

1 Corinthians: A Letter to a Troubled Church

A Resurrected Body (1 Corinthians 15:35-58)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 29, 2023

Introduction

- ❖ **I'm in my mid-forties now, and I'm certainly feeling the effects of aging.** If I do any strenuous activity, I notice my recovery time is definitely longer than before. Now, as many of you know, I still have a toddler in the home, so she keeps me on my toes and feeling younger. But it's all a facade. I just feel younger because I'm hanging out at the park with younger dads. But I need to watch myself. I can't horseplay like I used to. I pull muscles now just from sleeping weird on my pillow.
 - Now many of you here are older than me. You know what I'm talking about. You're like, "Welcome to the club." Or some of you here are well acquainted with physical pain and limitations. You struggle with a chronic disease. Some days you get a flare up that's so bad you can't go to work. You can't even get out of bed. Or perhaps you've had a significant injury in the past and you're still feeling the effects. Chronic pain. Limited mobility. **Suffice it to say, you feel, very acutely, the pain and frustration of having to bear these burdensome bodies.** Of being embodied creatures susceptible to weakness and decay.
 - But then there are many of you here, who are at the prime of your lives. You're young and fit. Your annual physicals are quick and easy. In fact, you're so young and healthy that you probably don't even do an annual physical. **You don't think too often about your body or its limitations.** The breakdown of your body is the furthest thing on your mind.

- ❖ **But whether you're young or old or something in between, I believe this morning's passage speaks a relevant word.** Because we are all in the body. And we are all aging. So we will all experience the effects of life in a burdensome body – whether now or later.
 - Lately, we've been in a series going through 1 Corinthians, and we've sat in chapter 15 for a couple of weeks. As we explained earlier, the false teaching Paul was addressing wasn't necessarily denying the resurrection of Christ. But they were denying one of the most important implications of Christ's resurrection – that is, the future resurrection of those who die in Christ. **Because Christ has been bodily raised, Christians can look forward to bodily resurrection from the dead.**

- ❖ Now if the image of dead people rising from their graves sounds far fetched to you, just know that it sounded equally strange to people in Paul's day. Look at v35 again, "*But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'*" **A bodily resurrection made no sense.** Because they were picturing dead, rotted corpses and trying to imagine them coming back to life.
 - So just as a B-movie zombie flick can be utterly ridiculous, 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 ancient Greeks didn't normally bury their dead. They burned them.** They practiced cremation because they viewed the body, at best, as a shell. At worst, as a prison house for the soul. So burning the dead was how you would free them from their bodily shackles.

- ❖ Now as these Greek pagans began to convert to Christianity, they began to renounce cremation and embraced the Christian practice of burial. But they still had a hard time imagining their deceased loved one – whose ashes had been scattered to the four winds – they couldn't imagine them rising again in a body.
 - **Of course, what they failed to understand is that – in the future resurrection of the dead – it will involve a radical transformation.** We will rise with our bodies but they won't be the same bodies. They'll be changed. They'll be transformed to a greater kind of glory. They'll be imperishable and immortal.
- ❖ That's Paul's argument in vv35-58. **His point is that the Christian's hope is not to one day shed this burdensome body but to see it changed.** That's what believers look forward to. In this morning's text, I see three things that those in Christ can anticipate. We can anticipate (1) a future earthly existence; (2) new glorified bodies, and (3) a stingless death.

A Future Earthly Existence

- ❖ The first thing we can anticipate is a future earthly existence. **We can look forward to a final destination that will be a physical place experienced in a physical body.** Our experience of heaven won't be in the clouds. It will be a physical, earthly existence. Now maybe, for some of you, that doesn't fit your expectations for what heaven would be like. It's not what ancient Greeks – like the Corinthians – would've anticipated for the afterlife.
- ❖ As we just explained, Greeks didn't recognize the body as being an essential part of who you are. **They had a dualistic worldview that sharply divided the physical from the spiritual.** Anything material – like your body – was considered inferior to the immaterial (your soul).
 - So, in that worldview, you are your soul – the immaterial part of you. **Which is why Greeks assumed that after death – after the shedding off of your burdensome body – that you would enter into an immaterial existence in an otherworldly place.** That's why talk of a resurrection where we rise with new bodies on a new earth made no 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've wondered.
 - I'm not surprised if Christians today wonder 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?**
- ❖ But do you see that that question already assumes a dualistic worldview that views 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 – what theologians call the intermediate state. No, I'm talking 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.** Revelation 21 tells us that heaven will one day come down to earth – only a newly renewed earth. **That means if God were to somehow give you a glimpse of heaven, you would actually recognize it.** It's not because he's going to show you some otherworldly location that replicates what things look like on earth. **No, if he shows you a glimpse of heaven, you would be looking at earth.**
 - Now it'll look different. But only different in that the curse of sin – and its ruinous effects – will have been 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 from earth. He's not going to abandon creation. His plan is to 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 text 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 that 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 means by "*flesh and blood.*" **Your body, in its present perishable 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 immaterial or intangible.** Bodies, by definition, are material, tangible things. They're physical. *Natural* and *spiritual* are describing the moral qualities 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.**

- ❖ Friends, is it possible that you have unknowingly adopted a Greek-like, dualistic worldview? **Have you always imagined heaven to be a foreign, otherworldly place?** Have you carried a rather low view of the body? Do you see it as an extraneous part of yourself that you look forward to shedding one day when you go to heaven?
 - **I realize some of you are facing a daily struggle with the aging and wearing down of your body.** I understand why the idea of finally being rid of this burdensome body sounds appealing. But my point is that, according to Scripture, that's not the Christian's blessed hope. **Our hope is *not* to be freed of the restraints of a human body and to escaped this cursed earth. Our hope is for this physical earth and our physical bodies to be redeemed – to be renewed by the same power that resurrected Christ from the dead.** Our Christian hope is to live out our eternal lives on a new earth in new bodies that no longer age, no longer get sick, no longer feel pain, and no longer die (Rev 21:4).

New Glorified Bodies

- ❖ That's what Christians have to look forward to. Which leads to our next point. **I want to talk about how these burdensome, broken bodies of ours will be gloriously transformed in the future resurrection.** Let's consider how we can anticipate new glorified bodies.
 - Look back at v35. Remember that Paul is responding to an objection that a bodily resurrection makes no sense. His opponents couldn't fathom how such fragile, feeble flesh could transform into something as glorious as what Paul has been describing. But Paul's response in v36 is one of shock at how foolish they are in their thinking. These skeptics of the resurrection of the dead are mistaken. **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 accompanies resurrection.

- ❖ To convey this idea of radical transformation, Paul turns to a seed analogy. He says think about what happens to a seed when it gets 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 or angel (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. The seed that is planted looks vastly different from the eventual plant. The fact that massive trees, multiple stories high, come from tiny little seeds should blow our minds.
 - Imagine sticking a little acorn 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 its place you find a tall oak tree! Now how did that happen? **That's amazing when you consider 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 the dead come back in a body. If their corpses have rotted – or if they've been cremated and their ashes have been scattered to the winds – how can they rise in bodily form? With what kind of body do they come?

- ❖ Paul says those are foolish objections. **Now if he was preaching a future resuscitation of the dead, then those would be fair objections** There would be a problem. But Paul preaches a future resurrection. So no matter if you were buried in one piece or scattered to the four corners – 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 directs our attention to creation. He points out how, within his creation, 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 John 20:19, he says on the evening of that first Easter Sunday, the doors were locked, and yet Jesus came and stood among his disciples. **So his resurrected body was still a human body, but apparently 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 constantly floated around Jerusalem, materializing himself through brick walls, teleporting here and there. That might give the impression that he was no longer human with a human body.
 - **If you think about it, all four Gospels make a point to emphasize that the stone in front of his tomb was rolled away.** Why make a big deal out of that detail in the story if Jesus could’ve materialized himself through the tomb? **It’s to drive home the point that Christ’s resurrected body is a real body that walked out of that tomb. But it’s also a changed body far more glorious than before.**
- ❖ Friends, unless Jesus returns in our lifetime, we are all going to die. Our bodies will fail us. There’s no use denying it or ignoring it. **Every hour of every day your body wears down a little more.** And one day it’s going to give out unless a fatal accident or tragedy strikes you first. That’s the reality we all face.
 - But if you place your hope in Jesus – if you believe he died for your sins and that he defeated death and is alive today – then even though your body will one day fail and you’ll be sown in dishonor, sown in weakness, sown as a natural body – **one day you’ll hear your name called and then a simple command to “Come out”.** And like Lazarus, you’ll come out of the tomb but in a gloriously transformed body.

- ❖ Listen to v51, “⁵¹*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep (meaning some believers will not experience bodily death because Christ will return in their lifetime), but 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.*”
 - Recently, I was in a discussion about our Christian hope of a future earthly existence in new glorified bodies. **And a father of a special needs child was describing how much he looks forward to seeing his child, one day, thriving in a resurrected body.** Experiencing the fullness of what it means to be made in the image of God.
 - Right now, in this present state, this man’s child faces certain limitations. Which makes this present life a challenge for their family. **But I was moved to hear this father describe his hope in the gospel promise that one day, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he and his child – and the rest of us who are in Christ – shall all be changed.**

- ❖ Friends, that same hope can be yours. You might be facing certain physical limitations. Maybe you’re battling cancer. You’re dealing with a chronic disease. You’re noticing a decline in your memory. You’re worried about dementia. Look, you should avail yourself of available treatments. Be grateful for all the advancements in medicine and technology.
 - **But keep this in mind – the Word of God never holds out the promise that all your diseases and physical limitations will be healed in this life. But it does hold out the promise of new life, on a new earth, in a new body – if you put your hope in a Risen Lord, in a Resurrected Savior.** If you put your trust in Christ, then you can be sure that when this vapor of a life has passed, you will be raised and you will be changed. You will no longer face any limitations. You’ll finally experience the fullness of what it means to be made in the image of God.

A Stingless Death

- ❖ That’s the Christian hope. That could be your hope – if that’s not already so. But look, I understand if this is still hard to hear. Because the Christian hope is ultimately future oriented. **It’s a hope – not for your present life – but for your future resurrected life. Which implies that you’re still going to die one day.** You probably won’t avoid death. But that was never the Christian hope in the first place. Our hope is in the promise that – because of what Jesus did on our behalf – we won’t stay dead but will rise again to eternal life.
 - This leads to the third thing we have to look forward to. **The Christian hope anticipates death – but not just a regular death – but a stingless death.** This is Jesus’s parting gift to his disciples. By means of his death and resurrection, he left his people with a stingless death.
 - Look at vv54-55, “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?”*”

- ❖ Here Paul is quoting Hosea 13:14 where the prophet is taunting death. *O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?* Paul is saying Hosea's taunt will be fulfilled on the day the resurrection takes place and all the dead will rise. **From that day on, no one will ever die again.** Death will be swallowed up, gobbled up, defeated. It'll be the death of death.
 - But until that day comes, we will still face death. **But there's a way to experience a stingless death – a death that won't hurt or harm you.** Notice how v56 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. You have no need to fear death itself – only death that still has a sting in it. **It's only death experienced as a punishment for sin that should scare you.**

- ❖ Friends, if you have yet to deal with your sin – with your failure to perfectly keep God's law – then death, when it strikes, will carry a deadly sting. You should fear it. Because you too will one day be raised – but *not* unto eternal life. It'll be a resurrection of judgment unto eternal destruction (Jn 5:28-29).
 - But the gospel centers on what Christ has done for you by grace. **He has both fulfilled the law on your behalf and removed the sting of death.** All you have to do is put your faith in him. And suddenly, death itself will be changed. **It will be transformed from a punishment for sin to a pathway to resurrection life.** For the Christian, death is now gain (Phil 1:21).

- ❖ And it's because of what Christ did on the cross. He let death sting him. **On the cross, Jesus took the sting of death for us.** And just think about a bee that has used up its stinger. It's a goner. It's going to buzz around for bit, but it's going die shortly thereafter.
 - In the same way, death stung Jesus on the cross, but in so doing, it sealed its own fate. It's a goner. Death is still buzzing around. It has yet to die. But like a bee without its stinger, death is harmless to believers.
 - **Christian, you have no need to fear death.** It's been swallowed up in Christ's victory – in his death and resurrection. One day, death will be no more. 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 some of you are struggling with your burdensome body. And it's shaking your faith.** You're not experiencing the healing or recovery you've been praying for. It's not getting better. In fact, it's getting worse. Your body is wearing down. Or perhaps you're seeing this happen 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 remember this: **If you're in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.** That's the encouragement Paul leaves us with in v58. If you've found refuge in the Risen Lord, if you share in his death, then know that you will share in his resurrection.

- ❖ And if it's a loved one you're concerned for, keep praying for their healing and keep caring for them in their weakness – but be sure to prioritize their relationship with the Lord. Because if they're safe in Christ, then their labor (and your labor) will ultimately not be in vain. **Though their body give way, their hope will stay.**
 - That's the kind of hope we have as a people who worship a Risen Lord and Resurrected Savior. *Come behold the wondrous mystery / Slain by death, the God of life / But no grave could e'er restrain Him / Praise the Lord, He is alive / What a foretaste of deliverance / How unwavering our hope / Christ in power resurrected / As we will be when he comes.*