

# The Resurrection Body

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning to all of you. In case you missed Dan's introduction at the very beginning of the service, we are doing something a bit different.

This morning we are using a funeral liturgy, the funeral liturgy, out of our prayer book to structure our time of worship. I know that's a bizarre thing to do a week away from Christmas.

There are some reasons behind it. Number one, we're still in the season of Advent, and Advent as a season is distinct from Christmas. It's a time when we are meant to reflect on the fact that Jesus came, that He will come again, and what we believe about death and life after death as a result of that.

So this is appropriate for that reason. There's also this reality that we don't often acknowledge in the church, probably not nearly enough, and that is that the holidays are an extraordinarily hard time for many people.

The holidays are a time when grief can be particularly poignant and painful. It's a time of year when we keenly miss and are aware of the absence of loved ones we may have lost.

[ 1 : 16 ] I think of people in my family I've lost, and this is the time that I think about them. And so this is a way for us to say, you don't always have to be happy during the holidays.

It's okay to feel grief. It's okay to struggle. It's okay to grieve loss or infertility or miscarriage or any of the other reasons that we might be grieving.

And in our desire to be an emotionally honest community, we want to create space for grief in the midst of the celebration and joy of the holiday season. And so this service is a sort of space for that. So all through the service, we're inviting you to bring to mind, bring into your heart those whom you have lost, those whom you are grieving, and to allow this to be a time to really bring that grief into the Lord's presence.

And then the third reason that we're doing a funeral this morning is that we are in a series in the Bible on the theme of embodiment. And we've talked about embodiment in various ways over the last few weeks.

[ 2 : 21 ] We said first that our bodies are gifts. And then we said that our bodies bear God's image. And then we said that our bodies are us, that your body's not merely a container that holds the real you, that our bodies are us.

And then last week, we said that our bodies are central to spiritual growth and change, that growth happens and discipleship happens not merely through changed belief, but through changing our practices, our habits, our rituals, the things that we do over and over and over over the course of our lives.

And so this morning, you know, there would be no series on embodiment would be complete if we didn't spend a little time asking, well, what about the future of our bodies? What's the ultimate destination of our physical bodies?

And is there some hope for our bodies as we face the inevitability of death? So we're going to break this into three parts this morning as we look at 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

We read a selection of it, but we're really going to look at verse 35 through the end of the chapter. And there's so much here, so I can't wait to dive in. We're going to look first at the problem of death and then the promise of resurrection and then the proof.

[ 3 : 43 ] How do we know? How do we know that this is true? Let's pray and then we will open God's word. Lord, we thank you this morning for being a God who is not only a God of celebration and sentimentality, but you're a God who takes our grief seriously because you're a God who has borne our grief.

You're a God who has grieved yourself. You sat by the tomb of your beloved friend Lazarus even as you planned to raise him and you wept at Mary's side.

And so, Lord, we know you're a God who weeps with those who weep. And we pray that as we bring our grief to you this morning and as we ask you about our future and how we might think about death, we pray that you would speak to us and tell us what we each need to hear, Lord. We pray this in your Son's holy name. Amen. So, first of all, we want to say a little bit about the problem of death. In verse 55 at the end of the reading that we heard a moment ago, Paul mentions the sting of death.

The sting of death. So, what is the sting of death? Ernest Becker was a cultural anthropologist who won a Pulitzer for his book, *The Denial of Death*, back in the 1970s.

[ 5 : 03 ] And this book made a huge impact because Becker was naming something that people, I think, are instinctively aware of, but he was putting words to it.

In this book, he makes the case that many of our psychological issues, many of our social ills stem from the fact that all human beings are caught in a kind of paradox.

He says, on the one hand, everybody has a sense inside them that they have cosmic significance. We, we, he says this, he says, this is the terror to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, and excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression, and with all of this, yet to die.

And he says, it seems like a hoax. So, on the one hand, we are self-aware, we have a conscience, we have a sense of our future, we have a sense that we mean something, that our lives matter. And yet, right alongside that, we know that at some point in the future, we're all going to be worm food. And it creates this tension. How can I be cosmically significant and aware of my own existence, and yet know that one day, nobody will be alive on earth who even remembers I ever existed?

[ 6 : 31 ] How do we deal with that? And what Becker's talking about in his book is really the sting of death. You know, this, this is the, the, the thing, we're all haunted.

We're all haunted by this deep fear and uncertainty about death and what lies on the other side of death.

And, and this sort of fear is always there lurking in the shadows of our daily lives. And the sting of death, since we're talking about embodiment, the sting of death actually fills us with disdain over our physical bodies.

Because Becker describes in his book, he says, you know, on the one hand, we're all convinced of our own significance, and yet we are, quote, housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body, a material fleshly casing that is alien to us in many ways.

The strangest and most repugnant way being that it aches and bleeds and will decay and die. Our bodies are constant reminders, especially when we get a little older, constant reminders that death is approaching and that there is no vaccine that can ward death off forever.

[ 7 : 54 ] It's approaching. Every day it gets closer. And so as we are embodied creatures, this fills us with disdain because we don't want to be reminded of that reality.

And so people have found many different ways to cope with the sting of death. Some people numb themselves to suppress it. Becker says, quote, modern man is drinking and drugging himself out of awareness, or he spends his time shopping, which is the same thing.

But the problem with that approach is, the more we numb ourselves to escape the sting of death, the more we suppress our ability to really live our lives.

And so he says that's the trade-off. If you numb yourself to suppress your fear of death, you will never actually inhabit your life. You'll live in a kind of half-life.

Right? So that doesn't work. He says that there are many other people who deal with the sting of death by trying to make a name for themselves or create some sort of lasting legacy.

[ 9 : 03 ] This comes from the foreword of the book. We achieve Erskine's immortality by sacrificing ourselves to conquer an empire, to build a temple, to write a book, to establish a family, to accumulate a fortune, to further progress and prosperity.

We want to clean up the world, make it perfect, keep it safe for democracy or communism, purify it of the enemies of God, eliminate evil, establish an alabaster city undimmed by human tears, or a thousand-year Reich.

He says much of the evil in the world stems from, is motivated by, this ceaseless striving and competing between people to try to build a lasting legacy and achieve some kind of Ersof's immortality.

More recently, psychologists and self-help gurus have promoted the idea that death is natural. The best way we can deal with our death anxiety is to embrace it as a natural part of the natural process that has been unfolding in the world for centuries, for millennia.

And so there's a lot of talk now about just recognizing that this is just part of the cycle and that we should be okay with it, we should be at peace with it. And that's a nice idea, but I'm convinced that the vast majority of people probably can't quite get there.

[10:33] And I actually want to know how many of the people who teach that actually believe it when it comes to their own death or the death of people they love. Because I may be able to get to that point when it comes to my death to reach some sort of peace or acceptance that it's going to happen.

But I'll tell you this, I will never accept the death of one of my children as being natural. I will never accept the death of any children as being natural.

I'll just never get there. And so that's a nice idea, but I think fundamentally people sniff it out for what it is, which is shallow sentimentality.

And then finally there are people who deal with the anxiety that they feel over death, the sting of death, by turning to technology. You know, we've already talked in this series about the transhumanist movement seeking ways to prolong life indefinitely or transfer our consciousness to a computer so that we can live forever.

This past week some of you may have read in the news about this new technology called the Sarco, right? It's a 3D printed death pod that is going to be made available.

[11:47] It's being tested out in Switzerland right now. I don't want to know the details of what testing something like this means, but it's being tested out right now.

And it's essentially a DIY death pod that will soon be available, according to the hope of the founder, for free to anybody who wants to build one for themselves.

And if you read the articles about the Sarco, it's sort of the next big lifestyle choice, right? What do you give people who already have everything, who have more of a sense of control over reality than any previous generation ever in the history of the world ever?

What more control can we have? Well, we can have control over our own death. The ultimate, the ultimate thing that has loomed outside of our control.

The creator describes this as a, quote, stylish and elegant way to die. I think there's a mistaken assumption built into this whole thing.

[12:50] It's the assumption that if we can control the experience of dying, that might somehow alleviate the fear of death. But I think we all know those are two very different things.

The fear of dying and the experience of death, two very different things. So the problem of death is its sting.

Is its sting. That is this deep dread that haunts us, that lurks in the shadows of our lives, that we cannot escape no matter how we might try to cope.

That's the sting of death. And I think this is a big deal. Because as many psychologists and spiritual leaders and other people have known for a very long time, if you cannot face the things that you fear, if you can't face them, they will end up controlling you.

It's the things that we suppress most that most impact our behavior. The less aware you are of it, the more of a hold it has on you.

[14:00] And so we have to be able to deal with the sting of death somehow. None of these other approaches work. That's why 1 Corinthians 15 is such an amazing passage. Because as we look at this promise of resurrection that is embedded in this passage, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's talking about the gospel.

And he's talking about this promise that one day our bodies are going to be raised to new life again. Our physical bodies. And believe it or not, he's getting a lot of pushback.

Right? People are saying, verse 35, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? Now don't miss the skepticism here.

It's tempting to think that people who lived centuries ago were far more gullible. But that's a form of chronological snobbery. In fact, people were every bit as skeptical about the resurrection of the

dead 2,000 years ago as they are today.

So people are asking these questions. And they're good questions. They're saying, how is this kind of thing possible? And even if it were possible, what kind of bodies are we going to have?

[15:12] So imagine the scenarios. You know, what about the body of my grandfather? It's been in the ground for a long time. It's seriously decomposed by this point.

Is that body going to come back decomposed like some sort of zombie? What about someone who's cremated? You know, my aunt whose ashes were scattered into the ocean.

What kind of body is she going to have? Is God going to go around gathering up all of the little molecules and somehow gluing that body back together? Right?

What about the fact that our cells are constantly replacing themselves? That the cells that your body has now are not the same cells that it had a year ago? Is God going to gather up all of the molecules?

And from what version of my body? Right? What about children? When children die, does that mean that they come back and they are permanently and forever children that never grow up?

[16:12] What about people who have miscarriages or abortions? What kind of bodies will they have if they were only a few cells before their life on earth ended?

What kind of bodies will we have? These are actually good questions. I can imagine sitting in a room full of adults from this time in our society and people asking very similar kinds of questions.

And here's Paul's answer. And I want you to follow the flow of his argument. Verses 36 through 38, he first makes this point. He says, listen, this is not new territory.

We've all seen this kind of thing happen in the natural world. The cycle of death and resurrection is already written into the rhythms of creation. He says, God does this all the time.

Think of seeds. When you, many of them were familiar with agriculture, when you sow seeds, what happens? Well, they land on the ground and they die. And then what happens?

[17:16] New life is raised up out of that dead seed. It's the same material, the same molecular substance. It's alive, it dies, and then it comes to life again as something new.

And then he says, you know, essentially, to put it in our modern terms, is it really that crazy to think that God could do the same thing with your body that he does with a seed every single day?

Is that really that crazy? And then he goes on in 39 to 41. He says, you know, we see all the time, God gives different bodies depending on the environment they are meant to inhabit.

Think about animals. Think about birds. Think about fish. Think about the sun and the moon and the stars. They all have bodies that correspond to the environment they're meant to dwell in. And so, you know, in our language, a fish's body is not meant to live on land, just by design.

A bird's body is not meant to live underwater by design, right? And he essentially says it's the same with your body. If you wanted to live in the ocean, if you wanted to live underwater all the time, you would need a different body.

[18:31] This body is not going to work. It's going to be a very short life. You're going to need a different body. And so, Paul's point is this. If you want to live in the age to come, if you want to live in the new creation, you're going to need a new body.

This body is not going to suit the new creation environment. So, you need a new body. And he says in verses 42 to 44, so it is with the resurrection of the dead.

What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.

It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. Now, spiritual here doesn't mean a ghost. It's easy to read this and to think that he's saying, you know, you have a physical body and then you'll have a pure spiritual ghost body.

But that's not what he's saying here. Natural here means a body for this age. Spiritual means a body for the age to come. So, I want you to see when it comes to the relationship between this body and the resurrection body, there are two themes that emerge when we look at this whole flow of the argument.

[19:42] He says, when you think of your resurrection body, here's the two things that you need to keep in mind. On the one hand, there's going to be continuity. And on the other hand, there's going to be transformation. On the one hand, there's going to be a molecular consistency between this body that you have right now sitting in the pew.

There's going to be a continuity between that body and your new creation body. It's going to be the same substance, but it's going to be transformed. Like a seed is transformed into a flower.

It's going to become something much more glorious. And that spiritual body is going to be suited for the new creation where there is no decay or disease or suffering or death.

It's going to be the kind of body that is meant to live in that world. Now, I just want you to take a moment and think, you know, if all this is true, if there is a promise that is guaranteed for each one of us in this room, that your body is going to continue into the new creation and that it's going to be transformed so that it can live forever in that new creation world.

And yet, at the same time, it is going to be this body. If all of that is true, then that would completely change the way we think about death. Because what this means is there's no longer anything to fear when it comes to death.

[ 21 : 05 ] Right? On the one hand, this affirms, yes, death does not belong in the world. This is not the way God intended things to be. It is right for you to be angry at it. It's right for us to rage against it.

But there's no longer any reason to fear it. Right? God has made death into a kind of doorway. It's a passage into a new, more glorious form of existence.

You know, it's no wonder that many early Christian artists used the butterfly as a symbol in their art of death and resurrection.

This body is the caterpillar. When you die and you're buried, you're simply going into a cocoon. And one day you will emerge from that cocoon as something far more glorious.

Whatever the equivalent of a butterfly body would be, whatever that is, whatever glory that represents for us, that's what we await. That's our future.

[ 22 : 05 ] And death is the passageway that gets us there. So if all of this is true, it changes everything. Right? It means, by the way, that what we do here and now matters.

It means that our bodies matter. It means that our work matters. That's why Paul says at the end of this passage, 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.

The things that you do here are going to continue into the new creation. This is not empty work.

You're not building things that are just going to burn up forever. We are building and participating in a world that is going to be renewed.

Much of what we do is going to continue. So this changes everything. If all of this is true, we can face death with real confidence and hope.

Not sentimentality that says it's natural. It's not natural. But we don't have to fear it. But this raises the fundamental question of how can Paul be so sure?

[ 23 : 15 ] How can Paul be so sure? How do we know he's not just blowing smoke? What's the proof? The proof of all of this is Christmas.

The proof of all of this is what happened on the first Christmas. The Word became flesh. The Word could have come in many different ways, any way he wanted.

He could have been a big bright light in the sky, sort of tearing the sky open. You know, I think of Monty Python. Have you ever seen Monty Python? Search for the Holy Grail. When God speaks, he kind of opens the clouds and he puts his little hands on the clouds and he talks.

Right? And, you know, the Word could have done that. The Word could have appeared as God has appeared before, as a great pillar of fire or smoke or a thundering voice in a dark thundercloud. But the Word became a zygote in a mother's womb.

A young, marginalized girl. The Word became a cell that multiplied into two, that multiplied into four, that multiplied into eight.

[ 24 : 31 ] And every step of the way, the Word became a human body. Until he was ready to be born. That's how the Word entered our world.

So, if we were to ask Paul, how can we be so sure of what will happen to our bodies after we die? His answer would be, because we've seen it happen once before already.

We know what's going to happen to our bodies because we saw it happen to his body. Right? We saw Jesus born. We saw him grow up. We saw him alive.

We saw him working a job as a carpenter. We saw him in his public ministry. Just a few years of public ministry. We saw him crucified and tortured.

We saw him dead on the ground. We saw him buried in a tomb. And then we saw him rise again. And guess what? He still had a body.

[ 25 : 32 ] We saw him eat fish. We saw him drink water and wine. We saw him do things that, you know, as he drank and ate before his crucifixion.

He ate and drank after his crucifixion. We saw him do things that you need a body to do. I don't think he drank wine, but he drank water. We saw him do things that you have to have a body to do. Now, it was a different body. Right? It's interesting in the resurrection accounts, you know, Mary doesn't recognize him. She thinks he must be the gardener. You know, Mary knew him very well. She didn't recognize him. The disciples are out fishing after his resurrection. They see him. They don't immediately recognize him. So there's something different about his body. He can sort of come and go at will. This is a different body.

They saw this body ascend to heaven. It's the kind of body that can exist in the heavenly realm. It's a different, more glorified kind of body, but it's a body nonetheless. And what you see in Jesus' body is continuity and transformation.

[ 26 : 37 ] It is still him, but it's a different body. There's something more about his body. And in verses 45 to 49, Paul says, listen, don't make the mistake of thinking this is just Jesus.

Jesus, because the word became flesh, because the word became an embryo, Paul says that Jesus represents a new prototype human being.

There's a new prototype that has entered the world. There's the first prototype, Adam, what he calls the man of dust. Adam was made from the dust, and when he disobeyed God, he was condemned to return to the dust and all of his descendants with him.

From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return. But he says Jesus is the second Adam. He says this is the last Adam.

There's a new prototype of what it means to be a human being, the man of heaven. And Jesus shows us what all human beings were created to be, and all of his people, all of the people in him and connected to him, will not share Adam's condemned future, to go back to the dust.

[ 27 : 48 ] Everybody who is in this new prototype human will share in his future. They will be raised in a body that has continuity and yet has been transformed. And so the point of this passage is that when you become a Christian, you're not merely adopting a new belief system.

And, you know, this is a new concept for me as well. I've been a Christian close to 20 years. This is a new concept for me to think about. You're not just adopting a new belief system.

At the moment that you come to faith in Jesus, you are transferred from one humanity to another humanity. You're transferred from the humanity of the man of dust to the humanity of the man of heaven.

And that means that your body will one day be raised just as Jesus' body was raised. He says in verse 49, just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

We're going to be like him. So the good news in the midst of the grief of a funeral service a week before Christmas is this. Christmas takes the sting out of death.

[ 29 : 02 ] Christmas resolves the paradox. Christmas says, on the one hand, you're right. You are cosmically significant.

You weren't made for the dust. You were made for the stars. You were made for eternity. That voice in you that cries out, it's true. And yet it says, on the other hand, our future is not to be worm food. Our future is eternity. Death was not part of the plan. Death is part of a fallen world of dust. Our future is eternity with bodies that are no longer subject to decay.

So for all of us who are grieving this morning, grieving loved ones you've lost, grieving infertility, grieving miscarriage, grieving broken relationships, grieving COVID, grieving the ongoing uncertainty and existential dread that comes with an unending pandemic.

Whatever you may be grieving, grieving the disaster, the tragedy of Kentucky, whatever you may be grieving this morning, we know even as we grieve that as we celebrate Christmas in a few days, as we celebrate Christmas, we are proclaiming Christ's victory over death because the Word became flesh and offers us a new way to be human.

[ 30 : 34 ] I want to end with this wonderful sonnet from John Donne, Death Be Not Proud. This is a dialogue between a believer and death itself.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so. For those whom thou thinkst thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me. From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, much pleasure then from thee much more must flow, and soonest our best men with thee do go. Rest of their bones and souls delivery. Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men, and dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell, and poppier charms can make us sleep as well, and better than thy stroke. Why swellst thou then? One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more. [ 31 : 41 ] Death, thou shalt die. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your Word, and we thank you that it gives us the only thing that could really offer hope in the face of death, which is the promise, the sure promise, that death has been defeated.

That the thing we know in our souls is wrong has been condemned and defeated. Lord, I pray that you would comfort those who mourn.

I pray that you would weep with those who weep. But I pray even as we continue in our prayer, in our singing, even as we come to your table, you would press into our hearts that resurrection hope. Lord, that we would see this for what it is, merely a doorway, a gateway, into a new, more glorious form of existence that we see prefigured in your resurrected Son, Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen.