

# Transformed to life

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[ 0 : 00 ] I have to say when I started preparing this sermon I thought gosh I've bitten off more than I can chew here.! Perhaps I ought to ring up Chris and say can I have another three weeks or something.

And those words of Jesus still speak to us. Do we really believe this?

Clearly the Corinthians were struggling with it. This idea of resurrection. And perhaps we need to think before we actually dive into it that our problems with it are not necessarily those of the people at the time.

Although some of them probably are. Of course in classical Greek religion of course then what happened was that you crossed the river of forgetfulness into Hades and you were disconnected from this present world.

But at around the time of Jesus of course probably the dominant philosophical view was that of the skeptics. The Epicureans and the Stoics who pretty much like skeptics today believed that there was nothing after death.

[ 1 : 30 ] And the only thing to argue about was what should you do about it? Should you, the Epicureans said let's you might as well just get drunk and forget your pain because there's nothing else to do.

Whereas the Stoics seem to say you should grit your teeth and endure it. And we find both those around today don't we? If you know any philosophy I guess you'll realize that Nietzsche was in essence a Stoic.

But most people of course, it's never been a particularly attractive doctrine. Most people go for the Epicurean solution of materialism. Let's just make, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. We know that in the Corinthian church there was influence of those people who were known as Gnostics, those who knew. And perhaps their view was different again.

Their view was perhaps that the spirit is trapped in a mortal body. And you escaped it at death. So in that case why on earth would you want to come back?

[ 2 : 38 ] It was a step down the spiritual ladder. And perhaps our problem with this doctrine is a slightly different one again.

It's almost the opposite perhaps to the Gnostic one. Our problem is that we know in fact in the sense that our spirit is made up of memories and experiences and knowledge. And it's stored in our brains.

And we ask how can this survive, the dissolution of the body? I think the Archbishop of Canterbury or somebody recently said we're all stored in God's cloud. Which may sound rather trendy and IT-ish.

But still how does that work? Can we survive the dissolution of our bodies? And yet that's sort of a new objection in one sense.

In the sense that was always the objection of the sceptics. But Paul's argument addresses really every objection. So let's see if we can make some sense of this very long and very challenging chapter.

[ 3 : 45 ] So there are I think basically four sections to it. The New International Version divides it into three. But I think that the last part you can divide into two sections.

In verses 1 to 11 it's about Christ's resurrection in space and time. And then the first objection. Those who say there is no resurrection.

Paul addresses this in 12 to 34. And then in 35 to 53 he says what kind. Answers those who say what kind of resurrection.

Does this make sense? What sort of body will we be resurrected in? And then there's this final song of victory at the end. So although we can divide it into sections.

I think that actually there is a developed argument that runs all through it. And we really do need to look at it all together. So I've got some long words for you here. Because actually I couldn't think of better words.

[ 4 : 46 ] To sum up what is going on here. He starts with history. In the first 11 verses. And then from the history he proceeds to the theology.

Theology of course is the study of what we know about God. And how it affects our everyday lives. And he moves from history into theology.

You've probably heard that word before. Many of you probably don't know what the next word even means. I suspect Tim probably does. But I really couldn't think of a better word.

Ontology is a philosophical term. Ontology is that branch of philosophy which asks how do things exist?

In what sense do things exist? And I really couldn't think of a better word to describe what Paul is talking about here. What is the nature of our bodies?

[ 5 : 48 ] And then having used two long words. I thought I might as well use another long one. And talk about doxology. Doxology of course is a word that means a song or a statement of praise.

So some long words. But we'll try and make sense of them. And try and see. Use them as sort of nails to see what Paul is trying to tell us here. So first of all.

Paul starts with history. He said in the previous chapter that he'd rather say five words of instruction than 10,000 words in a tongue.

And now he says I'm going to remind you of what that gospel is that I first preached to you or that you first had preached to you. And so he starts with a summary of the gospel.

But the emphasis obviously as you can see in here is on the resurrection. Well why? Because that was the doctrine that was particularly under attack. And he says the resurrection is a brute historical fact.

[ 6 : 59 ] It's not like some of these pagan religions which talk kind of about the death of the winter man and the rebirth in the spring. Which is essentially a symbolic thing.

Jesus' resurrected body certainly appeared to have properties that ours don't. But nonetheless it existed in our physical universe. He ate and he drank and he prepared a meal.

He broke bread with people and he talked with people face to face. And Paul says look there are 500 witnesses to this. You can go and talk to them.

It's not just some hallucination. And he remained with the disciples for an extended period. And he met with them on several occasions. So that's Paul's first point.

The doctrine of resurrection is founded in history. The sceptics tell us that faith ignores the evidence. Don't they? That's what Richard Dawkins is always trying to tell us.

[ 8 : 06 ] You can only have faith by ignoring the evidence. But Paul is saying exactly the opposite argument here. He's saying there's plenty of evidence. He invites us here to go and talk to the witnesses.

Well we can't actually do that. But we have their recorded testimony written down by many people. We have different descriptions and different recollections of exactly what happened.

And as some of the lawyers have pointed out. The confusions around the edge. The slightly different descriptions that you get from the different gospel writers and the different people.

Are in fact exactly what you'd expect. From a eyewitness account. Where people perceive things slightly differently. And put emphasis on different things.

If the apostles had sat down and worked out a careful story. Then they would have made sure all the details were absolutely consistent. Wouldn't they?

[ 9 : 06 ] But in fact they don't. What we have are eyewitness accounts. People with different perceptions and different recollections. And yet pointing to a historical truth.

A truth that Jesus rose from the dead. Everything else follows from that. There is evidence. And we believe it.

And in fact the skeptic's argument is only. In the end is only. Well resurrection is impossible. So it can't have happened. So who is ignoring the evidence here?

We are saying that there is evidence. That Christ was raised from the dead. But because of the skeptics.

Perhaps the Corinthians were thinking. This doctrine is actually a bit of an embarrassment. Perhaps it's not too important anyway. Perhaps we should. Why should we bother with it?

[10:07] Perhaps we should be concentrating on the gifts of the spirit. That we have now. And displaying the work of the spirit. In the church now. But Paul gives.

Well depends how you number it. But I suggest he actually gives three theological reasons. Why we cannot possibly do this. I don't know whether you ever thought of it this way.

But Christian theology is always rooted in history. It could be rooted in other things. I mean you could. Root theology in philosophy.

As Plato tried to do. Or you could. Root. Theology in some vision. Or some mystical. Sense.

As perhaps as the Buddhists try to do. But Christian theology is always rooted in history. God speaks in and through history. And if this link to history is lost.

[11:05] Then the whole thing collapses. Like a deck of cards. And Paul says it's absolutely essential. It's absolutely vital.

That Christ was raised as a historical fact. Because without it. Without the resurrection. The gospel makes no sense. And he makes several points like this.

He says first of all. In verses 14 and 15. The gospel is a lie. And Paul himself is a liar. Because we testified that Christ was raised. And in 16 and 17.

He says without it your faith is useless. Why? Because the resurrection of Christ. Is the mark. That the sacrifice is accepted. In the Old Testament. They actually had to use two animals.

They had to sacrifice one animal. And they have to put their hands on the other goat. And shove it out into the desert. As a sign. That the sins were taken away.

[12:07] Well the resurrection. Is the sign that God has accepted. The sacrifice. That he has taken the sins. And has broken the bounds of death and hell.

So without the resurrection. Your faith is useless. And you're still in your sins. There is no sacrifice. The sacrifice has not been accepted. Unless the resurrection is a true historical fact.

And anyway. He says if there is a resurrection. If there's no resurrection. In verses 18. And also he says something similar in verse 29. Those who are dead are lost. And so what is the point of the gospel anyway?

Those who are dead are lost. And he even talks. We don't worry too much about what he means. By being baptized for the dead. And why people will want to do that. At least he says. People have this sense don't they?

That there is something after death. And the resurrection is the guarantee of that. Those who are dead are not lost. That there is some future.

[13:12] And then finally in verse 19. And he comes back to it in 30 and 32. 32 he says work and suffering for the gospel is pointless. If there is no resurrection. So without the resurrection the gospel makes no sense.

And secondly he says without the resurrection history makes no sense. And that of course is just what the skeptics think. That history makes no sense. But that's not Paul's view.

In verse 20 he repeats doesn't he? The historical resurrection of Christ. He says. I'll stick now. Verse 20.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. This is the event he says. If you like at the center of history.

And it reflects back to Adam. Verses 21 and 22. He says this is the end of the curse of Adam. At least the beginning of human history.

[14:18] There was the curse of Adam. And he says this is the end. This is the center of it. And in verses 23 and 24. He says Christ is the end and the ruler of history.

He points forward. And he says. But death is the last enemy. To be destroyed. And that's why some of us. That's why we're still dying.

Because that final victory is not yet complete. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed. But this event of Christ's resurrection is at the center of history.

And he says history is actually going somewhere. And in the end in verses 27 and 28. God will be all in all. And then the third thing he says is without the resurrection.

Morality makes no sense. And don't we see the struggles that people have nowadays. They do have. People do have some sort of conscience.

[15:21] People do have the view that there is right and wrong. But in the end they can make no sense of it. Because. If. If. If we all die.

Then the only thing that can make any sense. Is our own gratification. And our own. Immediate experience. And so we can't. Have morality. There is no reason to be concerned. For others. And you find what happens. If you try and. Establish by. Morality by. Sort of statement. By merely declaring what is true. Which of course is pretty much what. Political correctness tries to. Do. Then it just frays around the edges. It might work for a while. But in the end. People say no. This is pointless. It doesn't make any sense. And. Paul. Points out here. He quotes actually from Isaiah. Let us eat and drink.

[16:18] For tomorrow we die. But of course. This was just the argument of the Epicureans. And it's the best argument there is really. If there's no resurrection. Let us eat and drink.

For tomorrow we die. So. That's the theology of the resurrection. Without the resurrection. The gospel makes no sense. And history makes no sense. And morality. Makes no sense. But then he moves on. Perhaps to an even more difficult. Question. Someone may ask. How are the dead raised? With what kind of body. Will they come? Well that's a good question. Isn't it? Why would you want to be resurrected? Given the problems and limitations. Of our current bodies. As I say. We shouldn't.

[17:13] Assume that resurrection. Is just reanimation. Lazarus was raised back to life. But he still went on and died again. And I'm sure in those extra years of life he had.

He still had all the struggles of life around him. In some ways this is a more legitimate objection. Than the fact that there was no resurrection at all.

I mean who wants to be a zombie? Who wants to be trapped. In a rotting body. A body who's. Well moves on to. That is in.

Subject to decay. And. Desecration. And here. We have a. Actually do have an issue. Don't we? Because Christ's body was. Raised intact. As it says in Psalm 16 verse 10. It's also quoted in Acts 2 27. You will not. Let your holy one see corruption.

[18:14] But for most of us. That isn't true. Most of us will see corruption. And yet this isn't a new objection. Even in Job.

Job is one of the oldest books in the Bible. And yet in Job 19 verse 26. Job says. After my skin has been destroyed. Yet in my flesh. I will see God.

So it's a very old problem. And yet it's a very current one too. What are those body. What are those whose bodies have been destroyed by fire?

What are those who have been eaten by wild animals? What are those who have been eaten by cannibals? Has the spirit passed into the cannibal? As some cannibals seem to think actually. Are they without hope? And even those who have been buried in the usual way? The chemicals of our body have been used by many people over the centuries.

[19:14] No doubt. They've certainly been eaten by worms and carried off. I was going to see if I could find a YouTuber on Ilkleymore by a tap. But I thought I probably didn't have time to do it.

But that's the argument there isn't it? If you go out. You'll be it. You'll die. If you go out in the Ilkleymore without a hat you'll die. And the worms will eat you. And the ducks will eat the worms. And we'll eat the ducks. And then we will have eaten you. Is that all there is to be said? Does it make any sense?

How are the dead raised? And yet to Paul this just seems to be woolly thinking. He says that in verse 36. How foolish. I mean we might need to remember that when foolish.

The Bible talks about foolishness. It's referring to moral inadequacy. It doesn't just mean stupidity. It means a moral failure. So let's see if we can get our heads around Paul's argument here.

[20:14] Because it isn't an easy one I think. And yet it's a vital one. And I tried actually on this slide. To summarize what Paul is saying here.

And we'll look at his illustrations. And you can see if you agree with me. That this is what Paul is saying. I think there's three aspects to it. The key concept here is clearly soma.

Body. He talks a lot about bodies here. The Greek word is soma. And what is a body? And as I say. He really raises the question of what is the nature of the being of a body? And I don't think perhaps he totally answers that.

But I think he can at least introduce it. And I think there are three things he's saying here. First of all a body is the solid thing. Which constitutes the physical existence of an object.

[ 21 : 18 ] Perhaps in one sense we're not only our bodies. But in another sense we are. In the physical universe at least. We are our bodies. That's us.

That's what we are. This is our physical existence. The body is our physical existence. Just as the body of this chair is its physical existence.

And so the body is the physical object if you like. The solid thing. Which constitutes the physical existence. And yet says Paul.

There's two things to note. First of all that the body can exist in different forms. And yet still be essentially the same thing. That's not an easy concept.

And he's got some analogies. To try and make it clear. It's not an easy concept is it? And yet I think that's what he's saying. And he says then that a body can be transformed by some process.

[ 22 : 23 ] And that transformation will certainly change it. And yet it still remains essentially the same thing. And I'd suggest to you that this is the essence of Paul's argument.

Well let's look at the illustrations he gave. And just keep those things if you can in your mind. But we'll look at the illustrations he gives. And so first of all he suggests that a body can exist in different forms.

And yet it's still essentially the same thing. And he takes doesn't he the example of a seed and a plant. The substance of a plant as it grows is different from the seed.

And yet it remains the same plant. It's made of different things. And yet it remains in the end the same plant. If you sow a wheat seed what you get is a wheat plant.

If you sow a fig seed what you get is a fig tree. It remains essentially the same thing. In verse 39 he says all flesh is not the same.

[ 23 : 35 ] Men have one kind of flesh. Animals have another. Birds another. And fish another. Now I'm sure you realize that all these things in a sense are made of meat.

That's what in fact almost what the word flesh means. Even people are made of meat. And yet there are differences. If you cut up a fish it doesn't look the same as a bird inside.

And yet they will remain flesh. It can exist. Flesh can exist in different forms. And he talks about heavenly bodies.

Well he talks about verse 40. Earthly and heavenly things have different attributes. It's difficult to get exactly what he was getting at here. Perhaps he was thinking in kinds of Aristotelian terms.

Of things on the earth being essentially different from heavenly bodies. Being of different substance. I don't know. But it's certainly true that earthly and heavenly things have different attributes.

[ 24 : 40 ] And yet they are still bodies. They still have a physical existence. They still exist. And he talks about the heavenly bodies. The sun and the moon. Different in splendor.

And yet they are physical things. They still exist. And one could add some illustrations perhaps of our own. What Paul can't have known but we know now.

Is that the moon and the sun are made of different things. The moon is made of rock. Pretty much like earth. But without any water. The sun we know is actually made of plasma.

Ionized hydrogen if you're interested. But I don't want to give a discussion of physics. But they are made of different things. They are. The sun is of course much brighter than the moon.

And yet they also have things in common. One illuminates the day. The other illuminates the night. And life on earth would certainly not be possible without either of them.

[ 25 : 42 ] Obviously if the sun went out we'd die very quickly. If the moon went out we might not die quite so quickly. But we'd still die because the tides would stop. And the whole cycle of life would be disrupted.

Or perhaps I could talk about this book. This one's a bible.

But just think of it as a book. In a couple of weeks we're going to... I'm doing the S... The Sussex Ministry Training Course.

And in a couple of weeks we're going up to the British Library. To see the Codex Sinaiticus. Which I didn't know. But apparently it's kept in the British Library.

That is one of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament. And it's a manuscript. It's written. Handwritten of course. That was the only technology they had in those days.

[ 26 : 41 ] For transmitting words. They didn't have the technology that was invented a thousand or so years later. Of printing.

And of course this book is translated into English as well. And I won't show it here. But on my computer here. I've got another version of it.

That book in another form. In purely electronic form. And yet it's the same book. If we could send it back to a time warp into the 4th century.

Then those scribes would doubtless attribute it to witchcraft. Somebody said that no. Any advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

But if they could get over that fear. And if you could teach them English. And just show them how it worked. They would only need to read a few letters. A few sentences.

[ 27 : 46 ] To realise that this was the same book. That they've been labouring over. It's transmitted in terms of technology they couldn't dream of.

And yet it's the same book. It's the same book that they struggled with 1600 years ago. It's the same book.

Or I could even talk about my car. My car is made mostly of steel and plastic. And yet that's not to say what it is.

And at one point it existed in a different form. It existed as a computer aided design. In some Ford engineer's design room. And then perhaps it got printed out on paper.

And yet to achieve its full significance as a car. It needed to be transformed into steel and plastic. Because until that happened.

[ 28 : 48 ] It hadn't reached its full potential as a car. It couldn't move about. And yet in one sense it's still the same car. As was produced by that design engineer.

When he sat down at his computer one day. So. We can perhaps.

Say is that. Paul. Sorry we've changed again haven't we. There were the examples. That a body can exist in different forms.

Yet still be essentially. The same thing. And he's given those examples. Now. I don't know about you. I. Perhaps find them only partly convincing. But maybe that's because.

Language is just not up to it. And yet. This is surely what Paul is trying to tell us. That. We can be resurrected in a different form. And yet still be.

[ 29 : 48 ] In essence. The same thing. But Paul has more to say about this.

And he has to say about this issue of. Transformation. And that's almost I think at the heart. Of his argument.

Resurrection here. Is presented as transformation. And indeed death. Is presented here. As transformation. And even life.

The life that we go through now. Is presented here as transformation. Because he does say that we now. Have the form of the earthly man. And this really I think is the.

The height. Of. Paul's argument. It's all about transformation. It's all about transformation. And more specifically.

[ 30 : 53 ] He sees this transformation. In terms of transformation. From Adam. To Christ. That's why. Christ is at the center of history.

Because. The transformation. Is from the earthly man. To the heavenly man. And he says all sorts of things. That illustrate that same point.

But it is the main point. In verses 45 and 49. He says that. The first man. Adam became a living being. The last Adam.

A living. Life giving spirit. And then. In verse 49. As we are born. The likeness of the earthly man. So shall we bear the likeness. Of the man from heaven. So the transformation.

That Paul is talking about. Is the transformation. From Adam. To Christ. And he. Expands that. In various ways. He says it's the transformation. From natural.

[ 31 : 50 ] To spiritual. In verse 44. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.

If there's a natural body. There is a spiritual body. It's in verse 45. He talks about it being. Transformed.

From a living being. To a life giving spirit. From soul to spirit. From psyche to pneuma. Is what it says in the Greek. Perhaps it's.

We struggle with exactly. What he means there. But I think he means. That we no longer have the breath. Merely of this world. But the breath. Of heaven. The spirit of God.

In verses 47. And 48. He talks about. A transformation. Some dust. From a dusty body. If you like. To a heavenly body.

[ 32 : 52 ] And that is. Quite remarkable. Because. Adam was made of dust. Before the fall. Fall. What he seems to be saying here. Is that. Even.

Before the fall. Even if Adam had not sinned. He would still have needed. This transformation. From an earthly body. A body made of dust. To a spiritual body.

But perhaps. Sin. As he says here. Is the sting of death. Sin is what. Makes this a problem. But. Even without sin.

There is this need. From a translation. From what is. Earthly. To what is heavenly. And in force. Implicit in that. Perhaps.

Is a transformation. In verse 42. From what is. Perishable. To what is. Imperishable. In verse. 43. From what is. Dishonorable.

[ 33 : 50 ] To what is. Glorious. In verse. 43. From what is. Weak. To what is. Powerful. And I've added.

One more there. Although this is actually. In the last bit. In verse. 53. A transformation. From what is. Mortal. To what is. Immortal. So Paul.

Sees this life. And death. And the resurrection. To follow. As part. All part. Of this process. A transformation. And he says.

That is. The point. Almost. Of what we are. To be. Transformed. Into the likeness. Of Christ. And without the resurrection.

That transformation. Cannot be completed. It can only go so far. Without death. And resurrection. Unless the seed dies. It cannot become.

[ 34 : 46 ] A plant. There is very little. Of the physical. Body of the seed. That is found. In the plant. As it grows. Most of that. Comes from outside. Yet it is still.

The same plant. It is. The seed is. If you like. Resurrected. As a plant. God. And. Paul says that. Without the resurrection. This transformation.

From Adam to Christ. Cannot be made. Complete. So finally.

He reaches this. Last section. In verse. In verses 50. To 58. And I would suggest to you. Actually. That this. Verse. These verses.

Are the climax. Of the letter. They are not the end of it. Because there is more. To be said. And there is another chapter. To go. That we will look at. Next week.

[ 35 : 41 ] This is the climax. I once heard a musicologist. Talking about. What is the difference. Between. German music. And English music.

And he says. In German music. The climax. Is always at the end. It always builds. To a triumphant. Or tragic. Or whatever the. Emotion is. To a finale. But in English music.

Talk about classical music. Here obviously. The climax. Is usually. About two. Thirds of the way through. And there is. A reflection. After that.

And in a sense. That is what we find here. Paul brings us. Back to earth. In chapter 16. But at the end of. Chapter 15. He reaches this great.

Doxology. Let's just. Read it again. Well. Before I do that.

[ 36 : 42 ] Just point out a few things. He says. We shall all be changed. Clothed. He describes it as. In. 54. Just as the. Seed is clothed. With the.

Form of the plant. God. We will all. Inherit life. And all the problems. And the questions. And the confusions. And the defeat. That the Corinthians had. And that we have.

Will be swallowed up. In the victory. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. So he tells us. To catch a new vision. We're not wasting our time. So let me just read it.

To you again. Starting in verse 50. I declare to you brothers. That flesh and blood. Cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Nor does the perishable.

Inherit the imperishable. 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.

[ 37 : 39 ] For the trumpet will sound. The dead will be raised imperishable. And we will be changed. For the perishable. The perishable must clothe itself. With the imperishable. And the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable. Has been clothed. With the imperishable. And the mortal with immortality. Then the saying. Which is written. Will become true. Death has been swallowed up. In victory.

Where oh death. Is your victory. Where oh death. Is your sting. The sting of death. Is sin. And the power of sin. Is the law. But thanks be to God.  
He gives us the victory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my dear brothers. Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully. To the work of the Lord.  
Because you know. That your labor in the Lord. Is not in vain. So.  
[ 38 : 38 ] Paul tells us. We can be transformed. Into life. As Jesus has said. In those few words. He who believes in me. Will live. Even though he dies. And whoever lives.  
And believes in me. Will not. Will never die. And then comes. The challenge. Do you believe that? Does Martha believe that? Did the Corinthians. Did the Corinthians believe that?  
Do I believe that? That's the challenge. That Jesus gives to all of us. And so we need to. Ask ourselves. That question now. And perhaps. In a sense. We need to ask ourselves.  
It every day. Because. Tomorrow. We may be able to say. Yes now. But. We need to believe it. Tomorrow as well. So.  
I'll leave you with. Jesus question. Do you believe that?