

Our Future Resurrection  
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Over the past few sermons I have been looking at various themes around the resurrection. Last week we focused on some of the resurrection appearances in John 20 and 21 and this morning we considered how we are dead to sin and raised with Christ. The most significant aspect of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, is that it is the pattern and promise of our future bodily resurrection. Tonight we will focus on this, and our attention will center on 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthian 15, is an unique chapter in that it goes into significant detail on the significance of Christ's resurrection and the a description of our resurrection. There is a great wealth of insight in this chapter.

At the same time, however, this chapter like many of Paul's letters was not written to answer the questions that we are most interested in. This chapter and indeed the whole letter of 1 Corinthians was written to respond to specific errors that existed in the historical church in Corinth. We would rather that Paul wrote us a theological textbook or even a treatise on Christian doctrine, but what we have instead is an explanation of some doctrine in response to a specific problem, in fact a problem that does not often concern us today.

Taking our cue from 1 Corinthians 15:12, it seems that the error against which Paul was writing is that the Corinthians were denying the future resurrection of believers.

<sup>12</sup>But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

The Corithians were probably exaggerating the idea that I preached this morning, that in Christ we are already dead to sin and raised to new life. They were probably overemphasizing present spirituality to the exclusion of the future. Or alternatively they were depreciating the idea of the body, thinking that true reality was spirit and therefore there was no need for bodily resurrection.

We are not certain of their particular error, but some were denying the resurrection of the dead and this is not usually a problem within the church today. Our challenge will be to gain some clarity about the resurrection of the dead within this discussion which is trying to prove a fact that we already confidently believe.

What then can we learn as we ponder this chapter.

Christ's resurrection was a bodily resurrection.

This is the main point of the first few verses which enumerate the various resurrection appearances.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

<sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup>and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

The point of the matter is that Christ appeared to these people in bodily form. When we talk about the resurrection of Christ, we are not talking about spiritual life after death, we are talking about the manifestation of Christ in bodily form. He was seen by real people in history.

In fact this paragraph in 1 Corinthians is likely the oldest written record of the resurrection of Christ. This letter of Paul was likely written before the gospels themselves. And the clear testimony of Paul from verse 3 is that he was passing on the oral tradition which he received. Paul is saying that he did not invent this gospel, but rather is writing about what he had received from others and indeed what he had previously taught the church in Corinth.

For Paul, the historical fact of the resurrection appearances because the first argument for the bodily resurrection of Christians. He brings up this topic because he wants to make the point that it is inconsistent to believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and not the bodily resurrection of believers. If you deny that we will be raised, you are in effect saying that Christ was not raised and therefore the gospel is pointless.

## 1 Corinthians 15:12-14

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

Paul goes on to say that the historical resurrection of Christ is the basis and guarantee that we too will be raised.

## 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

<sup>20</sup>But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

And we too can take this same encouragement. Though we may not be inclined to reject the idea of our resurrection, it is still encouraging to have the confidence that our future is guaranteed by Christ.

While the Corinthians were wrestling with the if question “wondering if we will be raised like Christ” the two questions that we are most likely interested in are “When will this happen? And “What will it look like?”

Both of these questions find answers in this chapter. First let us consider the question “When will believers be resurrected?”

It is often assumed that individual believers receive a resurrection body immediately after they die, yet this is not the testimony of the scriptures.

One verse in particular in 1 Corinthians 15, indicated that there is a delay between our death and resurrection. Consider verse 23

“But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”

Christ has already been raised. He is the firstfruits. But according to this verse, those who belong to him will be resurrected “when he comes.” This

is referring to the second coming of Christ, his return at the end of the age. The indication is that those who belong to Christ will be made alive, raised like Christ at the time of his coming. This indicates that there will be a separation in time between our death and our resurrection.

So what then happens to us during this intermediate time? The scriptures shed some light on this.

First of all it is clear that after believers die, they are in the presence of Christ in a place that has been called paradise. Let me point to you two pieces of scriptural evidence.

The first is what Jesus says to the thief on the cross.

Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”<sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Although 1 Corinthians 15 says that we will not be raised until he comes, Jesus said the thief “today you will be with me in paradise.” If we put these two things together it seems reasonable to conclude that when we die will be a wonderful place, though not having received our resurrection body. It is hard to say exactly what this experience will be like, but it will be good.

At another time Paul meditates on life and death and expresses his contentment.

2 Corinthians 5:8

<sup>8</sup>We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

In this Paul is saying that he does not fear death and in fact looks forward to leaving the physical body behind so that he can be home with the Lord. So although we may not receive our resurrection bodies until after the return of Christ, it is clear that when we die we are home with the Lord in a place Jesus called paradise.

Turning now to the question “what will it be like to have a resurrection body, we find that this same question is addressed to Paul in our chapter.

1 Corinthians 15:35

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

Paul goes on to draw so distinctions between our current bodies of flesh and blood and what he calls our spiritual bodies.

First of all he says that our new bodies will be a different category of splendour. Our physical bodies are like a seed that results in the splendour of a flower. Just like stars differ in luminosity and animals differ in complexity, our physical bodies will be much greater than our flesh and blood bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

<sup>42</sup>So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup>it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup>it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

We might hope for greater detail but merely says that our new bodies will be incorruptible and powerful. Greater than our current bodies in every way. Being incorruptible means that as our sinful nature is somehow tied to our physical existence, our new existence will be sinless. Our resurrection will be our full cleansing and removal of sin.

Romans 8:10 says that “if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.” When we receive our spiritual bodies we will be fully alive and pure in both body and Spirit.

Perhaps the most significant thing we can say is that they will be bodies. Our final existence will not be merely spiritually or ghostly, but tangible in a bodily kind of way. We will not be melded into the cosmos, but will retain bodies which will serve to differentiate us from each other.

The term spiritual body almost seems contradictory, but in fact it is a marvelous truth. Our resurrection bodies will be greater than biology, but not less than biology. We will retain all the benefits of having a body, by which we can interact with our environment and maintain individual identity, but we will have all the benefits of spiritual existence include greater power and freedom from sin.

If Paul stops too short for our curiosity, it is good to remember that Christ's resurrection is our example. As the fact of his resurrection is a guarantee of our own, the character of his resurrection is an example for us.

If we think about the resurrection appearances of Christ, we get a clearer picture of what it means to have a spiritual body. Like Christ we will be able to interact with others and even be able to eat "as Christ ate a broiled fish." We will be recognizable by our friends, though we will not necessarily look exactly the same, because Christ was not always immediately recognized by the disciples.

And we will transcend physical reality as Christ was able to appear in the middle of a room even though the doors were locked.

In the end, this topic retains a great deal of mystery. We do not fully know what resurrection existence will be like. Yet the bottom line truth remains that the resurrection of Christ will affect our future. We will be raised as he was raised. This is indeed a glorious hope which should energize us for the present.

1 Corinthians 15:58

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 labor in the Lord is not in vain.

It is not vain to put your hope in Christ and to lead others to do the same.