

The Resurrection Body

I Corinthians 15:35-58

If you want to live your life well, consider your life from its end.

You may not know when you will die, or how, but you will die.

Your life in this world will come to an end.

At that moment, what will be important about this life?

Answer that question well, and you will go a long way in making good choices in how to live now.

Today, we are going to explore death, and what comes after death.

Have you ever walked through a cemetery and thought about the people who once walked on this earth, but are now lifeless in the grave?

Before Sandy's graveside service, I was reading some of the markers. It is more common than in the past to have a picture of the person on the marker. I was struck by one young lady. In the picture, she seemed so full of life. And yet, her body was already decaying in the ground. What really made me pause is that this young lady had died only a few years before. And she was born in the same year I was born, 1969. She was only in her forties when she died.

That could be me lying in that grave. I have been given more years in this world than that beautiful lady. Her life in this world is over. Mine continues.

I want to live my life now with the same priorities that will continue to matter when my life in this world is over. But more than thinking about the end of life in this world, as Christians, we must also think about the life that comes after death.

The resurrection is a reality that must be grasped.

If this life contains all that you treasure, then you will live for this life.

Learn to set your heart upon heavenly treasure, and you will live even now for heavenly glory.

Paul is addressing Christians who were losing a real hope in Resurrection glory.

He wants them to regain the living hope of the Resurrection body.

Read I Corinthians 15:35-37.

35 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.

Skepticism lives in all of us. Some of the Corinthians had trouble believing the resurrection simply because they could not work out all the details in their mind.

As some people tried to envision dead and decaying bodies coming back to life, it simply seemed too "far-fetched" to be true.

Paul calls this sort of thinking "foolish." A fool, in Scripture, is not someone who is stupid. A fool is someone who chooses the less valuable over the more valuable. Just because they could not "picture" how the resurrection could be, they chose to deny the resurrection. And in denying the resurrection, they were choosing to live for this life, and not the resurrection life. That is foolish.

But Paul doesn't stop with calling them foolish. He shows them that God has placed hints of the resurrection in this creation. Is it not wonderful that God does not disdain the fool? He patiently instructs us in ways that we can understand.

God knew that people would struggle to grasp the concept of death and resurrection. So, he designs "seed bearing plants". Place a single seed in the ground and in the process of its decaying, new life will spring forth. If all you had to look at was a single kernel, could you really envision the whole stalk of corn? When all we have to look at is our present lives, it is difficult to imagine what will be.

Many of our problems with envisioning our new bodies is that our imaginations are so tied to who we are now. The death of this body must occur. And this necessarily means that our hopes and dreams must go higher than what our current minds can imagine.

We should use the good things in this life as a springboard to help us imagine more.

The Israelites were provided with manna throughout their wilderness journeys. But when they entered the Promised Land the manna ended. Why? Because God had provided better nourishment in the Land. The manna was helpful as a foreshadow. But rather than looking forward, what did the Israelites do? They wanted to go back to Egypt.

Chris Rice has a line in one of his songs that I love to think about:

"Deep enough to dream in brilliant colors I have never seen."

I like that. I am confident there will be color in heaven. But will they be the exact colors I see now? I do not know. But I suspect there we will see then colors that we have not yet taken in.

As a somewhat "color-challenged" person, I look forward to the colors in heaven. I really enjoy the crepe-myrtles around Morganton. They come in all sorts of colors. But there is one particular shade of red that I cannot see. Robin thinks that this color is one of her favorite colors. She will point it out to me. "Look at the beautiful red flowers on that tree." I only see the green leaves. It is as if the flowers are invisible.

The point is this. Our current understanding of our bodies in this world, does not suffice to help us understand our resurrected bodies. These two bodies are connected, but they are not the same.

The bodies we now possess are only a faint foreshadow of the bodies we will then enjoy.

But even though we cannot fully see what we will be, we know that we will be like Jesus. And Paul knows enough about Jesus in his resurrection to teach us some general principles about our resurrection.

Read I Corinthians 15:38-39.

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.

Our resurrection bodies will be specifically chosen by God for us.

This may not sound like good news to some of you. After all, God has chosen the body you are currently in, and you may not like it all that much.

We have a terrible time accepting the wonder of how God has particularly made us. We want to be like someone else. The human body is so wonderfully made. Consider how cool it is that your brain can think a thought and your fingers move. Think how fast a message can go from your finger tips to your brain and then back to your fingers. Ouch that stove is hot!

I read one time about the speed and complexity of eye-hand coordination that is necessary to hit a baseball. Engineers have tried to duplicate this mechanically with computers. The ball was in the catcher's mitt for more than a minute before the computer decided to swing.

Our problem is that we don't look at how incredible of a job God has done on each one of us. We only look at those areas where we wish we were like someone else. It comes down to the fact that, due to sin, we cannot accept the body that God has chosen for us.

Maybe we should take a lesson from our pets. We have three outside cats and one very large fluffy white dog. I cannot picture the cats lying in the sun dreaming of being a big fluffy dog. And I cannot picture Sonya, the white dog, somehow wishing she could climb up a tree. They are content, whatever that means for a dog or a cat, with who God has made them to be.

Do you want to be taller or shorter? Do you wish you had a different sort of hair? Do you wish your mind was like that of someone next to you? We all must come to grips that God has chosen the body in which we live. And he has formed us with great care and wisdom and goodness. Do not disdain yourself.

This being said, who you are now is not nearly as wonderful as who you will be.

I know that my being color challenged was not original to God's design. I know that Ginny's partial deletion of the 15th chromosome was not original. But how many other alterations have occurred because of the fall? Hard to say.

But trust this: that when we get our resurrected body, we will not be disappointed.

Read I Corinthians 15:40-41.

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.

Two points:

The glory of this creation cannot compare to the glory of the resurrection.

Even in the new creation, not all glories will be the same.

By glory, Paul simply means its excellence or brilliance.

As it relates to righteousness, we will all shine equally bright.

But as it relates to our place in God's larger plan, are you OK with not shining as brightly as another?

It is as the various parts fit together on the larger canvas that we can begin to see God's masterpiece. We don't all have to be the Sun. We can be a moon, or a lesser star in God's larger plan.

Learning to have contentment with the degree of glory that God has bestowed upon you is a large part of life.

But Paul's main point is that the glory of this world cannot compare to the glory of the resurrection. And he will use 4 contrasts to demonstrate this:

Read I Corinthians 15:42-44.

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead.
 What is sown is perishable;
 what is raised is imperishable.
43 It is sown in dishonor;
 it is raised in glory.
 It is sown in weakness;
 it is raised in power.
44 It is sown a natural body;
 it is raised a spiritual body.
 If there is a natural body,
 there is also a spiritual body.

Our current bodies are perishable.

Some translations say corruptible. But the idea is probably not moral corruption. It is simply that we are a lot like a banana. We are subject to decay. On the other hand, our future bodies will be imperishable. They are indestructible. Maybe this is why so many of us like the Avengers. No matter how hard they get hit, they just get back up like nothing has really happened.

Our current bodies are moving towards dishonor. The process of dying strips us of our dignity. The dying person often loses many of their faculties. They experience incontinence. They can no longer feed themselves. Those things that before would not have required a second thought, now become impossible to do. And then, once the body is placed in the grave, worms and other creatures in the ground begin to do their work. There is not much honor in death. Physically speaking, a person is not at their best in death.

This is why it is right to give dignity to people as they are dying. And after death, to give dignity to the body.

One of the horrors of war is that so many young and otherwise healthy people die. Their lives are brought to a sudden end. I have recently been re-reading a Civil War Trilogy by Shelby Foote. I am at the place in the books where Grant's army is laying siege to the city of Vicksburg. The Confederate army has had a long time to prepare for defense. Grant has more than 70,000 troops at his disposal. And Pemberton has less than 20,000. And yet, when the Union army assaults the defenses they are twice repulsed at the cost of some 4,000 casualties. Grant decides that he cannot take the city by force. And so, he settles down to a siege.

But what struck me was that after initial fighting, there were bodies of dead and dying strewn all over the ground in front of the rebel works. These bodies immediately began to decay. Often the bodies in the heat would swell up to twice their normal size. But if their fellow Union soldiers would go out to get the bodies and try to bury them, they would come into the sights of the Confederate snipers. For days the bodies were lying in the open. The stench was horrible. Finally, the Confederate soldiers called a truce and gave their Union counterparts the time to gather the bodies and bury them.

More than just getting rid of the stench, even in war, it is often recognized that the dead must be given the dignity of a burial.

Death robs us of honor.

But in the resurrection, the human body will shine again.

When you look at another Christian, what do you see? Do you evaluate them primarily through the lens of what your present eyes can see? Or do you evaluate them on the basis of their new heart, and what they will be when they receive their new and glorious bodies?

Our current bodies are weak, and becoming weaker.

Paul is not saying that every human being is weak physically. Of course there are some pretty strong people in the world. But throughout our lives we are shown in various ways how our bodies fall short.

I have been watching Avram Beck learn how to skate board. He usually comes to Youth Group with scrapes and bruises. Avram is talented. He has agility and strength. But even with these he has to deal with the frustrations of not being able to make his body do what he wants it to do. And even though there is joy in making progress, he will never accomplish all that he wants to accomplish. And one day, instead of getting better, he will peak, and then begin to get worse.

At their strongest, our bodies are weak. We all struggle with the feeling at times that we do not have the strength to accomplish what God calls us to do.

But in eternity, we will possess power. Maybe not limitless power. We do not become omnipotent. But we will possess the power to fulfill God's purposes for our lives. What a cool thought to imagine always having enough strength to accomplish all God's purposes for your life.

Our current bodies are designed for this earthly world, and entirely unfit for all that God has in store for us in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Our current bodies are "natural". Understanding what Paul means by "natural" is not easy. Neither is it easy to understand what he means by "spiritual". He certainly does not mean "ethereal" or "like a ghost without a material body."

The contrast is between two qualitatively different types of material existence. Paul is contrasting the quality of life originally bestowed upon Adam and the quality of life that is continually flowing from Christ.

Read I Corinthians 15:45.

⁴⁵ Thus it is written,
"The first man Adam became a living being";
the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

God made man "in his own image." This sets him apart from the animals.

But, if you go back to Genesis you will see that God gives life to Adam in a very similar way to the way that he gives life to the animals.

ESV **Genesis 2:7** then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

ESV **Genesis 1:30** And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

Humans, made in the image of God, are brought to life by the breath of God. And this breath is very similar to the breath that was given to other animals. So, according to Paul's thinking, the natural body is the body that is very much like that of other animals.

In this life, humans are very much like other animals. You can get into trouble saying that today with all of the Evolutionary thinking going around. Humans are not evolved from other animals. But as we live in this world, the life that we have is very similar to theirs.

But, in the resurrection, this similarity will fall away. I do believe there will be animals in the New Heavens and the New Earth. But they will not be resurrected animals. And although they will in some

sense be changed themselves because they will no longer be affected by the curse, they will not become “spiritual bodies” like us.

The spiritual body is the body that derives its life force from the spiritual One: Jesus Christ. The last Adam became a “life-giving spirit.”

The animating, or life producing force, by which we will be driven in the resurrection is fundamentally different from that which drives us currently.

I don’t know how to explain this. It just is.

Maybe it is like the difference between the early steam engine cars and today’s gas or electric cars. They enabled the vehicle to run. But it would take 30 minutes to warm up the engine to be driven. And the boilers in them were large made the vehicles too bulky. Gasoline was simply more cost effective.

When we receive our resurrection bodies, they will be run on the spiritual, life-giving force of Jesus Christ. In some ways, our new hearts run on this already. The Christian does not live on bread alone, but by ever word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Right now we are a sort of hybrid. But in glory we will run on pure spirit. Pretty cool right? But you have to wait for your “spiritual body”.

Read I Corinthians 15:46-48.

46 But
 it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural,
 and then the spiritual.
47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust;
 the second man is from heaven.
48 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.

At present, we identify with the first Adam.

But as believers we should identify more with the last Adam – the man of heaven.

There is an earthly part of you. But that part of you is dying. It is on its way out.

You must think more on the part of you that is of heaven.

You, in Christ, are “of heaven”.

Read I Corinthians 15:49.

49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,
 we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

There is a certainty here. We will bear the image of the man of heaven.

As Christians we struggle with remaining sin. We are not completely the people we want to be. It is easy to think that we will never be truly free from the downward tug of the old nature. But that old nature is tied to our earthly connection to Adam. It is dying. What is not dying is the life in us that is connected to the man of heaven. And we will indeed bear his image.

I Corinthians 15:50.

50 I tell you this, brothers:
 flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,
 nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

You cannot fully experience the kingdom of God in your present body any more than you could begin living in the ocean trying to use your lungs. Your lungs were not designed to support you under the water. In the same way, your present bodies are not capable of enjoying the glories of the future kingdom.

None of us like the thought of death. But apart from death, we cannot experience the glories of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

You should both fear it and welcome it. It is the process of being stripped of the honor and dignity that you do have. But it is the process by which we will gain new honors and new glories eternally.

Read I Corinthians 15:51-53.

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery.
We shall not all sleep,
but
52 we shall all be changed,
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.
53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable,
and
this mortal body must put on immortality.

Some people will not experience the decay of their flesh. Jesus is coming back! And when he does, there will be Christians living on the earth.

Those Christians living at that time will not have to die and decay. Instead, they will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye.

O what a day that will be! Those who have died with Christ throughout history will be reunited with their physical bodies. And those who are alive at that time will experience immediate transformation.

Read I Corinthians 15:54-57.

54 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."
55 "O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"
56 The sting of death is sin,
and
the power of sin is the law.
57 But
thanks be to God,
who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul has come to the conclusion of the matter. The punishment of death that came upon Adam at the beginning is finally removed completely.

What is the sting of death?

If you have ever been stung by a bee, one thing you don't want is to leave the stinger stuck in you. You want to get it out.

Death is terrible, but death with the stinger still in is horrendous.

It is the reality that physical death is really only a foreshadow of an eternal death. Physical death is not all there is. The eternal torments of hell are real. There is no escape from them apart from Christ. The Law of God makes this clear. All men are guilty before a holy and just God. All men are heading towards an eternal and tormenting existence.

When I was young we visited Niagara Falls. As you stand beside the falls, you cannot help but think of what it must feel like to fall into the river above the falls. The thought of inevitably going over the falls, falling to your destruction. This is what death is. It is not natural. It is universal, but it is not natural.

But praise God, Jesus has perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf. He has fulfilled all righteousness. And then he went to the cross and received in his own body the punishment that we deserved. He has taken our sin upon himself. And he has freely imputed his righteousness to us. That is, if we are believing in Christ for our redemption.

And because of the wonderful theological truth of "double imputation". As we come up to the falls of death, they are not falls at all, but rather the entrance into glory. The sting has been removed. Death has been swallowed up in victory!

Don't get mad because God will not affirm your present struggle with sin.

Don't hate God because he hates sin.

Don't try to alter God's standard of righteousness.

Cast yourself upon Jesus Christ, the one God has provided to deal with your sin fully.

Read I Corinthians 15:58.

58 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.

Paul labored to see people place their hopes in Jesus Christ.

That labor was not in vain.

Some would reject Jesus. Some would initially embrace Jesus, but fall away.

But for all who continue to trust in Jesus Christ, who persevere in their faith, their trust will not prove vain.

Our faith is not empty.

What you are striving for is awesome, in the fullest sense of the word.

The world is constantly making great promises to you. But it never delivers what it promises.

God, on the other hand, makes promises that are not empty.

People all around you are living and dying with the stinger still stuck in them.

There is no other way for the sting of death to be removed than faith in Jesus Christ.

People are dying. The death rate is 100%. But only if you tell them the good news of Jesus Christ do they have any hope of the sting of death being removed.

What am I going to care about when this life is over?

1. Have I persevered in my faith in Jesus for my salvation?
2. Have I sought to know and love God more than anything else in this world?
3. Have I attempted to live as a follower of Christ in this world? (daily learning to submit my will to that of Jesus.)
4. Have I sought to help others know Jesus – through my words and actions? (Holding to the standard of righteousness while extending mercy to those who fall short.)
5. Have I loved those whom God has given me to love? (Wife, family, church, world)

These are the priorities that I am striving to live out, by the help of the Holy Spirit.

What are your goals for your week?

Before you lay them out, take some time to dream of the resurrection.

Amen.