

The resurrection and Christian hope

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[0 : 00] The reading is taken from the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, 1 Corinthians 15, starting at verse 35.

But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? You foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies, and what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly one is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars.

For star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable.

[1 : 21] 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.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, The first man, Adam, became a living being. The last, Adam, became a life-giving spirit.

But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust. The second man is from heaven.

As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust. And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[2 : 30] Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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.

[3 : 36] Why don't I pray before we look at 1 Corinthians 15. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you for this glorious truth that the Lord Jesus was indeed raised from the dead.

And we pray now, as we look at this next section, 1 Corinthians 15, please would you open our eyes to see the implications for our lives.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're pleased to pick up a Bible again and turn to page 1157.

1 Corinthians 15, verses 35 to 49. One of the saddest stories of the last few months has surely been that of J.S., a 14-year-old girl who died from cancer after winning a court case to ensure that her body would be cryogenetically frozen and stored in America.

She was convinced that the procedure, which cost 37,000 pounds, would give her a chance to live again in the future. In an open letter to the court, which was asked to resolve the dispute between her divorced parents, she wrote, I don't want to die, but I know I'm going to.

[4 : 53] I want to live longer. I want to have this chance. Now, the company that markets cryogenic freezing admits there is only a small chance that their clients will ever be brought back to bodily life, which reveals, of course, the inability of science to offer any real hope in the face of death.

And that is why this series in 1 Corinthians 15 and the hope that is at the heart of this great chapter, the hope of bodily resurrection from the dead, is a wonderful hope and a wonderful chapter to be studying in these four weeks heading up to Easter itself.

Because unlike the false hope of cryogenic freezing, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead offers true and certain hope of eternal life for all those who belong to Jesus.

But remember, if you've been following this series, why is it that Paul is writing? Yes, he is writing to give us certainty and confidence that Jesus rose from the dead, that there will be resurrection of those who follow him from the dead.

But he's not simply writing that just so we can sort of tick the box and say to ourselves, yes, I believe that. Rather, he is writing so that our lives are changed and transformed today, tomorrow, every day.

[6 : 21] Remember the church in Corinth was a worldly church? And Paul wants them to loosen their grip on this world. It's what we saw last week.

Verse 33, he says to them, don't be deceived. Verse 34, he says, wake up. Why? Well, because they're just living for now, for today.

They're living like everyone else in Corinth. Verse 32, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. At which point I take it, 1 Corinthians chapter 15 gets very close to the bone, doesn't it?

You see, they are claiming to be Christian, claiming to be followers of Jesus. But actually, how are they living? Well, they're simply living like everyone else in Corinth.

Isn't that our danger? Especially living as we do in such a nice part of the world. So you see, here is what we need to grasp.

[7 : 21] And hopefully we're going to do that this morning as we look at verses 35 to 49. This is what we need to grasp. You and I will only be transformed now by the resurrection.

If we have grasped and if we're convinced that our resurrection is going to be a concrete, physical reality.

Just as our lives now are concrete, physical realities. In other words, as long as I think that the resurrection is kind of going to be a vague, floaty, spiritual thing, then actually that is never going to change, is it, the way in which I live today?

I'm simply going to confine it to the never-never. Completely unrelated to real life in the here and now. Real life of work, friends, family, ambitions, all those concrete things.

It's why I think this chapter doesn't stop at verse 35. Because Paul wants the fact of the resurrection to be concrete for us.

[8 : 27] So that our lives are changed. We're not just going to be sort of disembodied spirits floating around. No, we will have new resurrection bodies.

So there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. Three headings. First of all, a transformed body. I think actually a new body would be a better heading than a transformed body.

A new body. Have a look back at verse 12. Because we said last week that it looks as if that some of the people in the church in Corinth were denying the resurrection. Denying that Christians will be raised to life after death.

And that then is reflected in this objection in verse 35. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?

Now, they're either denying the fact of the resurrection of those who belong to Jesus completely. Or they're denying that it's going to be physical. They're saying that it's just going to be a sort of floaty, vague, spiritual kind of thing, rather than a physical, concrete, new body resurrection.

[9 : 36] So look at verse 36. You foolish person. What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Can you see what Paul is saying? That death is the precondition for life.

Paul uses a picture from the world of gardening, from the world of agriculture, to show that God's purposes aren't thwarted by death. Rather that death leads to life and transformation.

Perhaps now that spring has arrived, some of us have decided that it's time to get our green fingers out, and we're in time to plant some seeds in our garden. So you buy your packet of seeds, and on the front of the packet, there's a beautiful picture of forget-me-nots or whatever it is you bought in full bloom.

You then open the packets. You look inside this little packet. And frankly, if you didn't know what was going to happen as those seeds were then planted in your garden, and as they came to life and so on, if you didn't know what was going to happen, just looking at some of those seeds, why, they'd look incredibly unpromising, wouldn't they?

[10 : 55] They're not green, they're the wrong color. They have no leaves on them. There's nothing, as you look at some of those tiny seeds in the palm of your hand, there's nothing at all to suggest that they're going to produce this wonderful flower in a few weeks' time.

So unimpressive. They look completely dead. And Paul says that is a parallel with the unknown experience of resurrection. A dead-looking, bare, dry seed is planted, and what comes up is a wonderfully beautiful green plant, vigorous.

Death and decomposition aren't an obstacle to resurrection. Rather, they pave the way to it. The analogy, of course, shows there is continuity between our present bodies and what our future bodies will be like.

I think that's the point in verse 37, isn't it? There's continuity. The seed isn't taken away, nor do you sow a plant, the body that will be, but a seed so that the new body comes from the seed.

There is continuity. But there's also a transformation, verse 38, as God gives the seed a new body as he is chosen. In other words, when the Bible talks about resurrection, it is not simply talking about resuscitation, the resuscitation of a corpse.

[12 : 22] It's not going to be like some sort of cringy horror film, you know, where they're dead come out of their graves, and there's granny, and she's still got her curlers in her hair. She's as wrinkly and as frail as she looked on the day that she died.

You know, barely able to move and walk and so on. No, just as in nature, death leads to transformation, so the promise of God giving a new body of his choosing comes out of death.

The new body comes on the other side. Now, I've twice seen a dead body in my life, pale, stiff, lifeless, more like a waxwork model than a real person.

At which point, of course, if you've seen a dead body, the idea of resurrection seems completely impossible, doesn't it? Well, wonderfully, the promise of resurrection is of a new transformed body.

We only need to look at the resurrection of Jesus, a physical resurrection, to see that it's possible. Here is the promise of new physical resurrection life, a new body for those who trust in Jesus.

[13 : 35] It's why, of course, it doesn't really make any difference whether a Christian is buried or cremated, because those who believe in Jesus will be given new bodies. But not just the new body, but a better body.

Point two. Verses 39 to 41. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind of humans, one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory.

I think what Paul is saying here is simply, look at the whole variety of different types of body and animal that you can see now in creation.

People, animals, fish, birds. Indeed, there's variety, isn't there, within some types of animals. So think of a caterpillar. It has two bodies.

[14 : 44] One adapted for eating plants, another as a butterfly adapted for flying, which leads to the story of the two caterpillars having a chat one afternoon when a butterfly flies overhead, and one turns to the other and says, you wouldn't get me up in one of those things.

Illustrates the simple point, different sorts of bodies. There is variety within the creation that we can see. And so it shouldn't surprise us that there is also variety in the creation that we cannot see.

What's more, the resurrection body will be so much better than the one we have at the moment. And that is the point of verses 42 to 45. Notice there's a whole series of contrasts. And I've tried to, I've put them on the outline just to make the point.

So from perishable to imperishable, from dishonor to glory, from weakness to power, and so on. Verse 42, our resurrection bodies will not be the perishable, decaying bodies that we have at the moment, the result of human sin and the fall.

That's so obvious, I guess, the older we get. But they will be immortal, imperishable, resurrection bodies. Verse 43, not dishonorable, but glorious.

[16 : 02] Not weak, but powerful. At which point, my hunch is that many in the church in Corinth would at this point have winced.

Because remember what we saw when we looked at one thing in his last year, how they, as a church, how they wanted to look so impressive in this world as a church.

It's why back in chapter four, Paul said with bitter irony, we are fools for Christ's sake, we are apostles, apostles, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are held in honor, we in disrepute. Because to be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ is to look weak and dishonorable in this world.

Paul knew that. After all, we follow a savior who came to earth as a servant, who died a weak, dishonorable, death.

[17 : 04] You Corinthians, you Corinthians who want to look so impressive and glorious and powerful now, how wrong you are. But the resurrection body, well, that will be something else different entirely.

Raised in glory, raised in power. What's more, verse 44, it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Now, when Paul talks about the resurrection body being spiritual, he doesn't mean sort of immaterial and floaty.

He's not saying we'll be like a disembodied spirit or something like that. No, he means supernatural. He means unseen at the moment, but just as real and concrete as are the bodies that we have now.

In other words, the life of resurrection beyond the grave will not be a rather shadowy existence that is inferior to the one that we have now. It will not be less physical, less material than what we are here this morning.

[18 : 17] No, it will be an infinitely greater body that we have now, infinitely better. C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Great Divorce*, marvelously describes the bodies we have now as transient gray smudges compared to the bodies we'll have then, which he describes as beings of splendor, solidity, and permanence.

It's over 10 years since the actor Dudley Moore died. He was 67. He died of a degenerative brain condition, which robbed him of his ability to speak, but most painfully of all for him, robbed him of the ability to play the piano.

And this is how he describes his feelings. It is a great emptiness. There's always this feeling of why did it hit me? And I cannot make peace with it because I know that I'm going to die from it.

I am trapped in this body and there is nothing I can do. Yes, I am angry. Why should I be reduced to this insignificant version of myself?

Now, I take it that is a common experience of old age, trapped in a body that will no longer do what I want it to do. The older we become, the more it feels that death hems us in.

[19 : 44] So then, you see, here is a wonderful, glorious promise, 1 Corinthians 15, of a better, glorious, new body, free from sin, free from the effects of sin.

In other words, as those who trust in Jesus Christ, we should want nothing less after death than the revival of our current bodies. Nothing less than that because we long for new bodies, better bodies, resurrection bodies.

So, a new body, a better body, thirdly, a certain body. Verse 45 to 49. Have a look at them with me. Thus it is written, the first man, Adam, became a living being.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, the man of dust.

The second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust. And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

[20 : 57] Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. Now, it seems that what Paul is doing here is that he is deliberately echoing the language of the early chapters of Genesis.

So please, will you keep a finger in 1 Corinthians 15 and turn back to Genesis chapter 2, right at the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 2. And see if you can hear the 1 Corinthians 15 echoes as we look at some verses here.

Genesis chapter 2, verse 7. Here is the summary of the creation of man. Genesis 2, verse 7. Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life.

And the man became a living creature. Beginning of the verse, the man of dust. Here is Adam, the first man, who as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, was from the earth a man of dust.

Then in Genesis 3, there's the fall as Adam and Eve reject God's rule over them. But now look on to God's curse of Adam at the end of the chapter, Genesis 3, verses 17 to 19.

[22 : 19] And to Adam, God said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the plants of the fields. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Do you see how back in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 47, Paul uses the same language.

Verse 47, the first man was from the earth, a man of dust. The second man is from heaven. Here's the echo of Genesis 2, the man who came from dust. But then verse 48, here is the echo of Genesis 3, as was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust.

In other words, we come from the dust, we return to the dust. Words, of course, that are echoes in the Church of England funeral service. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

[23 : 30] We hate it, of course. We resist it. It's why people of a certain age become obsessed about their legacy and what it is they're going to leave behind. But notice Paul also speaks in verses 47 to 49 of a second man from heaven.

And once again, there's the deliberate echo of Genesis, just as in Genesis chapter 1, God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. And we are told God made man in his image, in the image of God he created him.

Male and female, he created them. It seems then that Paul's train of thought is something like this. That just as in the beginning God made Adam in his image as the head of the human race, so now, 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 49, God is now making a new human race and at his head is Jesus Christ, the risen Jesus.

And so, verse 49, is therefore true of the Christian. Yes, born in the image of Adam, sinful, fallen, which of us is not aware of that? Yet one day, we will bear the full image of the risen Jesus with new resurrection bodies just as he had a new resurrection body.

The resurrection is a certainty. So, a new body, a better body, a certain body. But you say, so what?

[25 : 13] Well, I hope for those of us who are skeptical this morning about the idea of life after death, and I guess there may be some of us like this, hope we can see that actually the idea of resurrection, of new resurrection bodies, is perhaps not quite as contrary to the natural order of things as we might at first imagine.

Jesus was raised to life, a bodily, physical resurrection. Those who belong to Jesus will also be raised to life, a bodily, physical resurrection.

Well, for those of us who are followers of Jesus, why the certain hope of a future bodily resurrection should transform the way we live today. Because remember, what are the main applications of this chapter?

Have a look at verse 58. 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.

In other words, don't be like the world. Don't be like the world whose motto is simply that of verse 32. Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[26 : 27] Seize the day. You've got to make the most of this life. You only have one life. You've got to make the most of it. That's the world we live in. In 1967, Joni Erickson at the age of 17 was left paralyzed.

I guess many of us might have read her autobiography. After a diving accident, she was left a quadriplegic in a wheelchair without even the use of her hands. And this is what she said many years later as she looked back on her life.

She said, we ask less of this life because we know full well that more is coming in the next. We ask less of this life because we know full well that more is coming in the next.

That is the mindset of the resurrection. Not just for the Christian who has to spend her life in a wheelchair, but actually for every disciple of Jesus Christ. In contrast, here is the latest edition of the SE22 magazine which came through our letterbox on Friday morning with an article inside about a book launch.

The title of the book is called Unlimited. It is written by someone who apparently is a qualified life coach. The subtitle for the book, Seven Habits to Unleash Your Full Potential and Get the Life You Want.

[27 : 54] Now, is that not the air that we breathe? The air that our children breathe every day? You only have one life. You've got to make the most of it to serve yourself, get the life you want, serve your potential.

Well, as we said last week, for some of us, 1 Corinthians 15 will be a real rebuke because frankly we are living just like the world around us. Living for this life to get the most out of it, whether it's decisions we make about work or the future, our use of time, the way we use our energy, our resources, our ambitions, our goals.

Just living like the world. But for others, I trust 1 Corinthians chapter 15 will be a great encouragement because actually we are seeking to do, verse 58, to abound in the work of the Lord Jesus.

And that is hard, isn't it? It's hard in a culture which is simply living for today, hard in a culture which is just living for this life, hard in a culture which is basically just living for me.

At times, it feels very costly, costly of time, energy, friendship, costly of opportunities, perhaps which we say no to. Perhaps even at times it feels in vain.

[29 : 17] But the fact of the physical bodily resurrection to come means that we can indeed ask less of this life because we know full well that there is much more to come in the next life.

Not a vague, floaty, airy-fairy kind of life, but a real, concrete life as real and concrete and physical as this life, but better.

And parents, if I can address those of us who are parents for a moment, let's have this mindset for our children. I've lost count, I think, over the years the number of people who have talked to me about the possibility of full-time Christian ministry.

And it's their Christian parents, yes, their Christian parents who have been so very opposed to them doing that. At which point the worldliness of their parents is simply revealed.

Now let's pray this for our children, that our children will be those who are always abounding in the work of the Lord. Let's have a few moments for quiet and reflection and then I'll lead us in prayer.

[30 : 43] For I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in these great facts of history. The death of the Lord Jesus for our sins, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus to life, the promise of resurrection life for all those who trust in him.

We're sorry when we simply live as those around us live. We pray, please, that in your kindness we might be transformed by the resurrection, that we might be those who are always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labour is not in vain.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.