

## Sermon

### ***Resurrected and Transformed***

**1 Corinthians 15:51-58**

22/2/2022

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#### **1) Review**

This is part three of a series on resurrection working from the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. In the previous two weeks we have looked:

##### **a. Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Paul gave us in verse 3-8 a very early church statement of belief that Jesus died, was buried and on the third day rose again. He was seen by many witnesses over a period of 40 days.

We saw how very strong the evidence is for the resurrection of Jesus.

##### **b. There is to be a General Resurrection**

In answer to the assertion that there could be or would be no resurrection, Paul strongly asserted that without the resurrection, Jesus has not risen and our faith is empty. Christianity hangs on the resurrection of Christ.

We heard that Jesus himself spoke of the general resurrection when he said:

... for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.<sup>1</sup>

He also specifically defended the resurrection in a debate using the Burning bush incident as evidence that to God all people are alive including those who have already died.

##### **c. The nature of the resurrection body**

Last week, I looked at the next section of the chapter covering the nature of the resurrection body. I clarified that there is a two-stage future state: an interim disembodied conscious state followed by resurrection when we receive resurrection bodies. To quote N.T. Wright:

Our culture is very interested in life after death, but the New Testament is much more interested in what I've called the life *after* life after death — in the ultimate resurrection into the new heavens and the new Earth. Jesus' resurrection marks the beginning of a restoration that he will complete upon his return. Part of this will be the resurrection of all the dead, who will "awake," be embodied and

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:28-29

participate in the renewal. John Polkinghorne, a physicist and a priest, has put it this way: "God will download our software onto his hardware until the time he gives us new hardware to run the software again for ourselves." That gets to two things nicely: that the period after death is a period when we are in God's presence but not active in our own bodies, and also that the more important transformation will be when we are again embodied and administering Christ's kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

As to the nature of the resurrection bodies we have two sources of information.

- i. Jesus is the forerunner – when he appears we will be made like him. So his resurrection body helps us understand what our resurrection bodies will be like.
- ii. We also saw that Paul used the analogy of the seed becoming the grown plant to our mortal bodies becoming resurrection bodies. The seed is the same organism as the plant but the plant looks very different and has very different abilities and form. It is greater than the seed. So too, our resurrection bodies will be greater than these bodies although still us.

## 2. Cremation question

I would like to take a moment to address a question I have been asked twice arising from these sermons since it is likely others have the same question. It concerns cremation and the resurrection. Is cremation all right in terms of the resurrection? Doesn't the body need to be buried in order for it to rise again? There is a certain fear behind that question – I understand that.

I have two thoughts to bring to this concern:

- a) If a body dies and is buried, it is broken down and its molecules and atoms are turned to earth. They may then be used by plants which are then eaten by animals which may then be eaten by someone. The same molecules have been part of two different people. So which person would get them in the resurrection? It cannot be dependent on the particular physical matter being reassembled.
- b) Our bodies are constantly renewing the physical matter which makes us up. Atoms and molecules are replaced, cells die and are replaced. Every seven years we have undergone a complete replacement while maintaining our form. It is not the particular atoms and molecules that define us but the form which uses matter to express itself as a body.

Dr John Lennox is an Oxford Professor of Mathematics and a noteworthy theologian and apologist writes:

There is a pattern somewhere that defines and holds each individual human in existence. And if we grant the reality of God and the supernatural, it is surely not hard to think that God himself holds these patterns in memory. He can reuse each pattern to fashion a resurrection body in the future.<sup>3</sup>

God will impose order on available matter to create the form of the new body he is giving to each person. What is important is the information to make a body not the actual matter of which it was made when it died.

## 3. The Resurrection and Translation of Believers

So we come to verse 51-53.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

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<sup>2</sup> Wright N.T. Interview in Time Magazine, 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008 Accessed from internet <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1710844,00.html>

<sup>3</sup> Lennox, J.C., 2015, *Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*, Lion Hudson Ltd, Oxford, p343

Here Paul reveals a mystery - something previously unknown. It has been revealed to him by Jesus. He wrote of the same event to the Thessalonians and there said this was according to the Lord's own word.

Remember Paul like Jesus uses sleep as a metaphor for death. He is saying here that when Jesus comes again, the Christians who have already died will be resurrected and those who are alive at that time will not die but be transformed directly from their mortal bodies to their new resurrection bodies.

I am reminded of the story that someone visited a mission hospital and was shown the nursery ward. Over the doorway was this same text: "We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed!"

He adds more detail in 1 Thessalonians: there will be a loud command, a trumpet call and the voice of the archangel. The Lord will come back in the clouds. That agrees with the words of the angels to the disciples when Jesus had ascended:

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. <sup>4</sup>

First the dead are to be raised and then living believers will be transformed and caught up to join him as he comes in the clouds. And this will not be a secret affair – you don't need to worry that you will miss it. Jesus said in Luke 21:24:

For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

When there is a flash of lightning, it doesn't matter which way you are facing, you see the flash – it is not hidden. And like a flash of lightning, this transformation will happen in an instance, literally the flick of an eye. We might say in an eye-blink.

#### **4. The Defeat of Death and Sin**

And finally at that point, Paul says sin and death will be defeated. This is the completion of the victory on the cross. When the resurrection comes, the perishable bodies of the dead will be clothed with the imperishable. The mortal bodies of those alive at the time will be clothed with immortality. All believers will be transformed.

It is sin which led to death reigning over humanity and the world. While the purpose of the Law of God is to direct and restrain our behaviour it is also, as Paul expounded in Romans, to expose our sinfulness. On being told not to do something, we want to do it because we are sinners. So he says the power of sin is the law.

With the fullness of the victory of Christ being realized, sin is dealt with, the penalty is dealt with, death is no more. When we are immortal and imperishable, death will have no more hold over us.

We will be free of that last enemy. Paul exalts at the thought drawing on Isaiah 25:8, "Death has been swallowed up in victory," and loosely on Hosea 13:14 "Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"

With him, we should all give thanks to God as He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **5. Instructions**

In the final verse, Paul turns to instructions. In the light of this great revelation of what is to be there are consequences for the present day.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Knowing this glorious future awaits us, we are to be steadfast and immovable. Not stubborn with our own ideas, but firm for the gospel hope and obedient to the Lord. This is a message originally a local church but then more widely distributed. Yet, Paul urges his readers always to give themselves to the work of the Lord. Not just the leaders but all of them. Not just our leaders here, but all of use, are to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. We are to be steadfast and immovable. And we have the knowledge that our work in Christ

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 1:11

is not in vain because of this resurrection hope. What we do in obedience to the Lord will be tried and what is precious will persist into the new creation.

With those words of Paul, we can consider the words of Jesus in the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Will we be those who hear his words and put them into practice or those who fail to obey his words? Paul says our labour in the Lord is not in vain. Jesus says if we obey his words, we are like someone building a house on solid foundations of rock which will withstand the storms and floods of life. That is good to hear in these more troubled times. This is a time when we want to know that our lives will withstand the troubles and stresses thrown against us. So we need to remember what Paul has just told us, stand firm and steadfast. Let nothing move you from your trust in God. Know that your labour for the Lord is not in vain.

The focus of this series has been on the resurrection. That is the great hope of our faith. And the resurrection is only the start of continuing glories beyond. We can only guess how wonderful they may be. C.S. Lewis expresses that for us in the last of the Narnia stories. These are allegories of the Christian life. As the Pevensie children pass from Narnia into Aslan's country (the equivalent of being transformed at the coming of Christ) he concludes with these words:

“All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis C.S., 1956, “The Last Battle”