

Christ is Risen Indeed:
The Resurrection Body (1 Corinthians 15:35-58)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on April 1, 2018

Introduction

- ❖ I'm getting close to midlife, and though I don't think I've hit a crisis yet, I am starting to feel the effects of aging. When I hit my thirties, I made a point of having annual check ups, and I always got a clean bill of health. But a few months ago, it was the first time my doctor told me to come back for more tests. She noticed an abnormality in my blood test. I'll be honest, it was a bit of a shock. Now thank God it turned out to be a false alarm, but it was definitely a wake up call, reminding me that I'm not getting any younger. **Like everyone else, I'm aging and my body is slowly but surely breaking down.**
 - Just the other day in the church office, Roy asked me if my shoulder was okay because he noticed me rubbing it profusely. I wish I had a story to tell about how I tweaked it playing football or basketball. But, nope, I did it sleeping.

- ❖ **Friends, we have to face the reality that our bodies are aging.** Every year, every day, they grow a little older and a little weaker. A little more prone to injury. A little more susceptible to sickness. We can't exercise or play sports with the same intensity as we used to, and when we try, it takes that much longer for our muscles and joints to recover.
 - Now some of you, due to age or to a struggle with chronic illness or injury, are keenly aware of this reality. You're like, "Welcome to the club". **You feel the pain and frustration of having to bear these burdensome bodies.**
 - But there are many of you here, who are at the prime of your lives. You assume, as I once did, that every doctor's visit will be quick and uneventful. You assume you can pull off a 10K with little to no training. You assume you have many more years on this earth. Death is the furthest thing on your mind.

- ❖ This morning's passage is a much needed wake up call. In the last few weeks leading up to the Easter, we've been studying 1 Corinthians 15. **It's where Paul explains the significance of Jesus's resurrection and the implications if it was just a nice story and not an historical reality.** *"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."* (v17) If Christ himself is still in the grave, if he only experienced *this* life and not a new resurrected one, then our hope in Christ would apply to *this* life only.
 - If Christ has not been raised, then death (the last enemy) has not been defeated. That means, like Christ, we will one day be dead and stay dead. But if Christ has been raised from the dead, then all who die in Christ will one day share in his resurrection. That was last week's point when we covered vv12-34.
 - **Because of the first resurrection, Christians look forward to a future resurrection of the dead where those who die believing in Christ will rise again to eternal life, while the rest of humanity will rise to eternal punishment** (Dan. 12:2; Mt. 25:46; Jn. 5:28-29). All of human history – all who have ever and will ever live – are heading towards a bodily resurrection and one of two destinations.

- ❖ Now this idea, so prominent in Paul's teaching, confused as many people in his day as it does in ours. Look at v35 again, "*But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'*" **Apparently some were confused as to how a future resurrection made any sense.** Because they were picturing dead, rotted corpses trying to imagine that coming back to life.
 - So just as a bad, B-movie zombie flick seems ridiculous to us, in the same way, there were some in the Corinthian church who thought the idea of a bodily resurrection was flat out silly. What kind of body are they going to come back with? It's ridiculous.

- ❖ **Especially since the Corinthians weren't used to burying their dead but burning them.** Like all Greeks, they practiced cremation because they viewed the body, at best, as a shell. At worst, as a prison for the soul. So burning the dead freed them from their bodily shackles.
 - Now even though early Greek converts began to renounce cremation and pick up the practice of burial, many of them tried to picture their dead friends, whose ashes had been scattered to the four winds. They couldn't imagine them rising again in a body.
 - What they failed to understand – what Paul belabors to explain – is that, **in the future resurrection of the dead, a radical transformation occurs.** We rise with our bodies but they're not the same bodies. They're changed. They're transformed to a greater kind of glory. They're imperishable and immortal.

- ❖ That's Paul's argument in vv35-58. **According to his gospel, the Christian's hope is not to one day shed this burdensome body but to see it changed.** Let's dig into that. Let's consider what our Christian hope anticipates. There are three anticipations in the text. 1) Our Christian hope anticipates a bodily future existence, 2) new bodies changed and more glorious than before, and 3) a stingless death and resurrection to an imperishable life.

A Bodily Future Existence

- ❖ The first thing our Christian hope anticipates is a bodily future existence. **We're looking forward to a final destination that will be a physical place.** But for ancient Greeks, that idea didn't fit within their worldview, how they perceived reality. That's what made the idea of a future bodily resurrection so difficult for some Corinthian believers to grasp.

- ❖ As we just explained, Greeks didn't understand your body as being an essential part of who you are. **Because they held to a dualistic worldview that sharply divided the physical and spiritual realms.** Anything material – anything comprised of matter (like your body) – was considered inferior to the immaterial (to your spirit or soul).
 - So, according to that worldview, you are your soul, the immaterial part of you. Your body is just a shell. **So you can understand why Greeks would imagine that after death – after shedding off your burdensome body – that you would enter into an immaterial, ethereal existence in an otherworldly future.** That's why talk of a resurrection where we rise with new bodies made little sense to them. If you already died, why would you need to be reunited with a body? If you finally got rid of it, why would you want it back again? That's what ancient Greeks would wonder.

- ❖ But I'm not surprised if a lot of modern-day Christians are wondering the same thing. Why do we need a resurrection? Why do we need a body in the future? **If after we die, if we're with Christ in heaven, what's the point of a resurrected body?**
 - Those questions only make sense if we've already accepted that dualistic worldview that sees heaven as some kind of immaterial, otherworldly existence. Now to be clear, by heaven, I'm not talking about where the dead in Christ are right now but about the Christian's future, final destination when all is said and done.
 - **If your picture of that heaven doesn't include mountains and rivers and valleys, if it doesn't include buildings and bridges and all sorts of technology – if you're imagining clouds and floating castles – then you're not thinking of heaven.** You're thinking of something else.

- ❖ **Heaven, according to Scripture, will be an earthly place.** In Revelation 21, we're told that heaven (God's dwelling place) will one day be on earth – a newly renewed earth. **So if you God were to show you heaven today, you would recognize it.** It's not because he's going to transport you to some otherworldly location that replicates what things look like on earth. **No, if he shows you heaven today, you would be looking at earth.**
 - It'll look different, but only different in that the curse of sin and all its ruinous effects will have been completely eradicated. It'll be new in that sense. But it's still the earth. When all is said and done, God's plan is not to transport his people away and abandon his creation on earth. His plan is to redeem and renew creation. **He won't give up on the earth any more than he gives up on us.** So if our future destination is to be with God on a newly renewed earth, then we're going to need newly renewed bodies.

- ❖ I understand that certain verses in our passage could be used to argue the opposite. For example, v50 says that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven*". That seems to suggest the kingdom of heaven won't be a place for physical bodies. But v50 is talking about our physical bodies as constituted now. That's what Paul meant by "*flesh and blood*". **Your body, in its present state, won't inherit the kingdom of heaven, which is why it needs to be transformed.** It needs to be resurrected.
 - When v44 says our "*natural body*" will be sown and then raised as a "*spiritual body*", don't focus so much on the word 'spiritual' that you overlook the word 'body'. It's still a body. **Calling the resurrection body 'spiritual' doesn't make it something immaterial or intangible.** Bodies, by definition, are material, tangible things. They're physical. 'Natural' and 'spiritual' describe the moral quality of that physical body.
 - **Paul's point is that only spiritual bodies – bodies that have been fully sanctified, glorified, eradicated of all sin – only that kind of resurrection body is able to dwell on the new earth.**

- ❖ Before we go on in the passage, ask yourself if you (perhaps without realizing) have adopted a very Greek-like, dualistic worldview. **Have you always imagined heaven to be a very foreign, otherworldly place?** Have you shared a rather low view of the body? Do you see it as an extraneous part of yourself that you'll one day shed off when you go to heaven?

- ❖ **I realize some of you are facing a daily struggle with the aging and wearing down of your body in ways that I have yet to experience.** I think I understand why the idea of finally being rid of this burdensome body is appealing. But instead of painting a future where we're freed of the restraints of the human body, I'm trying to show you a beautiful biblical vision of a new earth where those who die in Christ will rise again with new bodies that no longer age, no longer get sick, no longer feel pain, no longer die (Rev. 21:4).

New Bodies Changed and More Glorious Than Before

- ❖ That what I hope you hold on to. Which leads to our next point. **I want to talk about how our bodies will be transformed in the future resurrection.** Let's consider how our Christian hope anticipates new bodies changed and more glorious than before.
 - Now if you go back to v35, remember Paul is responding to an objection that a bodily future resurrection makes no sense. **But his response is that objectors are mistaken because they're thinking in terms of resuscitation and not resurrection.** They're imagining a rotted corpse being resuscitated back to life. They're not taking into account the radical transformation that takes place in resurrection.
- ❖ Paul uses a seed analogy. He says think what happens to a seed when planted. **There is both continuity and discontinuity between the seed and the eventual plant.** Listen to vv36-37, *"³⁶You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain."*
 - So think in terms of continuity, if you sow a kernel of wheat, you know that come harvest time you're not going to reap a barley plant. It'll still be wheat. There's continuity. **In the same way, the human body that dies and goes into the ground will one day rise as a human body.** We're not going to transform into a different kind of being. We remain humans. Jesus rose and came back as a human.
 - The post-resurrection accounts in Scripture make a point to emphasize that he wasn't a ghost. He wasn't a spirit (Lk. 24:39). He had a human body that could be touched (Jn. 20:27) and could eat and digest food (Lk. 24:42-43). He remained incarnate – in flesh. There's continuity.
- ❖ But in resurrection, there's also discontinuity. Think back to the kernel of wheat. We all know that the seed planted looks vastly different from the eventual plant. But that doesn't seem to impress us. We're not surprised at the wonder of how trees and plants come from a tiny seed.
 - Imagine sticking a little round thing in the dirt and walking away. Paying it no attention. Then, a year later, you go back to that same spot to dig up that little thing, but in it's place you find an oak tree! Now how did that happen? **It should blow our minds considering how different the acorn is from the oak tree. What rises up looks nothing like what was buried.** There's discontinuity.
 - Yet what rises is not something brand new. **Revelation 21:5 says God is making all things new, not all new things.** So in the future resurrection, the new earth will still be the earth and resurrected bodies will still be bodies.

- ❖ This is Paul's response to those who can't fathom how we're going to come back from the dead in a body. If their corpse has rotted, if they've been cremated and scattered to the winds, how can they rise in bodily form? *With what kind of body do they come?*
 - Paul says those are just foolish objections. **Now if we were preaching a future resuscitation of the dead, then those are fair objections** There would be a problem. But we're preaching a future resurrection. So no matter if you were buried in one piece or scattered throughout the land or sea – if you died trusting in Christ – **you will rise again in a new body that has been qualitatively changed as much as an acorn has changed into an oak tree.**

- ❖ Just think back to Jesus's resurrection. **He came back with a human body but it wasn't the same as before. It was far more glorious than before.** That's the point of vv38-41 where Paul says just look at creation, and you can tell that God has assigned different kinds of bodies with different degrees of glory.
 - So our present bodies will one day give out and like a seed we'll be buried in the ground. But a change is coming. Listen to vv42-43, *“⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”*

- ❖ **After Jesus was raised in power, his new resurrected body did some peculiar things.** It's recorded in Luke 24:31 that after revealing his identity to the two disciples he met on the road to Emmaus, he suddenly vanished from their sight.
 - In John's Gospel, in 20:19, he says on the evening of that first Easter Sunday, the doors were locked, and yet Jesus came and stood among them. **So his resurrected body was still a human body, but he wasn't bound by the same limitations as we are today in our present lowly state.**

- ❖ And yet having said that, I don't want to give the impression that the Risen Christ just floated around Jerusalem, materializing himself through brick walls, teleporting here and there. Again it might give the impression that he's no longer human with a human body.
 - **If you think about, all four Gospel accounts make a point to emphasize that the stone in front of his tomb was rolled away.** Why make a big deal out of that if Jesus could have simply materialized himself through the tomb? **It's to drive home the point that the resurrection body is a real body that physically walked out of the tomb – but it's a changed body far more glorious than before.**

- ❖ **A resurrected body is very different from a resuscitated body.** Think of Lazarus. Dead four days, buried in a tomb, but resuscitated at Jesus's simple command to *“Come out.”* (Jn. 11:43). He came back to life but wasn't resurrected. He didn't get a new, glorified body at that point. He couldn't walk past locked doors. His resuscitated body was still subject to decay. It was still prone to illness and injury. Poor guy was going to have to die a second time.

- ❖ Friends, unless Jesus returns in our lifetime, we are all going to die. There's no use denying it or ignoring it. We're going to die. **Every hour your body wears down a little more.** One day it's going to give out unless a fatal accident or tragedy strikes you sooner. That's reality.
 - But if you place your hope in Jesus, if you believe he died for your sins and he's alive today, then even though you'll be sown in dishonor, sown in weakness, sown as a natural body – **one day you're going to hear your name called and then a simple command to "Come out"**. And like Lazarus you'll be raised. But unlike Lazarus, you'll be raised in glory, raised in power, raised as a spiritual body.
- ❖ And if you're so fortunate to be alive when Jesus does return, Paul says in v51 that even for those who don't fall asleep in Christ (euphemism for death), *"we shall all be changed, ⁵²in 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."*

A Stingless Death and Resurrection to an Imperishable Life

- ❖ Now how can we be sure this will be so? This leads to our third and final point. The Christian hope anticipates a stingless death and a resurrection to an imperishable life. **And what gives us steadfast, immovable confidence that this is our future?** It's the victory that Christ accomplished on the cross and over the grave. Look at vv54-55 with me, *"⁵⁴When 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?"*
- ❖ Paul's quoting here from Hosea 13:14. He's saying that when the future resurrection finally takes place and all the dead will rise, then the taunt of death found in Hosea 13 will be fulfilled. **After the final resurrection, no one will ever die again.** It says death will be swallowed up, gobbled up, defeated. It'll be the death of death.
 - But until that day comes, we'll still face death. **Yet notice how there is a way to experience a stingless death – a death that won't hurt you or harm you.** In v56 it talks about death's sting. The Greek word refers to a scorpion or bee's sting. Listen to v56, *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."* So death itself is not the problem. It's only death as a punishment for sin that should scare you – because it leads to a second death, to an eternal death (Rev. 20:14).
- ❖ Friends, if you have yet to deal with the sin in your own life – with your failure to perfectly keep God's law – then death, when it strikes you, will carry with it a deadly sting. You really should fear death. Because you too will one day be raised but to a resurrection of judgment unto eternal damnation (Jn. 5:28-29).
 - But the good news of the gospel centers on what Christ has done for you freely by his grace. He has both fulfilled the law on our behalf and removed the sting of death. You have to put your faith in this Jesus. **And if you do, if you become a Christian, you'll still die one day, but death will be transformed from a punishment to a pathway to resurrection life.** For the Christian, death is now gain (Phil. 1:21).

- ❖ And it's all because of what Christ did on the cross. He let death sting him. He took the sting of death for us. **And just like how a bee that has used its stinger will die shortly after – death stung Jesus on the cross, but in so doing, it sealed its own fate.** Death, like a bee without a stinger, is still buzzing around. It hasn't died yet, but it's harmless.

- ❖ **Christian, you don't need to fear death.** It's lost its victory. It's been swallowed up in Christ's victory, his death and resurrection. One day, death will be no more. Christ's resurrection assures us of this. Listen to v57, "*⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, 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.*"
 - **I know that struggling with your burdensome body can really shake your faith.** Perhaps you're not experiencing the healing or recovery that you had hoped and prayed for. It's not getting better. Maybe it's getting worse. Your body is wearing down.
 - Or perhaps you're seeing this happening to a friend or family member. Some of you are taking care of elderly parents or sick spouses or children with special needs. Your faith has been tried and tested.

- ❖ But just remember this: **If you're in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.** That's what Paul leaves us with in v58. If you're safe in our Risen Lord, if you share in his death, then you will share in his resurrection.
 - And if it's a loved one you're concerned for, then keep praying and caring for their health, but prioritize their relationship with the Lord. Because if they're safe in him, then their labor (and your own) will ultimately not be in vain. Though their body gives way, their hope will stay – that in Christ they will rise to new imperishable life.