

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

The Resurrection of the Body

May 30th, 2021

Philippians 3:20-21

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Philippians 3:20-21. Every Sunday for the last few weeks Shauna Lee has greeted me at the door as I returned home with a hug an expression of gratitude for how kindly the Lord has been in the arrangement of these topics. It feels like every week we are talking about something that directly addresses the challenges and needs of the moment. It certainly feels that way again this morning. This week our church suffered a significant loss. It is a personal loss. Bob was a friend. He was a friend to many of you. He was kind of the unofficial GRANDFATHER of the church and his loss leaves a hole. And it leaves a wound in us. Bob is happy this morning – but we are sad. And we have questions and thankfully, this line that we are being directed to in the Apostles' Creed addresses many of those questions – so we feel the goodness of the Lord in that.

Now I know that if Bob were here he would say: “Now don't you go making this sermon about me. You just preach what you see in the Bible.”

I hear that.

And we will do that – but we always read the Bible from an actual place. And today that place is a little tender. It is a bit of a sad place – it might even be a bit of a mad place – and that’s ok. God can handle that – and this doctrine can handle that. Christianity is intensely practical – some of the ancient critics said it was TOO PRACTICAL – TOO PHYSICAL and TOO HUMAN.

Well – it is all of those things and for that – this morning in particular – we are thankful.

Today we are talking about the resurrection of the body.

J.I. Packer says here:

“This bit of the Creed was probably put in to ward off the idea (very common for three centuries after Christ, and not unknown today) that man’s hope is immortality for his soul, which (so it was thought) would be much better off disembodied.”¹

I think I may have mentioned back in the series we did on 1 John that the Greeks and Romans tended to think of the body as a CAGE for the soul – a cage they were eager to escape from. The body held us back. The body weighed us down. Salvation for them was about RELEASE – but salvation for the Christians was about RESURRECTION.

We believe that to be to a human being is to be a SPIRIT AND A BODY. We are not ANTI-BODY – we are PRO BODY. The body is our vehicle of expression. It is how we sing, how we smile, how we shake hands, how we hug, how we work and how we worship. It is WHO WE ARE. It is inseparable from US. To be a human is to be an EMBODIED SOUL.

We don’t want to get rid of our bodies – we just want our bodies to be healed.

Healed from the ravages of sin, disease and ultimately DEATH.

Death is the ultimate insult to a human being. Death is the separation of what God intended to stay together. It is de-creation. It is literally DEHUMANIZING. So we are SAD TODAY. We are INDIGNANT on behalf of our brother. We are grieving – but not without hope; because the

¹ J.I. Packer, *Affirming The Apostles’ Creed*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 140.

Gospel says something about the future of our bodies. The Bible talks about a future reunification of our souls and our bodies. The Bible TALKS about resurrection - and today feels like a good day for us to remember that.

So hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 20 of Philippians chapter 3. This is the Apostle Paul writing to the church in Philippi:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20–21 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This morning I just want to try and answer three very common questions about this doctrine. The three questions are these:

1. What happens when we die?
2. When will we receive our resurrection bodies?
3. What will our resurrection bodies be like?

First of all then, what happens to us when we die?

What Happens When We Die?

We address this issue in our Children's Catechism – as well we should. We want our kids to know this – this is CORE CHRISTIANITY. The question in the Children's Catechism is stated this way:

What becomes of the righteous after death?

The answer given is:

Their body returns to the dust and their spirit goes to be with the Lord.

Theologians refer to this as “the intermediate state”; intermediate means “the time between”. They use that term so that we’re not confused into thinking that this is our FINAL DESTINY – it is not. Remember TO BE a HUMAN BEING is to be an EMBODIED SOUL. Which means that after you die – and your soul is separated from your body – you are NOT what a human being was meant to be. So that can’t be your eternal destiny – that can’t be the end – and it isn’t. It is an in between time only – a time of waiting - and thanks be to God it will not last forever. There is a picture of this in the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John says:

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Revelation 6:9–11 ESV)

So John, the last living Apostle, has a vision, in which he sees all those who have gone before him into the presence of the Lord. They have been faithful. They have given witness under duress. They have finished their course and now they are gathered around the throne of Almighty God. They are not completely naked – they have been given a white robe – some sort of temporary covering – and they’ve been told to WAIT A LITTLE LONGER until the full number of their brothers and sisters has been assembled.

Remember – the Bible says that those who die before us DO NOT PRECEDE US into our final reward. We all cross the finish line TOGETHER. The Apostle to the Hebrews – speaking about all the faithful people who have lived and died before us says:

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that **apart from us they should not be made perfect.** (Hebrews 11:39–40 ESV)

Did you hear that? APART FROM US they did not receive what was promised – APART FROM US they should not be made perfect.

They're waiting for us!

They're in a tent, as it were, that has been set up one metre back from the finish line. They're waiting in there, until the whole team has been assembled and then AS A GROUP – as a BODY – we will cross the finish line together and enter into our eternal reward.

So to be clear – those who have passed on before us in faith HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED their glorified bodies. We hear that all the time at funerals – “Uncle Frank is enjoying his new legs up there in heaven; playing a round of golf with Jesus” - but that's not true. Uncle Frank will not be perfected ahead of us. He will not enter into the new heavens and the new earth ahead of us.

Uncle Frank is going to wait for us – with everyone else who has gone ahead before us and when we are all assembled – when God's purposes have been fully accomplished down here on earth – THEN we will all receive our resurrection bodies at the same time and enter into our eternal reward TOGETHER.

That's what the Bible says.

Which leads us to our next question: when exactly will that be?

When Will We Receive Our Resurrection Bodies?

Everywhere in the New Testament the resurrection of the body is described as happening at the same time as Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul says that in the passage that we read at the beginning of the message. In Philippians 3; he says:

“our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20–21 ESV)

He says the same thing, with a little more detail, in 1 Thessalonians 4.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, **will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the

voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:14–17 ESV)

So the Apostle to the Hebrews say, “They won’t precede you”, those that passed on before us, and here Paul says, “we who are left won’t precede them!!”

Nobody is crossing the finish line before anybody else!

The Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an Archangel and with the sound of the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first – but then those of us who happen to be alive – we’ll be changed too in the twinkling of an eye – Paul clarifies that detail in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; he says:

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. (1 Corinthians 15:51–52 ESV)

So there you see!! It all happens at once – in the twinkling of an eye!! When Jesus returns, the dead are raised and changed – and we who are alive are changed – the whole church will be assembled – glorious, healed and immortal - and TOGETHER we will cross that finish line and enter into our eternal reward TOGETHER - thanks be to God!

Which leads us to our last question:

What Will Our Resurrection Bodies Be Like?

Again – Paul addressed that in Philippians 3:20-21, he said, “we’re waiting for Jesus”:

who will transform our lowly body **to be like his glorious body**, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:21 ESV)

So if you want to know what your eternal body will be like – then you go back to the Gospels and you read about the appearances of the resurrected and glorified Christ. And what do you see there?

Well you see, first of all, that he was **GENERALLY RECOGNIZEABLE**.

The disciples **KNEW IT** that it was Jesus when they saw him – even though they didn't always recognize him at first. Do you remember that story in Luke 24 when two of the disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus? Jesus came up alongside of them and began to talk to them. They didn't recognize him at first – maybe he had his hood up, maybe it was raining, maybe he just looked 5 years younger and a little bit taller – we don't know – we just know they didn't recognize him at first. But then they stopped for the night – Luke tells the rest of the story this way.

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. (Luke 24:30–31 ESV)

So he was **THE SAME ONLY DIFFERENT!!**

The Apostle Paul said that too – he compared it to a seed and a tree. He said in 1 Corinthians 15

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. (1 Corinthians 15:36–38 ESV)

So every human body is a like a seed. When it dies we put it in the ground and we cover it with dirt – why? Because we expect something to grow out of that seed! Something **RELATED** to that seed – but different. That's how it is with our bodies. Your eternal body will grow out of your present body. It will be **YOU!** We will recognize it as you! But it will be different – just like it was in the case of Jesus.

There are several other things we can say here by reflecting on the post resurrection appearances of Jesus. We can say with confidence that we will be able to talk, touch, walk, work and eat – Jesus did all those things in his various appearances. He talked to the disciples as he walked with them to Emmaus. He kindled a fire on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He made breakfast. He ATE with the disciples – not just with them – he ate BEFORE THEM – as a demonstration. Luke 24:42-43 says:

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them. (Luke 24:42–43 ESV)

He did that to SHOW THEM what their future would be like.

You will not be floating around in the vast emptiness of space as a disembodied soul. You will have a body! You will smile at your friends. You will walk. You will talk. You will work. You will eat and you will worship.

You will be human – as you were created, saved and glorified TO BE.

That's your eternal destiny. A new heavens, a new earth, a new body, a new you – with Christ and all of us, doing what you were meant to do, without sin, without decay, without disease, without death – FOREVER.

That's what you're affirming when you say that you believe in the resurrection of the body – thanks be to God!

Now, what are the implications of all that for our life and living in the time between?

Implications:

Really quickly then, let me give you 3 that come immediately to mind. The first one is this:

1. We should grieve, but not without hope

Sometimes Christians feel a weird obligation to pretend that death is not our enemy – but it is.

The Apostle Paul said:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV)

Death is the last of our enemies to be defeated and according to the Bible it isn't defeated until the return of Christ and the final judgment. We read about that a few weeks ago in Revelation 20:

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.¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. 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.¹⁴ **Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20:11–14 ESV)

So when is death defeated? When is death itself thrown into the pit of hell? On the day of final judgment. Until then DEATH IS OUR ENEMY.

And it's ok to be mad at this enemy. Jesus said to love our HUMAN enemies but he didn't say we had to love this enemy. He didn't love it. We talk sometimes about how Jesus WEPT at the funeral of Lazarus – but we forget that he also got angry.

John 11:33 says:

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was **deeply moved in his spirit** and greatly troubled. (John 11:33 ESV)

If you have an ESV translation open in front of you there will be little text note by that phrase telling you that the word used there actually means “indignant”. The Strong's Greek Dictionary says the word literally means:

“(to snort with anger); to have indignation on, i.e. (transitively) to blame”²

²Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament

So Jesus was angry. He wasn't angry at the people weeping – he was weeping!! No, Jesus was ANGRY at death. He was indignant! This is not how human beings created in the image and likeness of God should be treated. Brothers and sisters, listen to me – there is nothing in the Bible that obligates you to make friends with death.

Do you understand that?

When death takes one of our loved ones, we don't have to pretend to be ok with that. It's not ok. We can be sad and we can be angry - we can GRIEVE – but not without hope.

Paul says to the Thessalonians:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve **as others do** who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13 ESV)

So you can GRIEVE – just not as others do who have no hope. Jesus grieved! He was angry and he was sad. He was grieving – but not without hope. He knew that Lazarus was going to come forth – he was just about to call him out BY NAME as a sign and a foretaste of the great resurrection that is coming. Jesus said:

an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28–29 ESV)

Have you done good, brothers and sisters? Have you done what you should? We know what that is. Jesus said:

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (John 6:29 ESV)

Have you done that?

If you have then you will be resurrected to eternal life and if you haven't then you will be resurrected to eternal judgment.

So do that.

Believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and you will be saved – and then – right along with the rest of us - you can hate death for the indignity that it is and you can look forward to cheering as death is thrown by Jesus into the deepest pit of hell forever.

That's what it means to GRIEVE with hope.

Paul said that he doesn't want you to be uninformed. He wants you to KNOW THIS – so that you can GRIEVE LIKE THAT.

It is also important for you to know this so that you can LONG for your proper home.

2. We should be eager to go home

Listen to Philippians 3:20-21 again; Paul says:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20–21 ESV)

Paul is saying to these folks: This world is not your home; you know that right? Your citizenship is in heaven! That's your city! That's your country. This world you are living in now is your mission field. And when your service is done, when your deployment comes to an end, you get to go home.

If you've spent any time whatsoever on the mission field, you know that it is an incredible joy to serve – even yet it is tremendously sweet to come home. There are always a few things you miss when you are on the mission field – it's part of the experience. For me when I was travelling in

India it was always the coffee - Tim Hortons coffee in particular. The coffee in India is great – they put the Buffalo Milk in there, and that’s an interesting experience – and I’m all for that – but as anyone who has travelled to India with me knows – first thing I do when I get off the plane is hug my wife and kids and then head directly to Tim Hortons. In a fact in a perfect world Shauna Lee is hugging me with a Tim Hortons coffee in each hand, thank you very much. That’s my love language.

There’s no place like home is there?

Well Paul is saying here, that’s how you need to think about this world in general. You are missionaries FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE. You are here as Ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven. And when your deployment is over – you will go home.

And that’s a good thing.

DEATH is our ENEMY but DYING – is merely our transport HOME!! DYING is nothing to be afraid of. Paul said:

“we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8 ESV)

Every true believer will echo that sentiment. In my last conversation with brother Bob, he made it clear to me that he was ready to go. He wasn’t looking to go - he didn’t want to leave Eileen and the kids, he had prayers and concerns for his loved ones and he said multiple times how he would miss the friendship of his brothers on the board – but he was excited about the prospect of seeing Jesus. He was willing to stay and serve if that’s what the Lord wanted, but he was also ready and even eager to go home.

That’s exactly what you expect to hear from real believers.

Listen, we hate death for what it does to our friends and loved ones. We hate death for the indignity it imposes on human beings created in the image and likeness of God – but dying itself,

for believers, is nothing to be feared. It just means your race is run. It means your work is done. It means your suffering has come to an end and it's time to go home.

That's how a Christian who has understood these things looks at the prospect of dying. We don't go looking for it – we understand the trauma it will be for the loved ones we leave behind - but we don't fear it. We understand that for now, death is just the road we need to travel on to get home.

And that takes us to our final implication.

People who believe in this doctrine ought to be able to endure all earthly suffering with resolve.

3. We should endure all earthly suffering with resolve

Dare I say, even “cheerful resolve”?

The Apostle Paul seemed to incline in that direction; he said:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

You see, Paul saw the whole process, he knew what it was for and he knew where it was going, therefore he embraced his earthly trials with RESOLVE.

Joyful resolve!

James, the brother of the Lord said the same thing, he said:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4 ESV)

Jesus never promised that we would complete our mission under perfect conditions – in fact he said:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

This world is fallen! So you better expect some famine, some earthquake, some plague. You better expect that people are going to hate you – and sometimes they are going to persecute you:

“But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 10:22 ESV)

So that’s the road, brothers and sisters. There are enemies on every side. And the last enemy to be defeated is death.

But AFTER DEATH?

I believe in the resurrection of the Body.

I believe that death will be swallowed up in victory. I believe that one day soon Jesus will come again and he will call me by name and I shall emerge from the grave VICTORIOUS!!

Victorious. Transformed. Embodied. And immortal.

That’s the future. That’s the ultimate hope for all those who put their faith in Christ. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.