



## Sermon

### ***The Resurrection Body***

**1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 16:19-31; Genesis 45:3-11,15**

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This is the second week of a three part series on Resurrection as we follow the Fifteenth chapter of the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

Last week, we reviewed the Resurrection of Christ as being the bedrock of Christianity. Paul turned to consider the General Resurrection of humanity. Some had argued that there was no resurrection, but we saw that Jesus stated that to God all are alive specifically including long deceased individuals and that all humanity will rise again to face judgement. Paul argued that if there is no resurrection then nor could Christ have risen from the dead and so therefore we would all be lost in our sins without a saviour.

**But** Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.<sup>1</sup>

Now as we come to look at the next section of the chapter which is about the nature of the resurrection body, we need to set some more foundations of understanding in place.

Many people think that resurrection, heaven, the New Earth all refer to the same thing. In other words, we die and we go to heaven which is some airy-fairy sort of place not as solid or real as this earth) and that is something called the resurrection – end of story.

However, that is not what the Bible teaches us. It is an abbreviated and distorted version of the story – heavily influenced by pagan Greek understanding.

If we put together what was understood in the Old Testament with what Jesus, Paul and the Apostles tell us we find that there is a state into which the dead go before the resurrection.

When we die we remain as conscious beings before the resurrection.

Jesus makes reference to this in at least two places. He told the story of the beggar, Lazarus, at the gate of the rich man. Some protest that this is just a story. But it was our Lord who told it and he called himself the truth. If he made up a story to make a point but set it in a fictional and incorrect setting he would be leading us astray about the future state of the dead. That would not be consistent with truthfulness. So I think it is reasonable to take note of the secondary details of the story.

In that story, both Lazarus and the rich man die and are conscious beings in the afterlife. It appears that there is a place for the righteous dead here called the “bosom of Abraham.” It is a place of divine favour. There is

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20

another place where the unrighteous dead are. This seems to presuppose a pre-judgement before the formal great judgement day.

And the story, is set before the second coming or the resurrection, because the rich man asks that Lazarus be sent back to warn his brothers.

From it we can see that the dead are conscious. They can relate to other deceased humans and still have their personality. Sadly, the arrogance of the rich man persists – he expects Lazarus to serve him in the afterlife!

A second reference Jesus made was on the cross. Remember he was crucified between two criminals. One of them mocked him. But the other stopped him saying:

**Luke 23:40-43** "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? <sup>41</sup> We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Paradise was a word of Persian origin for a beautiful watered pleasure garden – a private park. N.T. Wright writes:

'Paradise' is a regular Jewish way of referring to the temporary place of rest before the rising again from the dead.<sup>2</sup>

It is another name for the place of the righteous dead, also called Abraham bosom. A third name is 'heaven.' Dr Grudem defines heaven "as the place where God most fully makes known his presence to bless."<sup>3</sup> While N.T. Wright says,

If we talk about 'going to heaven,' we strictly speaking should remember that that means 'going to be with God, with Christ, until the time when God makes new heavens and new earth and gives humans new bodies appropriate for citizens of this realm.'<sup>4</sup>

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12 about the experience of a man who was caught up to the third heaven. It is almost certain that Paul is referring to himself obliquely. He then calls the third heaven 'paradise.'

There are these and others examples of deceased people conscious and known as themselves before the resurrection. But at the resurrection, which will be when Christ returns, all the dead will be raised and given new bodies. This is the point of the resurrection, we will have bodies again. And then there will be the judgement.

In Hebrews 9 we read: "... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment ..."<sup>5</sup>

There is no room for reincarnation here. We live, we die once and after that we face judgement.

The New Testament goes on to tell us that God will create new heavens and a new earth and the redeemed will live in their resurrection bodies on that new earth where God will dwell with them.

### *Nature of the resurrection body*

Returning to 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains the nature of the resurrection bodies. He says they will be glorious. The relationship between the mortal body and the resurrection body is like the relationship between a seed and the plant that grows from it. It is the same organism but vastly different in form and ability.

At the moment, our oak tree is dropping acorns to the delight of the children who love to collect them. But compare an acorn with the fully grown oak – they hardly look alike; it would be impossible to predict the form and size of an oak from the acorn if you had never seen an oak tree before. Yet it is undeniable that there is a direct connection and a continuity between the acorn and the oak tree.

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<sup>2</sup> Wright N.T., 1999, "New Heavens, New Earth", Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge, p22

<sup>3</sup> Grudem, W., 1984, Systematic Theology, IVP, Leicester, p1159

<sup>4</sup> Wright, p25

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 9:27-28

Just as the seed must be sown and figuratively 'die' in the ground before it produces the plant. So too our mortal bodies die to produce the immortal bodies. We are mortal, perishable and weak but our resurrection bodies will be immortal, imperishable and powerful. What a comfort as we consider aging and death. We may grow weak, we may be dishonoured, we may perish, but the resurrection body will be incomparably more glorious than we ever were in our prime. Any and all loss of function, connection, ability, dignity or strength that we may endure will be far exceeded by the glory of the resurrection bodies we will receive.

In verse 45, Paul wrote of the two types of human. The first Adam is the first earth-dwelling human who is the forerunner of humanity and is taken to represent all of humanity. We have the same nature as the first Adam – we are natural, of the dust of the earth.

The last Adam is Christ. When we are born again we are incorporated into the body of Christ. So Paul says we will bear the likeness of the man from heaven, Christ. The great distinction is that flesh and blood – these natural bodies – cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. The state of the new Heavens and the new Earth, living in the glorious presence of God, requires new bodies of a different nature and that is what the resurrection bodies are to be. Only they can inherit the imperishable of that future state.

### Two applications we might consider.

1. If there is an afterlife whether in paradise or in the new creation for ever, we are going to have to meet in glory those we have known here. If there are Christians we are at odds with, it would be far better to sort matters out now on earth while we are both alive than leave it for the afterlife. Jesus is pretty insistent about the need to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sometimes it has to be said, we cannot achieve reconciliation, Paul wrote in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." With some people, we just cannot make peace – but we can still forgive them even if they will not forgive us.

2. The fact that there is a new creation coming means material things do matter. It is not the case that we will be spiritual beings without bodies for eternity. That would imply that the physical dimension is irrelevant. On the contrary, this world matters – we are stewards of it under God. We are not building God's kingdom here, but we are building **for** God's kingdom. There is a continuity between our present work and God's future kingdom even though there is to be a recreation of heaven, earth and our humanity. N.T. Wright says:

The Christian hope is for a full, recreated life in the presence and love of God, a totally renewed creation, an integrated new heavens and new earth, and a complete humanness ... complete in worship and love of God, complete in love for one another as humans, complete in stewardship over God's world...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wright, p26-27

