

A Body that is Not Perishable

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[0 : 00] Now, what page are they up to? On the third day he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body.

And the resurrection of the body? Hang on a minute. Communion of saints? Not sure what that means, but okay. Forgiveness of sins, yes.

But the resurrection of the body? Life after death or the everlastingness of the soul or something like that I could do, but no one with half a brain could possibly think that this thing, this body is what we'll have after we die.

I mean, it causes us so much trouble here on earth, aches and pains. I mean, how would it work? If we die when we're 85, are we all going to be old and wrinkly in heaven?

[1 : 15] Will little babies who've died be resurrected to crawl around heaven in nappies, praising God with goo-goos and ga-ga's? Or will they grow up when they're raised?

Will they be raised at age 18 or age 25 or age 40? Whatever we think is the best age to be. And anyway, it's not like many of us are going to have our bones just lying there all nicely, waiting to have flesh put on them again and stand up.

We're going to disintegrate. I mean, doesn't that Bible say that we're all going to return to dust? Cremation does it quickly, yeah, but even burial gets there in the end.

Plus, if you know anything about science, you know that the atoms that make up our bodies right now, they're not uniquely ours.

They're not stamped with our name on them. No, our atoms are in a constant state of turnover, aren't they? And they're recycled.

[2 : 24] Something or someone else used them first and we'll send them back to the recycling depot of the earth when we die. Then they become part of the soil and they grow into a plant and then a sheep eats the plant and then we eat the...

Oh, gross. Or maybe if you fall overboard whilst on a cruise in the Caribbean, you get eaten by fish and then the fish get eaten by a shark and then the shark gets caught in a net and sold to the fish and chip shop and then you get...

Okay, well, you get the idea. So, I mean, if God's going to raise this body again, who gets first dibs on the atoms? I mean, will it be the first person who got to use them or the last person?

This creed just doesn't make sense. It's ridiculous. How can you possibly believe in the resurrection of the body? Well, although they might not have talked about atoms...

Well, they might have. Their Greek neighbours were giving the Corinthian Christians a hard time about the possibility of the resurrection of the body. Already, as we've heard in the last couple of weeks, the idea of resurrection of the body was under fire philosophically by Greek thinkers who tended to regard matter and the physical aspect of life as inferior to the spiritual or to the mental aspect of life.

[3 : 59] For them, for the Greek philosophers, matter didn't matter. And so any idea of resurrection or life after death had to be spiritual.

It was all about the soul escaping the shackles of its earthly prison, not about an actual body coming to life again.

And for them, anyone who thought differently, such as what these Corinthian Christians had been taught to believe, anyone like that was just loopy.

And now to strengthen their philosophical objections, it seems they were raising lots of questions, practical objections to the bodily resurrection.

And in essence, they were mocking the idea by questioning how on earth it could possibly work, just as I did in character a moment ago.

[5 : 01] And we get a sense that this is what's happening because of what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 35. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised?

With what kind of body do they come? Now, I just love the fact that Paul is willing to deal with these questions. Sometimes we as Christians are told that we should just have faith, that our questions should be left at the door.

But in this case, sometimes that's right, but in this case, Paul knows that for the Corinthians, like I think for many people today, including perhaps some of us here, for the Corinthians, for us, the practicalities of the resurrection of the body, the hows and the whats, actually can be a stumbling block, can add to a sense of uncertainty about the possibility of this article of the Christian faith, of what Paul had always taught, the resurrection of the body.

And so for the Corinthians, the objections that people were raising needed to be answered. Otherwise, for them and for us, they start to eat away, to undermine our confidence and our trust in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in answering these questions, how are the dead raised and with what kind of body will they come, Paul reveals God's truth on this issue in a simple way. The core of his answer is in verse 44.

[6 : 50] If you've got your Bibles open, you might want to have a look. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

That's the core of his answer to their questions. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. So in effect, Paul is saying that the reason that the Greek thinkers were getting so hot under the collar and the reason that the Corinthian Christians were getting so confused is that when Paul talked about resurrection, they immediately began to think in now instead of in age to come terms.

He was talking spiritual and they were thinking physical. And so all those questions about the age of the person resurrected and how all the atoms would come together were misguided because it wasn't about all that earthly, natural stuff.

It was about supernatural, spiritual stuff. But today in the 21st century, we've got a problem. We can't use verse 44 as a summary for us on its own.

I can't stand up here and say to you, if you remember one thing from tonight's sermon, please remember, if there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

[8 : 19] If we did that, we would likely get Paul completely backwards. But it's not our fault. The reason is we're influenced by Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore making pottery together.

We're influenced by sci-fi images of people turning into beings of pure energy. And so when we read our English translations and we see the words physical and spiritual contrasted, that's the realm in which we start to think, don't we?

We think he's talking about the distinction between matter and non-matter or between something you can see and touch and something you can't see and touch.

Physical and spiritual. Visible, invisible. That's what we kind of think about when we see that contrast. But the problem is that that's not what Paul is meaning at all in this statement.

And if you've been here over the last couple of weeks or if you've read any of 1 Corinthians, you'll know that Paul is at pains to say exactly the opposite to the Corinthians throughout this chapter.

[9 : 42] Resurrection has to be bodily. It has to be touchable. It has to be visible. Because the evidence on which our faith stands or falls is that the tomb was empty, the body was gone, and Jesus physically, bodily, visibly appeared to the disciples, including Paul himself.

So then, how are we to understand this truth that we should be thinking about the resurrection of the body in spiritual, not physical terms?

How are we to understand that? Well, let's go back to verse 36 and start working through to give ourselves more content to what Paul really means by spiritual.

So let's read this first illustration, verses 36 to 38. Fool, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

[11 : 11] So Paul tells us three things here. First of all, he tells us don't be fooled by the fact that death looks so final, that the death of the body looks so final.

He says, if you look at human life with natural rather than supernatural eyes, you will only see a body that will eventually run down, die, and break down, and whose atoms will be scattered and recycled.

But Paul calls this type of person a fool. Not being insulting in just calling them a name, but a fool in the biblical sense of the word means someone who doesn't take God into account.

And Paul is saying, if you don't take God into account, then you will just see a body that is useless and that there can be nothing more.

But if you look at human life with God in mind, you will realise that just as God has written life from death into his creation, in the awesome power and plan of God, human death doesn't have to be the end.

[12 : 31] all around us we have evidence that life comes from death. In nature, a seed falls into the ground looking, for all intents and purposes, as though it was dead.

And yet, from this seed a plant grows. If you'd never been taught that a tulip grew from a bulb, you would never connect these beautiful flowers flowers, with this brown shriveled up rock looking onion thing.

But, in fact, every year up in Sylvan, they stick thousands of these shriveled up brown little dead rocks into the ground in rows and in September and October you can go up there and you can buy a ticket off a little girl wearing clogs and you can enjoy the beautiful sight of rows and rows and rows of tulips in every colour imaginable.

It's absolutely gorgeous. So, in God's design being put in the ground wasn't the end for these bulbs and in God's design being put in the ground or scattered under a bush doesn't have to be the end for us either.

Don't be fooled. Secondly, we know that the new and beautiful tulips didn't come from putting fully grown tulips in the ground.

[14 : 05] If you did, they would probably just rot away. Instead, these funny looking bulbs were sown and there was transformation.

In the same way, we oughtn't think that just because God is definitely going to raise us bodily, we have to look exactly the same as we do now.

maybe we're closer to this at the moment than what we will be. There will be transformation.

Jesus Christ himself, our model, our first fruits, if you remember from last week, wasn't recognized initially by the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

He wasn't recognized initially by Mary in the garden and it seems he was able to appear and disappear at will and things like walls and great distances were no object to him.

[15 : 15] His body in some way that we don't understand was transformed. thirdly though, although our bodies will be transformed, they will still be our bodies.

When you go to the tulip farm, you know that they don't just stick any old bulbs in the ground. They carefully sort, categorize each bulb because they know that a tulip doesn't grow from a daffodil bulb and a daffodil doesn't grow from a tulip bulb.

Likewise, a farmer carefully sows the seed of whatever crop he or she wants to grow. If they want wheat, they don't plant barley because the farmer knows that even though the seed itself looks nothing like the plant, nothing like it, there is continuity between the two.

There is continuity. In the same way, even though our resurrection bodies will be as different as a plant is to a seed, there will be continuity from our bodies now.

Jesus was eventually recognized by his disciples and he showed them the wounds in his hands and in his side. He invited Thomas to touch him.

[16 : 42] He assured them that he wasn't a ghost. He ate with them fish, bread, barbecue breakfast. He was still completely the Jesus that they had known and loved.

And yet he was transformed as well. And so if we go back to our little summary or our little phrase from verse 44, if there is a physical body, there will also be a spiritual body, we can now give that some more content.

our earthly or physical body is all that you can see now, but don't be fooled. Just as real as that body, in fact, even more real, will be the transformed but same but continuous body that you will have at the resurrection.

That will be your spiritual body. But we want more information, don't we? And so Paul tries to give us as much as our brains can handle.

Firstly, he proves that God is able to and will make our resurrection bodies completely appropriate to the age to come. I won't read them out, but we heard in verses 39 to 41 that God is perfectly capable of designing the right kind of body or flesh for different types of creatures or parts of his creation.

[18 : 17] Fish get fishy flesh and birds get birdy flesh. Stars are made out of certain elements in certain states and the moon is made out of others.

Everything that God has made has been given the exact type of body that it needs for its purpose and its context, be it to fly in the sky or to swim in the sea or to shine in outer space.

And in the same way, our transformed but continuous bodies will be completely appropriate to the new age that Jesus will bring in when he returns.

But just as we can only speculate about what makes up some of the phenomena that we observe in our telescopes at night, we can't say exactly what our bodies will consist of, what substance, but we do know that God is able to resurrect us, resurrect me in a way that enables us, enables me, enables you to live as God's perfected people in the age to come with a body that is completely appropriate to that context rest.

And yet a body that will still be me, that will still be you. And so this is how Paul describes the characteristics of such bodies. You might want to have a look in verses 42 to 44.

[19 : 51] So it is, he says from his illustration, so it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.

It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

So this is what it really means to have that transformed spiritual body that we spoke of earlier when thinking about the plant.

We can only learn so much, we can only extrapolate so much from the data that we have of Jesus' resurrection body in the Gospels.

But God now reveals through the Apostle Paul more of what our resurrection bodies will be. Firstly, he says, they will be imperishable.

[20 : 53] That is, they will not be subject to any of the sagging, bagging, balding, spreading that comes with this life. they will never get sick, they will never die.

Our resurrection bodies will be full of life and health and vigour for eternity. Secondly, they are glorious rather than dishonourable or humiliated.

and this is a victory or vindication idea. Instead of the experience of losing all of our rights and of being helpless against the onslaught of the last enemy, death, which is the thing today we try in vain to avoid or control, will be raised as the glorious, righteous, triumphant saints of God, living in the full victory of Jesus Christ on the winning team.

And so when we know that, we don't have to rage against the humiliation of death, trying to legislate things like euthanasia or stem cell research to prevent us from losing our dignity.

That's the essence of death and we can't escape it. But the great news in Jesus Christ is that we will be raised in glory with the truest of our human dignity, the truest dignity we could ever long for because then we will be fully redeemed and fully perfected.

[22 : 52] Thirdly, our resurrection bodies will be unimaginably powerful. We're not talking simply Arnold Schwarzenegger in his heyday here.

We're talking absolutely no limits. Whatever the tasks God has for us as the perfected humanity bringing glory to him in his new creation, we will be able to do them without tiring, without straining, without any limitations at all.

people. Although we die in weakness, on a hospital bed, in our bed at home, during an interview in Tasmania, if we are in Christ, we will be raised in power with bodies that are powerful.

spiritual. And fourthly, we are raised as a spiritual body. Now we've talked a little bit about what this means already, but I think you might be able to get the sense of what a shock this language would have been for the Corinthians.

If you've been here or you've learnt anything about 1 Corinthians before, you'll know that for the Corinthians, the idea of spiritual was very not bodily.

[24 : 14] It was very relationship with God now, nothing to do with my body, I'd transcended all of that. And for the Corinthians as well, they felt that they had all of their spiritualness, everything that was promised, they had that now.

But Paul shocks them by saying no, it will be raised a spiritual body. The body that you have now, your existence now, is not spiritual like it will be in the age to come.

Then, then you will be transformed. Then you will be imperishable. Then you will be powerful.

Now you are not. you will have a spiritual body, one that is transformed but is still a body, made of whatever makes us, but whatever needs to be in that age to come.

It will still be absolutely me, it will still be continuous with my old body, I'll still be able to eat, which is good, but it will be an imperishable, glorious, powerful body.

[25 : 38] totally appropriate to who I am and to my new context of God's new creation. Now, I realise that I've spent pretty much all of our time on the first half of this passage, but I wanted to focus us tonight on that awesome vision, because I think when we have that vision in mind, it's that that enables us to sacrifice in this life, to live for Christ, to put his priorities first, to be obedient to God, even in the face of death, to be his people under whatever circumstances we are, knowing that in the future, we will have this to come, this awesome vision.

But before we finish, let's briefly examine these final few verses in our passage, because they're an explanation of why, just as there is a physical body, there will be a spiritual body.

So Paul writes in verses 45 to 48, Thus it is written, the first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, 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 are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. And verse 49, Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

[27 : 33] It's kind of back to don't be fools when you look at what we've got now. Don't be fooled by that. But he says Adam was given life by God.

He didn't own it, and he didn't control it. For Adam and for all his descendants, like you and me, life is God's to give and God's to take.

But the last Adam, that is Jesus Christ, the man who will bring in the kingdom of God on the last day, he did own life.

All life was created through him, we read in the scriptures. And so at his resurrection, Paul says, he became for all those who believe, a life-giving spirit, spirit.

That means at his resurrection, Christ assumed his supernatural body, which he will give to all those who follow after him. He became a life-giving spirit.

[28 : 45] Now the word spirit here shouldn't be confused with the Holy Spirit, or shouldn't be thought of as something ghostly, like we've talked about earlier. But Paul is simply meaning in this context that Jesus is the first one with a spiritual body, and the first one, the first human to be in the age to come.

The spiritual realm, if you like, but the age to come, the supernatural age. life, and so he will give this spiritual body, and the eternal life that he himself has always possessed, he will give that to everyone who believes and trusts in him.

The first man was from the earth, and would return to dust. His atoms would be scattered, and recycled.

And we also experience the same in this earthly life. But our great hope and our great, great privilege is that we who believe in Christ will experience the life of Christ, the man from heaven, because in God's grace, we are no longer citizens of the earth, we are no longer simply people of the dust, but we are now citizens of God's kingdom, of heaven, where life is life eternal.

And we have that now in part, but when we are sown, and when we rise again, we then will have it in full, and we will be the perfected creatures in the new creation.

[30 : 50] So, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? They are raised by the power of God, who raised Christ from the dead, the first fruits of all who will follow.

They are raised through the life-giving resurrected Christ, because we bear the image of this man from heaven when we believe. They are raised in the same way that a seed grows.

First they must die, then God brings a new, transformed, but continuous body. At the coming of Christ, friends, we will be us more than ever, but we will be raised imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

That is totally fit to live with God forever as his beloved people. Amen.