

1 Corinthians 15:35-58
Isaiah 25
Psalm 49

“The Resurrection of the Body”

March 13, 2022

In Isaiah 25, Isaiah promises that one day God will swallow up death forever.
The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and remove the reproach – the shame – from all the earth.

That is precisely what Paul will be talking about in 1 Corinthians 15.
The good news – the gospel – is that Jesus has done this.

Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures –
he was buried –
He was raised from the dead, according to the scriptures –
and appeared to Cephas and the twelve...

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 49 –
which speaks of how *no man* can ransom another,
or give to God the price of his life,
but also speaks of how *God* will ransom my soul from the power of the grave.

Sing Psalm 49
Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

What is your hope?
Where are you going?
Where is your story heading?

I fear that for so many who claim to be Christians,
they would conclude their Creed
“I look out for my bodily happiness, and the life of the present age.”

Do you really believe what you say in the Creed each week?

In the Apostles’ Creed we confess the “resurrection of the body and the life everlasting” –
and in the Nicene Creed we say “I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.”

Think about Paul’s conclusion here:

“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 seems to think that his whole discussion of the resurrection

is eminently practical.

If you believe in the resurrection of the body,
then you know that your bodily labors are not in vain – *in the Lord*.

After all,

the resurrection of the body is the proof that in the Lord your labor
(your "toil" or "troublesome labor") is not in vain.

What does he mean by "labor"?

"Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" –
the work of the Lord means everything that you do
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ –
anything where you cast yourself upon Him!

The work of the Lord can be summarized in the words of Jesus:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength."

Whatever you do out of love for God is the work of the Lord.

And that should be *everything* that you do.

Doing your job is not in vain.

Cleaning the bathroom is not in vain.

All that you do in the Lord is not in vain.

The resurrection guarantees that your bodily labor has a purpose!

What is done in the body *matters*.

Paul started the chapter by reminding the Corinthians of the *gospel* –
the good news – the message of which Paul was a herald.

And he lays out what is of *first importance*:

this is what is most important – what belongs in every creed!

"that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (v3-5)
and then to the rest of the brothers, etc.

In other words, the gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done in history.

The message of the gospel is not primarily an appeal for *you* to do something.

The message of the gospel – the good news – is a story about what God has done.

Greek philosophers went around telling people how they ought to live.

The apostles used a very different method.

As J. Gresham Machen once put it,

"the strange thing about Christianity was that it...transformed the lives of men
not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story;
not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event."

(J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p47)

Because Jesus has been raised as the firstfruits from the dead,
therefore all those who belong to Jesus will also be raised.

1. What Kind of Body? (v35-49)

a. Glory and the Body: Distinguishing between Bodies (v35-41)

³⁵ *But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”*

A century before the apostle Paul, the famous Roman orator, Cicero,
had recounted “the dream of Scipio”
in which Scipio speaks to his departed ancestors –
who had left behind their corruptible bodies,
and ascended beyond the circle of the moon.

There, as disembodied spirits, they lived in peace and tranquility.

Cicero – and most Romans – would have asked precisely this question!
“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

The body is the source and occasion for most of the pain and discomfort that we feel.
Why would we want to keep our bodies?

So the typical Roman would be quite skeptical regarding the resurrection of the body –
for that matter, so would the Sadducees – a part of Judaism.

But Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians is that in Christ you are neither a Jew nor a Gentile.
You have been united to Jesus.
Your community is the body of Christ.

“Stop being deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’
Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.”

The resurrection of Jesus means that those who belong to him
are now knit together in one new man.
And so if there is no resurrection of the body – then there is no new man!

And that’s why Paul responds with such vehemence:

³⁶ *You foolish person!*

This is a strong rebuke!

It’s the same word Jesus used, when he rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy,
cleansing the outside of the cup, but leaving wickedness within (Lk 11:40)

You senseless person!

You are not thinking clearly!

Listen up!!

How is the resurrection body connected to your current body?

Paul says that it is like a seed:

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.

You plant the body in the earth – like you plant a seed, a kernel of grain.
And what comes up out of the ground is organically connected to that seed –
that seed, properly sown, will produce this sort of plant –
but while it is organically connected,
you would never guess by looking at a kernel of wheat,
that it would produce such a plant!

As Paul goes on to say in verse 38:

³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

And even among the animal kingdom, there are a variety of bodies:

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.

Flesh – *meat* – varies between humans, animals, birds, and fish.
All flesh is muscle – but there are differences between the different creatures.

But Paul applies the same principle to “bodies” more generally:

⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,

The difference between heavenly bodies and earthly bodies
is not that one is body and the other is not –
but that they have different kinds of *glory*.

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.

The sun has a body.

Not a flesh and blood body – but a fiery body!

Likewise the moon has a body – a body that reflects the sun’s light.

And each kind of body has its own glory.

Even from earth you can see variation in the stars:
some stars are red – others are white – others look blue or yellow.
And then there are the wandering stars – the planets.

Star differs from star in glory!

If you recognize that there are different kinds of flesh –
and different kinds of bodies –
and different kinds of glories –
then you will be prepared to understand the resurrection body!

**b. “Psychical” and “Pneumatical” Bodies: The Man of Dust and the Man of Heaven
(v42-49)**

⁴² *So is it with the resurrection of the dead.*

And Paul uses four pairs of opposites to describe the difference:

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.

Let’s start with the first three – which Paul sets up to prepare us for his main point.

1) First, what is sown is perishable – what is raised is imperishable.

Perishable refers to what is corruptible –
the basic idea is “decay.”

This is fairly obvious:

the body that is sown in the grave decays.

But what is raised is imperishable –

it does not – and cannot – decay.

Now, if this was all we had, then it might sound like Paul is talking about
some sort of static existence of “incorruptibility” –
imperishable like canned fruit!

500 years from now, that canned fruit will still be just the same!

That is *not* Paul’s idea of imperishable!

2) After all, look at the next line: “it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.”

Notice he doesn’t just say “dishonor” and “honor” –

the resurrection is not just a matter of making the dishonorable honorable.

Rather, it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory!

The body that was humiliated and covered in shame

is now raised up in splendor – beauty – radiance – glory!

Have you ever experienced humiliation and shame?

Our problem is not just sin and guilt.

Our problem is also failure and shame.

But Paul reminds us that our shame and humiliation is not permanent.
It is sown in dishonor – it is raised in glory and splendor!

Why does Paul say this?

Remember who Jesus is!

The eternal Son of God joined himself to our humanity
in order that he might join us to himself!

The “life everlasting” that we confess in the Creed
is none other than the life of God!

3) And even more, “it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

My father spent his last decade with dementia.

The man who played football on the beach with his teenagers at the age of 60
became unable even to take care of himself.

We are weak.

The power of habit sets grooves in our lives –
dare I say *ruts* –
and because of our weakness,
we are unable to break out!

But even as Paul asserted that the body will be raised incorruptible,
now he explains what that means:
it will be raised in *power*.

Power explicates the reversal of *decay* – corruption.

Power and splendor – power and glory –
characterize the incorruptible resurrection body.

And that’s why Paul says “it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”

Now, first of all, “natural” is a terrible translation!

This is *not* the word “natural.”

It is the word “*psuchikos*” – from which we get our word “psychological.”

It has nothing to with *nature* – but with *soul, life*.

In Genesis – the passage that Paul will quote in a few verses –

we are told that Adam became a “living being” – literally, a “living soul.”

Paul is talking about a *soulish* body – a psychical body – a body characterized by *soul*.

I realize that these are strange phrases: “a psychical body” – or “a pneumatical body”

but then again, these terms weren’t familiar to the Corinthians either!

That’s why Paul goes on to explain them in detail in verses 44-49!

*If there is a [psychical] body, there is also a spiritual [pneumatical] body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written,
“The first man Adam became a living being”;^[e] the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

Normally, in Greek thought, soul is opposed to body (psyche vs. soma).

But Paul rejects this!

Soul is not opposed to body.

Soul is opposed to Spirit.

In the beginning, God made a soulish body – a body animated by soul.

And now in Christ, God has made a Spiritual body – a body animated by the Holy Spirit.

If you want to understand what Paul means by “soulish [or psychological] body” –
look back to Adam.

God breathed the breath of life into him,
and the first man, Adam, became a living soul.

A living ‘psyche’.

Adam’s body was animated by *soul*.

I should point out that the same phrase “living soul”

is used to refer to all animals –

everything that has breath can be called a “living soul.”

When Genesis 1:24 says “Let the earth bring forth living creatures” –
the phrase there is “living soul” –

the exact same phrase used of Adam in Genesis 2:7,
when God breathed the breath of life into him,
and “he became a living soul.”

When God gave all the plants of the field as food to the animals,
he said that he gave every green plant to “everything that has the breath of life” –
that’s the same phrase.

To be a living creature – a living soul – means to have the breath of life.

In the first creation, God animated our bodies with breath – with souls.

But in the new creation, God will animate our bodies with his own Spirit.

Once, earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul used this phrase “soulish person.”

Back in chapter 2, verse 14, Paul spoke of how “the natural person
[the ‘psychical man’ – the ‘soulish’ man]

does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him,
and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

They are discerned by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I can see why the ESV chose “natural body.”

It is, after all, the body that we have because of creation.

But it’s really important to see how Paul is using Genesis to show that:

now we have bodies animated by soul –
bodies that are corruptible,
bodies that are characterized by shame and dishonor,
bodies that are weak and feeble.

But Jesus came in order to glorify that which was shameful –
to empower that which was weak –
and to raise us up to everlasting life and glory!

This is, precisely the point of verses 46-49:

⁴⁶ *But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural (the psychological), 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.* ⁴⁹ *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall^[1] also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

Paul returns to the theme that he introduced in verses 21-22 –
the parallel between Adam and Christ –
the first Adam and the last Adam.

Some people in the first century believed that our purpose is to “return” to a primitive glory.
After all, Adam stands for all that is corruptible, dishonorable, and weak!
In Paul’s thought, we are not seeking to return to a glorious past –
rather, the cross brings a reversal of corruption, shame, and weakness –
and the resurrection establishes a glorious *new creation!*

Adam was “a man of dust” –
he came from dust, and (because of his sin) he returned to dust.

Jesus is the “man of heaven” (or man “from” heaven) –
because Paul intends us to see a parallel:
he came from heaven, and (because of his righteousness) he returned to heaven.

But the central point of the contrast
is how did Adam become “the man of dust”?
(because God made him!)
How did Jesus become “the man of heaven”?
(because God raised him from the dead!)

And Paul now says that as we have borne the image of the man of dust –
so also we shall bear the image of the man of heaven.

In the end there are only two men – Adam and Christ.
You are either *in Adam* or *in Christ*.

But there is also a clear disjunction between them:
the first Adam became a living soul –
namely, the first human being –
but the last Adam became a life-giving spirit!

This is key.

The word “life-giving” in verse 45
is the same word used in verse 36,
when it says, “what you sow does not come to life unless it dies.”

Jesus becomes the life-giving Spirit through *his* death and resurrection.
Paul is saying that God established the very pattern of seeds growing into plants
in order to set up the gospel!

How did Jesus become the life-giving Spirit?

By his death *and burial!*

so that he might also be raised up as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

And what does it mean that Christ became the “life-giving *Spirit*”?

Paul sees the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit so closely bound together
that he will speak of Christ *as* the life-giving Spirit.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit *is* the presence of the resurrected Christ with his people.

But for now, we still bear the image of the man of dust.

We live in a world of decay, of shame, and of weakness.

We live in *bodies* of decay, humiliation, and weakness!

The resurrection body – the incorruptible, glorious, and powerful body –
is something that is *not yet* present for us
(although it *is* present for Jesus!).

2. “We Shall Be Changed” (v50-57)

a. “Putting on Immortality”: the Mystery of the Resurrection (v50-53)

⁵⁰ *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

Watch where Paul goes with this.

Paul reveals something that had been hidden – a mystery.

And the mystery – the thing that had been hidden –

is that we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

These mortal bodies cannot live forever.

We must be changed.

“This perishable body must put on the imperishable,
and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (15:53)

What does an imperishable, immortal body look like?

It looks like Jesus.

“We shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (15:49).

I can’t tell you much more about what it looks like.

It is a true, human body.

Paul does not say that we will *exchange* our mortal bodies for immortal bodies.

Paul says that *we will be changed*.

The word simply means “to make other than it is.”

Your body will be transformed.

It will be made new – different.

And all this because Jesus has been raised to the heavenlies,

and sits at the right hand of the Father,

therefore, all who are in him will bear his image.

And if he has a body characterized by the Spirit, then so will we.

And when will this happen?

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. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Notice how Paul says it:

“this mortal body must put on immortality.”

This mortal must clothe itself with immortality.

Paul is emphasizing *both* the identity of the current body with the resurrection body –

it is *this mortal body* that must clothe itself with immortality –

and the dramatic difference between this mortal body

and the immortal body that I will have!

When Christ returns – when the last trumpet sounds –

the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Okay, now, let’s just think about this for a moment.

It’s easy to say “we shall be changed.”

My body – this flesh and blood thing –

will be transformed.

Got it.

But what about the guy who was eaten by a shark?

All the cells of his body were digested and became part of a shark!

How does his body get “raised” imperishable?!

It's probably easiest to describe this in terms of DNA and memory.
Your DNA is the biological program that goes into who you are.
And your memories are the "soulish" part of who you are.

While it may be true that the guy eaten by the shark has no biological matter left to him,
that does not interfere with the resurrection!
God still knows his DNA and his memories,
and is fully capable of raising him from the dead.

Well, by this point,
as Paul reflects on the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,
in verses 54-57, he just gets excited!

b. "Death, Where Is Your Sting?" The Triumph of Jesus (v54-57)

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?"*

These two quotes are taken from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14.

Those passages were talking about the exile.
Isaiah 25 says that even death would be swallowed up forever
when God vindicated his people.
But Hosea 13 declared God's judgment *against* Samaria—
against the northern kingdom of Israel.

Indeed, in Hosea, the prophet is calling for death to *come against* God's people!
This was the problem Israel faced throughout history.
If God would always judge his people by the law,
then they would always bear their own guilt.
Death and exile would always be our lot.

Hosea 13 spoke as though death was winning!

So after citing Hosea 13:14, Paul goes on to explain why he chose such a passage!

⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*

O death, where is your sting?
Your sting is *sin* – sin is what makes death so frightening,
because death is the wages of sin!
And because I have sinned –
therefore I fear death – because I know what I deserve!

⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Remember where Paul started in 1 Corinthians 15.

He started with the gospel:

Jesus has died for our sins,
and was raised for our justification,
we now have the victory.

We have the promise of the resurrection – death’s sting has been removed.

Okay, so, if you are going to have a glorified body one day,
what does that mean now?

Does that mean that the present body is irrelevant?!

By no means!

What you do in the body *now* is *not in vain* –
because of the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion: “Be Steadfast...Knowing That in the Lord Your Labor Is Not in Vain” (v58)

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.*

Notice how central Jesus is to verse 58.

We are to be abounding in “the work of the Lord” –
and we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The one who believes in the resurrection of the body
already, by faith, begins to partake of its power and glory –
because the power and glory of the resurrection body
is nothing less than the Spirit of God himself!

So I will conclude with Paul’s exhortation to you:

“Be steadfast, immovable” –
take your stand on the gospel – and don’t budge!
believe the good news – and hold on!

Don’t be shaken by the foolish questions of those who have abandoned the gospel!
Stand firm.
Hold fast.

“always abounding in the work of the Lord...”
Overflow *more and more* in the work of the Lord.
The work of the Lord is whatever work the Lord has given you to do!
In whatever you do, whether in word or in deed,
do all to the glory of God!

But the resurrection of the body reminds us that “in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”
The “work” of the Lord is the ordinary word for “work.”

But *labor* is a word that ordinarily means *toil*, wearisome labor.

After all, you are engaging in the work of the Lord
while you still live in a “soulish body” –
a body that is characterized by Adam’s corruption, shame, and weakness.

But you have been united to Christ –
the one who has a body that is characterized by immortality, glory, and power!
And his immortality, glory, and power will be sufficient to sustain you in your toil,
until the last trumpet sounds!

Come back to Isaiah 25:6 at the Lord’s table...
“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food,
a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow,
of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever...”

Death is never the final word in the Christian life.
Sure – I like to say that marriage is martyrdom –
and I talk a lot about the afflictions and sufferings of the Christian life –
but the Christian ethic is fundamentally a *resurrection ethic!*
And we see that clearly here at the Lord’s Table...