# This is My Body

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0:00] Well, good morning to you all again. Delighted to be back with you and delighted to be starting a new series. We are starting a new series this week that's going to kind of, we're starting the Advent series a little early. So this is going to be a series that takes us into the season of Advent all the way up to Christmas. And the series is going to cover a variety of things.

We're going to cover issues such as virtual church, race, sexuality, gender, marriage. We're going to talk a little bit about abortion, birth control, Botox, a little bit about beauty treatments, plastic surgery, a bit on pornography, eating disorders are going to go in there, vaccine mandates, mental illness, dementia, yoga, tattoos, cloning is going to make it in there, cremation, chronic pain, aging, diet, exercise, got to have those, transhumanist technology, and a bit on death.

So we're going to cover a few topics over the next few weeks. Debra's agreed to allow me to double the length of my sermons, which I'm really excited about. It's been a battle we have fought ever since you joined the team. For the sake of time, actually, we're going to hit on all these topics by focusing on the one thing that all of these topics share in common, the kind of underlying issue that directly impacts how we think about all of these issues, which is the issue of embodiment. Embodiment. What does it mean that we have physical bodies? What do our bodies have to say about what it means to be human? What do our bodies have to tell us about who we are, why we're here, where we're going? What do our bodies have to say about what it means to be human beings? Are they secondary or are they central to our identities? These are the questions that we're going to be exploring. What we're going to see, hopefully, is that what you believe about your body, what you believe about your body, actually is going to determine how you think about all of the issues that I listed a moment ago and many, many others. So this is going to be our focus for the next six weeks.

The title of this series is, This is My Body. And those are very powerful words. That's a very powerful statement. This is my body. And so this morning I thought a series like this really needs a full sermon to introduce it so that we're really clear on what we're talking about. And I started thinking about this phrase, This is my body. And I started thinking how evocative that is and how it can really change meaning depending on who is saying it, what their emphasis is, how they say it. And so by way of introduction to the series, we're going to look at four ways that this phrase can be uttered and how from one to the next, the meaning changes depending on the speaker and on the emphasis. And we're going to use these passages that we just read from John 1 and 1 Corinthians 11 as our guide as we begin to explore this topic and sort of frame up what we're going to be doing over the course of the next six weeks.

So we're going to look at four ways this phrase can be used. This is my body. The first two are ways that human beings use it amongst ourselves and to God. And then the second two are going to be ways that God speaks this into the world and to us. So let's pray and then let's dive in. Lord, we thank you for your word. And we thank you that it's more than just theory that you're the God who is in the midst of your people. That Lord, you're here in fulfillment of a great and ancient promise that you would be a God who dwells in the midst of your people. That unlike the idols who are deaf and dumb and mute, you speak.

[4:12] We pray that you would speak to us this morning. That you would speak your word which never departs and returns void but accomplishes all that you intend it to accomplish. We pray that you would do that in us this morning. For your glory. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.

So first of all, this phrase can be a highly personal phrase. This is my body. In other words, this is my body, not that body or that body or that body.

But this alone is my body. Let me ask you a personal question. Next time that you are in the bathroom, if you were to stand in front of the mirror and simply, you know, full-length mirror and

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simply look at yourself and if you were to say, this is my body, how would you feel about that? Would you say, this is my body? Or would you say, this is my body? How would you say it? What feelings would that evoke in you? You know, this particular body is your body and you didn't get to choose this body for yourself. God chose it for you. And like it or not, you're sort of stuck with it. This is your body.
But it's a very unique body. In fact, it's extraordinarily unique to you. From your fingerprints, to your ear ridges, to the folds of your lips, to your irises, there has never been, nor will there ever be, another body exactly like your body. You say, what about identical twins? Even identical twins have different fingerprints. Your body is utterly unique to you. There's never been a body like your body. Now, despite all of this, you would think that we would hear this and we would think, my body is amazing. It's unique. It's never been anything like it. It's a one-of-a-kind, handmade creation. Despite all of this, I think it's fair to say people have a complicated relationship with their bodies, right? So, on the one hand, our bodies are ways that we experience being in the world. Your whole experience of being in the world is made possible through your embodiment.
So, all of our five senses enable us to experience all kinds of sensations in the world. And it's hard to imagine orienting ourselves in this world apart from those sensory experiences. And they can be gateways to extraordinary joy and pleasure. Some of the greatest things in life come through these senses. We can't imagine life without them. But I think our bodies can also be sources of tremendous anxiety, depression, self-hatred, right? Some of us long to be skinnier, as we look in that mirror. We long to be taller. We long to be prettier. We long to be stronger.
[7:17] Some of us can't help but constantly compare our bodies to other people's bodies. I don't want a body like this. I want a body like that. All right? Some of us have chronic pain or we have health issues, autoimmune issues, and we sort of live life feeling like our own body has turned against us, that our greatest enemy in life is our own body. Some of us are enslaved to bodily appetites.

We feel controlled by them. We can't beat them. Some of us, because of trauma, feel completely disconnected from our bodies. We live in a state of dissociation, alienated from our own physicality. Some of us are plagued by the nagging sense that we are somehow trapped in the wrong body altogether. And the only solution is a different body.
So the words, this is my body, are very, very, very personal, complicated feelings. Lots of insecurity arises around that phrase.
But at the same time that this is a personal phrase, these same words have also increasingly become highly political. Highly political. This is my body. This is my body. One of the most fundamental definitions of freedom in our society is the phrase my body, my choice. Now, some people use that in defense of their desire to terminate a pregnancy. Some people use that in defense of their desire to not take the vaccine. Either way, these, for many people, capture very essential ideas around human freedom in our society. A free society is one in which I can say, my body, my choice.
[9:13] It's an unassailable truth, according to most people in our culture. And what we've seen over the last few centuries is how bodies can become sources of division and injustice and oppression themselves. You know, we have this example in history, this horrible example of post-enlightenment pseudoscientists needing to find a way to justify slavery and doing that by creating the modern conception of race and claiming that lighter-skinned Europeans are inherently superior to darker-skinned Africans. That was an argument based in physiology and perceived physiological differences that enabled these scientists to create a kind of taxonomy where it was seen as beneficial to inferior races to be governed and dominated by so-called superior races. I don't have to tell you that that has done incalculable damage in our society and continues to the present day to do the same.

And in more recent history, bodies have come to occupy a central place in our entire political order. These days in our society, it's very hard to imagine politics separated from the human body and physiological differences. Karl Marx and Michel Foucault have argued and persuaded many in our society that the body is a central point for analyzing the shape of power in a given society.
So you take characteristics like biological sex or sexual orientation or gender identity or gender expression or skin color or hair type or age or disability or weight or clothing size.
And many people would say that these determine where you fall in the power hierarchies of society. Right? So these days, many people would say that your body either grants you privilege and

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access and power or it relegates you to marginalization, oppression, even exploitation.
Your body does this. So our bodies have, at the same time, a highly personal aspect to them. It is this body and it's unique to you.
[11:34] But they've also become highly political. They're very personal and they're very political. We can't imagine politics in society without talking about our bodies. They're very central. And I think it's fair to say if we look at all of this, something is wrong in our relationship with our bodies.

Something somewhere went really wrong and that our relationship with our bodies is, shall we say, disordered. Right? If you're an alien anthropologist looking in on our society from another planet, studying us, trying to figure out if you want to reach out and make contact, and you look at all of this, you would probably think, wow, there's something going on there.
There's something not right in their relationship with their bodies. And, you know, the Bible would very much affirm that. It would say it goes all the way back to the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.
We see after human beings disobeyed God, after they said to God, from now on we're going to decide right and wrong for ourselves, we're going to live in this world, but we're going to essentially seek to become our own gods, which was the nature of the fall.
What's the very first thing that happened after they made that decision and their relationship with God was broken? The very first thing that happened, they began to experience shame about their bodies.
[12:59] The very first symptom of a broken world was that our relationship with our own embodiment got broken. And what we see is this fundamental shift.

Instead of seeing our bodies as gifts to be celebrated, our bodies became problems to be solved. So for the first time, human beings went about trying to solve the problem of a body about which they felt shame. And when you've cut yourself off from God, you just have to rely on your own ability, your own strength, right?
Your own capacity. And so they turned to technology. And for the first time in history, human beings began using technology to cover their bodies.
They sewed fig leaves together. And ever since that day, human beings have been developing more and more advanced technologies to cover, alter, enhance, or altogether transform the bodies we have into the bodies we want.
[14:12] To solve the problem of the body. And virtually every society we know of throughout history has used cosmetics and body modification technologies to do just that.

You know, 7,000 years ago, people were putting makeup on to subtly alter their appearance. Numerous religions grew up, including all of the Gnostic traditions and the Eastern traditions, that denigrated the physical body, that offered various ways to either transcend or escape the fleshly prison of our bodies once and for all.
And as I say this, I hope it sounds familiar because the truth is, is our society is no different. We've taken these same things and we've just pushed them further and further and further, right?
Americans these days spend something like $16.5 billion on plastic surgery every year.
$16.5 billion. The fig leaf industry is booming. It is booming. It is booming. And the leaves have become a lot more expensive.
Many people just want to feel a little younger or a little more attractive. We begin to see the effects of aging on us and we want to stave that off as long as we possibly can.
[15:31] A little nip, tuck, Botox injection here and there just to kind of tweak ourselves so that we stay a little prettier or a little more handsome for a little longer.

Other people want more significant alterations. There's such a thing as ethnic plastic surgery. You may not know about this. Maybe you do. People of black or Hispanic and especially Asian descent using plastic surgery to try to meet Caucasian beauty standards.
In some parts of the world, that's big business. Sex and gender reassignment surgeries are on the rise. All the market projections are showing that that's a good industry if you're wanting to make money and you're in the medical field to get into because all the curves are going up.
More and more people want it. More and more people feel that the sex of their body does not match their gender identity and they want to align their body with the way they feel on the inside.
And that takes a lot of surgery. It's not just one, but it's a whole process and procedure over years to fully alter your body in that way. Likewise, transhumanist technology is on the rise.

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[16:43] These are all the various technologies that enable us to enhance or altogether transcend the limits of our physical body. Now, at one end, we just have something like Facebook's announcement of the metaverse.

Right? The great hope, the great vision of human flourishing that Mark Zuckerberg is preaching to the world is that the metaverse will allow us to sort of be anything we want, go anywhere, experience anything we want, that everything in the physical world can be taken into the digital world.

Interestingly, he's referring to it as an embodied internet, but if you look at what they're actually doing, it's the exact opposite of that. It's a disembodied experience. On the one end, we have that, and then we have all of these technologies that allow us to enhance our physical bodies, cybernetic enhancements.

This sounds like the stuff out of a sci-fi movie, but on the other end of that spectrum, you have more and more people and people with a lot of money and resources working on ways to either upload ourselves into another body or to upload ourselves into some kind of a computer that will enable us to escape our bodies once and for all, finally leaving embodiment behind.

And many people hear this and they think about the disordered relationship we have with our bodies and all of the anxiety and the depression and the insecurity and the chronic pain and illness, and they hear this and they think, well, that is good news for the world.

[18:10] Let's use technology to escape the limitations of our bodies and solve the problem once for all. What we're going to see in this series beginning today is that the gospel offers something infinitely better, infinitely better news for our bodies because the gospel doesn't promise alteration of our bodies.

It doesn't promise escape from our bodies altogether. As Paul says in Romans chapter 8 verses 23, the redemption of our bodies is the goal of the gospel.

The redemption of our bodies, a rightly ordered relationship with our bodies so that we no longer see them as problems to be solved. We began to see them again as gifts to be received and celebrated and loved because we're going to have them for a very, very, very long time.

Spoiler alert, we're going to have them for a very long time. So let me just give you a sense of how the gospel begins to do this. Just a little tidbit here for this morning.

How does God go about doing this? Through the words, this is my body used in two different ways. The first is the incarnational.

[19:28] This is my body. Right in John chapter 1 verse 14, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Through the incarnation, God says to the world, this is my body. This is my body. And the word, as John uses it, the word word is the Greek word logos, which is very rich and multi-textured in its meaning.

The word logos is the intersection of Greek and Hebrew thought. Right? The Greeks thought of the logos as the ordering, shaping principle of the universe, the sort of, the principle that holds all things together.

The Hebrews heard logos and they went back to Genesis. The word is how God created the universe. He created through his word. And so if you take these ideas and hold them together, when John says logos, here's what he means.

The being through whom all things were created and by whom all things hold together. That's the logos.

[20:50] And John says clearly that the logos became flesh. And he deliberately bypasses other words that would have less emphasis on the physicality and he deliberately goes to the word that would be the most physical of all of the words he could have used.

Sarx. The emphasis of that word is on the physicality, on the fleshy substance itself. The organizing principle of the universe through whom all things were created has become squishy flesh and bone. That's what he's emphasizing here. Now this would have absolutely scandalized the Greeks because the Greeks thought a lot like we think. They separated the spiritual and the physical and they just assumed that the spiritual was superior to the physical and so a lot of their thought revolved around especially later how to get out of the constraints of physicality and transcend the pure spiritual plane.

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So the idea that something that was spiritual would choose to become physical fleshy sarx that would have been totally scandalous to them. But John is not just saying that the word took on the appearance of flesh because a lot of them heard this and they thought well maybe what he means is that for a while the Logos looked like a person.
Or maybe for a while Logos took on a body kind of like putting on an overcoat to kind of do the thing but at the end of the day when the mission was done took the body off again.
[22:36] A lot of Christians to this day think that. But John is saying no. The word didn't just take on the appearance of flesh or inhabit a body temporarily Logos became sarx.

The word became ginomai and the tense that is used here conveys a permanent change in the nature of something. Something that becomes something new that it wasn't before.
And so here's what this means. The God of the universe permanently altered himself. Permanently altered himself. The eternal son the Logos became flesh.
And to this very moment as we sit here this morning is flesh. There is a body a physical body sitting at the right hand of the father as we speak these words together.
Now this has extraordinary implications. I just want to give you a couple before we move on. We're going to say a lot more about this in the weeks to come. But the incarnation means that Jesus alone can offer us two things that we desperately need when it comes to our relationship with our bodies.
[23:54] Compassion compassion and direction. Hebrews chapter two the author of Hebrews says he meaning Jesus became like us in every way.

The context of that is this. What is he saying? Are you struggling right now? God has been there. Are you depressed? Are you fearful? Are you hungry?
Are you in chronic pain? Are you exhausted? Are you lonely? He has been there. Do you feel rejected? Do you feel marginalized? Do you feel mistreated? Do you feel overlooked?
He has been there. Are you homeless? Are you friendless? Are you jobless? Are you poor? He has been there. Jesus has been there more than we know.
So when we pray to God and we are struggling within the limitations of our finitude, our creatureliness, our fleshliness, we are longing to escape all of these limitations, when we are crying out to God, we are crying out to a God who knows what it is because he voluntarily took on those limitations himself and experienced it himself.
[25:12] So he knows how we feel. So his compassion is real. But then also through the incarnation, we're given not just someone who can empathize with us, but we're given a direction for ourselves and our own bodies.

Because what you see in Jesus is someone who became flesh and experienced life in the flesh, and yet at the same time he never sinned. He never gave in to the temptations that come with life in the flesh.
So Jesus not only became a human being, but he shows us what human beings were meant to be, and what we can one day become through his grace.
this is where we get the phrase that we'll talk more about, Christological anthropology. Essentially the idea that we can only ever fully know what it means to be a human being by looking at Jesus. That Jesus shows us what a true, fully formed human being looks like. And we can't fully understand what it means to be a human being until we have seen true humanity revealed in him.
[26:18] And what this tells us is that the aim of the Christian gospel is not just to save us. The aim of the Christian gospel and the Christian life is to become fully human.

This is a re-humanization project. Until, as it says in 1 John 3 verse 2, beloved, he says, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared.
You know, we're becoming something. We're not quite sure what that's going to be. But we know, he says, that when he appears, meaning Jesus, we shall be like him.
That's how we're going to know. We'll recognize him because it'll be in some ways like looking into a mirror. Now, that's an amazing claim. And this is made possible because Jesus didn't just become a body, become flesh, but he offers his body.
He offers his flesh for the sake of humanity, which brings us to the fourth and final way that we hear this phrase spoken by God to us, the sacramental way.
[27:28] Jesus sitting at the table with his most beloved disciples, holding out a piece of bread and saying, this is my body. This is my body.

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1 Corinthians 11 verse 23, for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said, this is my body.
Jesus gave us this meal of bread and wine to be for us, as we say, his body and his blood. And after instituting this meal, he goes on to show us the full meaning of these words when he goes to the cross.
cross. And on the cross, we see his flesh being torn. We see his blood being spilled in order to make, as the Hebrew would indicate, to cut a new covenant between God and all the peoples of the earth that anyone and everyone who comes in faith and repentance to Jesus can be saved and restored.
And what we need to understand in this context is that this is more than just a time to remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. As Paul says in the previous chapter, chapter 10, verse 16, he says, the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?
[28:52] The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? What does that mean? By eating and drinking this meal, which by the way, we can only do if we have physical bodies.

You can't eat and drink a meal if you don't have a physical body. By eating and drinking this meal, the Holy Spirit joins our physical bodies with Christ's physical body.
In that moment when you are eating and receiving this meal, in faith, the Holy Spirit is joining your physical body to Christ's physical body. And in that moment, you are participating in his body and blood.
You are one with him. The word koinonia, you have fellowship with him. In the most intimate sense, you are one physically with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.
We don't believe that the bread changes into flesh. We don't believe that the wine changes into blood. That arose in the days of Thomas Aquinas and the rise of the scholastic movement, which departed platonic categories for making sense of the Eucharist, the great tradition which had lasted a thousand years.
[30:08] And they began to use Aristotle to try to define more and more and more precisely what is actually happening in this meal, in the bread and in the wine.

We read this and we say the call is to receive this meal, understanding that as we receive it, in the power of the Spirit, we participate in the body and blood of Jesus, just as it says.
And we can only do this if we have physical bodies. And in this meal, we begin to see a glimpse of God's future plan for us and for the world and for our bodies. That the great hope of the Christian gospel is not that we might one day shuffle off this mortal coil and fly up to sit on a cloud and play a harp in heaven.
That the great hope of the Christian gospel is that the heavens and the earth will come together as one. That the spiritual and the physical will come together as one. Matter and spirit will become one as God always intended for it to be.
What that means is that the bodies that we have now will be fully restored and renewed. And as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, the best guarantee of this is Jesus' body.
[31:23] The fact that he was physically raised shows us that we will be one day physically raised as well. We pray this every week in the Lord's prayer.

This is the fulfillment of our request, our desire, that one day God's kingdom would come and his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. So over the next few weeks we're going to be exploring many of the themes that we've teed up here this morning.
We're going to be touching on them in more detail. For now, I hope that it is clear to you that when it comes to your body and the complicated relationship that you have with your body, there is no greater source of hope in the world than the Christian gospel.
It wouldn't be a sermon if we didn't quote C.S. Lewis. Here's what he says on the topic. Just kidding. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body, which believes that matter is good, that God himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy.
Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this. And even now, as we prepare to come to this table, we simply ask that you would take whatever of this is from you, either to convict us or comfort us that you would do your work through your word and the power of your spirit.

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[32:57] And that as we come to this table and as we receive your body, that we might experience a sense of encouragement and hope as we reflect on our own bodies and the great and wonderful plan that you have for them and for us, for your glory and your son's holy name.

Amen. Amen.

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