Christ's body had substance. It just had a different kind of substance, like the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> dimension kind of substance. In a resurrected body Jesus is able to walk through the door that's locked in the upper room. In a resurrected body he is able to appear to the two on the road to Emmaus, and then he's able to disappear from their sight. But he's eating fish, he's having breakfast with the disciples, he's doing all kinds of things. But he's doing it in a body that Paul tells the Philippians is a glorious body that we will have as well. Philippians 3:20 and 21. Paul says we await our Savior--eagerly await our Savior from there--that when he comes he will transform our lowly bodies into a glorious body—phrase: “like his own.” That's what Paul's saying: this is the kind of body we're going to have. It's a natural body now, but it will be raised a spiritual body fit for heaven. Sown in perishable, raised imperishable; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in glory; sown a natural body. raised a spiritual body.

And it's who we are identified with that makes all the difference. Paul then says, “The first man Adam became a living being, but the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” Are we still only identified with Adam, our first father, or are we by faith identified with Christ, the last Adam? Because Adam is the head of the human race, all of us are identified with Adam by nature. But Christ is the head of the redeemed and we are identified with Christ by faith. Adam became a living soul. Christ, Paul says, became a life-giving spirit. He is the one that causes these bodies to be animated for glory. Adam is of the dust, he is up from the earth. That's how he was created. But Christ is down from the heavens. He condescended, but he's from heaven. And he returned there, and he's prepared a place for all of us who believe. All in Adam, Paul says, ‘earthly.’ All in Christ, ‘heavenly.’ Now bearing the image of Adam, but we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. See, who we identify with makes all the difference.

That's what it is to face death with confidence. It's not confidence in us, it's confidence in Christ. Can you say today with confidence that there ain't no grave gonna hold this body down? Can you say that with confidence? Can I?

I want to close with an illustration from a man named David Niblack. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing his name right. NIBLACK. He's a pastor and he writes blogs on the Gospel Coalition blog. He's a runner. He's been a part of a group of runners, and he just this past Monday ran his first Boston Marathon. And I want to read some excerpts from a blog that he posted on April 19th this week. He had just finished running the Boston Marathon and he had crossed the finish line and he had gone to the restaurant that they prepared for some the runners. He was about two blocks away, he said, when he heard the explosions--explosions that killed three and wounded many, dozens. And Niblack says this, “Even as a pastor I've struggled often to find ways to build bridges to help those in the running community see the relevance of the gospel. I joined with friends from the group as we rode the bus to the starting location.” [I'm just skipping down through...] “Monday's weather was ideal for a race, everything seemed perfect. In the midst of this, I remember sitting on the bus feeling discouraged over how irrelevant Jesus seemed to this crowded bus of optimistic, mostly upper middle class, successful runners.” He says, “But when I walked out of the restaurant I stepped into a world that had changed. Suddenly our achievements, our medals, and even whether we had finished the race became astonishingly trivial. The near-sacred enchantment of the Boston Marathon vanished before my eyes. Our medals became mere pieces of metal around our neck. The finish line was only a band of colored paint, and we found ourselves in a new race--a race to discover if our friends were safe amid the confusion and the sadness. This race had an urgency the marathon never did. Death and evil openly entered the equation and they changed the atmosphere completely.” He goes on to say, “The tragedy in Boston reminded me of the foolishness of assuming that we can judge what is relevant and what is not. In the wonder of his grace God has told us ahead of time which race really matters in life. Jesus wins for us the prize that we could never win on our own, and he saves us from our eternal defeat into his eternal victory. We don't have to wait for evil and

tragedy to confront us up close to relate to it, but we can live in its fullness, day by day. We can live in the fullness of the grace of God," he says, "day by day. Tragedy has a way of making God relevant, and at the finish line of the Boston Marathon it took only seconds for that to occur."

We serve the one who took on a body so that we could know with confidence--we could know with confidence that when our appointment with comes, we will be raised. This meal before us today is a sign and a seal of that. Jesus, when he instituted the Lord's Supper, said to his people, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim my death for sinners. And not just my death, but my victory over death. This is the promissory note that says when you die you will not ultimately stay dead. You will be with me for all eternity. This meal is for those of us who have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They've received the sign of the covenant, water baptism. And they have professed publicly to the world that I'm a sinner, I need a Savior, and that Savior and that saving grace is found in Jesus Christ and Christ alone. That's who this table is for. If that is your testimony, if that is your profession of faith, if that's who you are, if that's where your hope is, then I invite you, when the elders and the deacons distribute these elements, to partake of them, to celebrate. This is Christ feeding you, nourishing you for the walk of faith in this present age. If that's not your testimony, I want to encourage you to refrain. Do not partake of those elements. But if that's not your testimony today, and you want to find out more, then I invite you to find out more. You can talk to me or somebody. You could see these men are to going be serving in a moment. Talk to one of them about this Christ who saves sinners.

Let me pray for us, and then we'll come to the table of the Lord. Gracious God, we pray that you would meet us now in this moment, that you would be pleased, Lord Jesus, to show us yourself. That we will see with the eyes of faith the life that was lived that we could never accomplish, and the death that was willingly died in our place. I pray, Lord God, that you would nourish your people. Nourish us now, Lord, with the grace that is amazing grace, wonderful grace, matchless grace. And cause us then to live lives in this present age that are lives that are honoring to you, lives that are grounded in your power, and lives that are glorifying to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen.