

A Sure and Certain Hope: A Spiritual Body

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Date: 30 June 2024

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[0:00] Lord, we thank you for this Lord's day. Thank you for getting us under the foot of your word to hear your word. Be with us now. Give us hearsay here.

Hearts to respond in faith and believe. Encouraged to obey what is written in your word. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Please be seated. Excuse me.

This is our third week in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. And Paul, by way of reminder, if you've been following along in this chapter, he wants his readers to know that knowing the future will cause us to shape our present in light of that future.

And what's the future he's been telling us about? It's about the resurrection from the dead. And that's why he ends this chapter in particular, chapter 15, with these words in verse 58.

[1:14] 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.

For Paul, if the resurrection is a sure and certain reality, then verse 58 should be the way in which we live in the present.

And we will actually spend some time in verse 58 in two weeks. We will spend time in this verse in detail as we look back on our journey through this whole epistle.

But in the meantime, Paul has assured us that we will be raised bodily after death on that day when the great cosmic alarm clock will sound.

What's the great cosmic alarm clock? He says it here. The trumpet. And that trumpet and the sound of the trumpet all will be raised up from our slumber.

[2:20] Those who are dead in Christ first. And this historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead also then, in Paul's mind, demands our own future resurrection.

He said it earlier in chapter 15. If Christ is raised from the dead, then we also will rise. At the sound of the last trumpet, we will be given new bodies. There are three things about this body that we will be given that Paul shows us in his passage that we read this morning.

The first thing is that this body will be different from this earthly body that you're in currently. Second thing is that this body will be glorious in comparison to this present body.

And the third is that this body that you will have at the resurrection will be immortal. Verse 35. As Paul writes this to them, as he's writing, the first 35 is that the Corinthians responds to all that Paul has said about the resurrection so far.

It's almost as if he quotes them. He says, so they ask him, but how? How will this happen? Because they couldn't conceive of a future with a resurrected body.

[3:41] So they ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? And you can imagine the worldly-minded Corinthians saying to Paul, you mean to say to us, Paul, that we are not going to be disembodied souls in heaven?

All right, then. If what you're saying is true, what will these bodies that you're speaking of, what will they look like? How old are we going to be, for example? Are we going to be the age we were when we died?

I mean, I don't know about you. I'm only in my early 40s. But I'm hoping that my resurrection body will be much younger than even where I am right now.

Right? So imagine our dear sister Mary and Shane who went to be with the Lord, 92 years old. Is what she's looking forward to in heaven is a 92-year-old body? So they're asking these questions of Paul.

Or what if one dies in infancy? So all of these questions are proper questions to ask. So they're asking Paul. And so Paul goes on in these verses to answer some of these questions.

[4:57] Paul is a loving shepherd. He listened to the problem that they had. And the questions they're raising. And he's seeking to answer their questions with clarity and simplicity.

And so that's what we have in verse 36 to 57. It's Paul's answer to their confusion about the nature of the resurrected body. And so from verse 35 to 41, he talks about how the body will be different from the present body we have now.

Firstly, our resurrected heavenly body will be different from this earthly body. It will be a different kind of body altogether.

So he says in verse 36, You foolish person. Now, Paul's bluntness is not really a rebuke. Rather, it's rather an invitation. It's almost as if he's saying, What nonsense are you talking about, Corinthians? It's an invitation to look beyond their worldly eyes to see the mystery that God is revealing to them. So he gives example.

[6:03] He said, Even the observable natural world around you gives examples of resurrections or transformation from death to life. So he says, What you sow does not come to life unless what?

It dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or some other grain.

And so just as you sow a bare grain kernel seed into the ground, what happens to the seed? The seed dies. But new life comes from that sown seed.

And the new life that comes is of a different kind altogether. It is not the grain that is sown, but a different kind. And yet at the same time, you know that that which comes, this new life, although it's of a different kind altogether, yet you still know it's a grain.

Right? It's true for any other kind of seed that you plant. You plant apple tree and it grows. You know that it's of a different kind than the seed that is planted, but you still know it's an apple tree or whatever else kind of thing that you put in the soil.

[7:19] And so Paul is using those examples as pictures of what the resurrection, the marked difference in the resurrection body. It is identifiable as grain and yet markedly different from the seed that is put in the ground.

So Paul is saying to them, such will be your resurrected body. So imagine when you are at a gravesite service and the priest says, we therefore commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, ensure uncertain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

You might have heard that before at a gravesite service. Well, we said that in full assurance that the body that is being buried or cremated or any other means by which the body is committed to the ground, that's not the same body that will rise at the last trumpet.

That's what Paul is saying here. It's going to be a different body altogether. That body that is being committed to the ground will decay and perish and be done away with. But a new body, the body being buried will perish and decay.

But the new body will be raised to life at the resurrection. And that body that will be raised to life will be of a different kind altogether. And we'll see in what ways it is different as we go forward.

[8:55] So look at verse 38. Paul says, Look at nature itself. It gives you pictures of resurrections, of transformations. But verse 38, But God is the real power behind all of it.

God gives it a body as He has chosen. And to 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, 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, another glory of the stars.

For stars differ from star in glory. So they're asking, How will this come to be? Okay, we get that it's going to be a different body, but how will it come to be?

You may not be able to conceive of such a thing, Paul is saying to us and to the Corinthians. But he wants us to see that the sovereign God who at creation spoke life into existence will also cause new life to come at the sound of the last trumpet as we were raised bodily.

[10:08] And here Paul reminds us of the majesty of God in creating different bodies. He's not referring to just human bodies here when he's saying bodies, bodies of different kinds.

But he wants us to see all of creation itself, the different bodies in which, in the way God created the things in the world. Look at the world around you.

Look at the different kinds of bodies, even in this room. But more importantly, look at the bodies that God created that are made suitable for different areas he has placed them in.

The bodies that live in water. The bodies that soar in the sky of different animals, birds. The bodies that inhabit the land. All created by God in his sovereign majesty.

And what of celestial bodies? The sun, the moon, and the stars who inhabit each of them their sphere as God has ordered them.

[11:09] And all of them function in their capacity with the glory God has given them. And so when you're asking, how will it happen that we will be raised bodily?

Well, God made out of nothing all that you see around you. Do you wonder perhaps about, so is anything, can anything be too difficult for God then?

Can he not raise and give new bodies? families. And maybe you wonder about perhaps your loved ones who have died in the Lord. Friends, parents, grandparents, siblings, or maybe children who died young, even in the womb, who you never knew.

Here's the glorious truth of the resurrection of the dead. God is saying to us believers that you will be reunited. You will know them.

They will know you at the resurrection. God is able to give you a resurrection body. That body will be different than the body that was sown and yet your own and yet that body will still be your own body.

[12:25] So that in heaven, what would happen? You will be able to recognize one another. God who is infinitely resourceful and powerful in creation is the same infinitely resourceful and powerful God in recreation.

Is there anything too difficult for God? Is there? No. So, God will do it is what Paul is saying.

And then, Paul goes on in verse 42 to 49. This body that you will have will be glorious. The new body will not only be radically different, but it will also be radically glorious.

So much of what we read is a challenge to us because we don't really have, you know, eyes have not seen, ears have not heard. I wonder what you think about it, what you think heaven is like when you think of heaven.

In the Corinthian world, they saw death, the Greek thinking about death and life after death. They saw death as freedom from the prison of the body.

[13:39] The physical world is a bad place. It's bad. So freedom, whereas the spiritual world is free of every and every physical limitations.

So the Greek mind thinks that what makes life after death superior is that it will be free from all physicality. But the picture the Bible paints is quite the opposite, isn't it?

Paul asked us to look at the risen Jesus himself as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. And when you hear that word, falling asleep, you heard it in our gospel reading this morning, didn't you?

What did Jesus say? About the little girl, Jairus' daughter, who had died, fallen asleep. And the apostles, the disciples in the first century took up that word to speak of those who had died in Christ.

Those who had fallen asleep. So when you hear the word falling asleep, that's the Christian way of describing believers who have died. And so, Jesus is an example of this resurrected body.

[14:48] Well, look at Jesus' resurrected body. Was it some ethereal body? Was it some floating Casper ghost that was floating everywhere after his resurrection?

No. It was a physical body. It can be seen. It was seen by the apostles. It was touched. He walked. He sat down with them. He even ate with them, with his disciples. And yet, his body, his resurrected body, was of a different kind than the one that was sown in death and buried.

And so, Paul goes on in verse 4, so it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable. But what is raised is imperishable.

You know what it is to have a perishable body, don't you? Even the youth among us, the under 30s, you know what it is.

[15:53] You might not know as much as those who are older, but you do know. Everyone knows what it is to have a perishable body. To one degree or another. We know the truth of the phrase in the book of Common Prayer that says, in the midst of life, we are in death.

Because from the moment of birth, you start to feel the pangs of death. After all, what is hunger? But the pangs of death.

What is sickness? But the pangs of death. And those two things assault the young and the old alike. Cancer doesn't have an age limit, does it?

Of course, the more life you live, the more you become even more aware that you live in a perishable body. Something that is perishable is something that is subject to decay. That is true of this earthly body that we all inhabit. spirit. But this decaying body, Paul tells us, will be raised from death as an imperishable body.

[17 : 12] As one commentator puts it, it will be raised in decay's reversal. I love the way he puts it there. It will be raised in decay's reversal. It's not just the quality that is in mind here, but also the process of the new body that is in reference.

Right? What is the process of this body that we have? It is in the midst of life, we're in death. It is the minute you're born, you're dying. And you're decaying.

That is the condition of this body. But this body that we will have, the new resurrected body, will be marked by a reversal of decay.

While this earthly body is marked by decreasing capacities, increasing weakness, ready exhaustion. Do you feel it?

Until it finally perishes in death. The new body that you will have will be the opposite. The heavenly body does not undergo the process of decay at all.

[18 : 19] In fact, the exact opposite is true of this heavenly body. The resurrected body will be a body that is constantly being renewed.

We will experience increasing strength rather than decreasing strength. Increasing vitality rather than decreasing.

Just as running water is constantly refreshed as opposed to stagnant water. Running water is always replenished, it's ever new.

In the same way, the new life that you will have, the new body that you have, the life that flows through your resurrected body, has at its inexhaustible source, Jesus Christ, the living water.

So, it will know no decay. It's not decayable. I don't know if that's a word, but that's exactly what Paul is trying to convey to us here.

[19 : 25] This resurrected body is not decayable. Verse 43, Paul continues, it is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. You know what it is to have a body that is dishonored. This earthly body has been dishonored.

It is marred. It is marred by sin. It is weakened by the passage of time. Think of how we dishonor our bodies, our other people's bodies, because of our sinful appetites.

The physical and the psychological effects of addictions, whether to drugs, or to pornography, or to food, or whatever your poison is.

our body bears the mark of sin. We bear the weakness and the humiliation of our fallen and sinful nature in our very bodies.

[20 : 35] Even pride, selfishness, arrogance, all of these, our earthly body bears upon it the wages of sin, sin, which is death, but not so with the heavenly body, because it is not susceptible to sin, this heavenly body.

Therefore, it remains a glorious body. The effects of the fall, the ravages of sin, which results in decay and death, will never touch this new body that you will have at the resurrection.

This, you will write, this body will be raised in glory, and it will remain so. In fact, it will go from glory to glory, that's what the Bible tells us, as this body displays God's power, that indwells and animates it.

That's the picture that Paul is giving us here. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. For 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, here, we read this, and I think this is what the English translation does in do justice to the distinction that is being made between a natural body and a spiritual body.

[21 : 55] Because we read it and we think, well, natural body means physical, spiritual means sort of, you know, whoo, Caspar, ethereal. That's not what Paul, when Paul writes it, he doesn't make those, that's not what he means.

Both are physical. The natural body, though, the word actually, the Greek word used there is, soulful body. It's a body that is encapsulated by the, that has soul in it.

But the spiritual body is going to be of a different kind altogether. Different than the natural body. Both are physical.

We will be wrong to think that, we will be wrong to adopt the pagan view of, sort of, escape from the physical material body. But the contrast is between an ordinary human body, which is the natural body, and a spiritual body in which the transforming power of the Holy Spirit operates in.

That's what makes it a spiritual body. The power of the Holy Spirit is what animates and transforms and empowers this new resurrected body.

[23:11] And so, Paul can go on in verse 45, 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. That's Adam. The second man is from heaven. As a man of dust, so also are those who are of dust.

And as is the man of heaven, Jesus Christ, so also are those who are of heaven. Those are all who are found in Christ. Just as we have born the image of the man of dust, you now bear the image of the man of dust.

In your flesh, you have the signs and the vestiges of the fall of sin and death. You bear the image of your father, Adam. But if you are in Christ, you shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Adam. That's the promise. Just as Adam is our federal head and representative, his failure and sin were imputed unto all his descendants.

[24:20] In the same way, Christ is our head and representative. He is the head and representative of the new humanity in the new heaven and earth.

Christ is the second and last Adam. Remember what we said last week? There are only two kinds of people. Those in the first Adam and those in Jesus Christ, the second Adam.

The destiny of the first Adam is death. And the destiny of the second Adam is resurrection and eternal life.

There are only two kinds of people. Paul concludes from verse 50 to 57 saying, and reveals how this body will be an immortal body.

And so he says in verse 50, I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. What the preceding verses to verse 50 have already made it clear that flesh and blood is not referring to just physical and non-physical, right?

[25:31] flesh and blood means a body that is marred by sin and the mark of death and decay.

That's what flesh and blood means. And that kind of body cannot inherit that which has been prepared for us in heaven.

Instead, God requires holiness to be in his presence. The only way we can be holy is by the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness to us.

And so, the picture Paul wants us to see is that in this new body, we have it because Christ himself attributes to us, gives to us, his holiness.

On that basis alone, on that basis alone, can we inherit the kingdom of God? It's because we bear the image of Christ.

We have been bathed in his finished work, atoning work on the cross for us. And so, Paul continues in verse 15, behold, I tell you a mystery.

[26:48] We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, actually, it would happen. In the twinkling of an eye, in an instant, 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 imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

mystery. Anytime Paul uses the word mystery, he doesn't mean a secret that you must discover, unravel.

He's not asking you to put on your detective hat and figure it out. But when he says mystery, he's actually referring to the revelation of God's saving act that has been hidden in history until it's revelation at the coming of the Lord and has now been revealed to God's people.

And so what Paul is saying here is that mystery, salvation and redemption in Christ and resurrection at the last day.

[28:05] the revelation is this, the resurrection from the dead will be instantaneous. It will be in a twinkling of an eye at the sound of the trumpet.

The redeemed of the Lord will be raised to new life with imperishable spiritual bodies. On that day when this happens, when the dead in Christ rise and those who are still alive, if you're still alive, if Christ comes, you will be changed.

That's what Paul is saying. And when that happens, when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written.

As we gather with the Lord at the last trumpet, we will sing a victory song. Together, we were redeemed of the Lord.

We will sing a victory song. It will be a taunting song, actually, as we taunt death itself. Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh, death, where is your victory?

[29 : 15] Oh, death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. It's not that it doesn't have any power. It does.

But, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is essentially quoting Isaiah 25 here. Isaiah's prophecy that speaks of the finished work of the Messiah.

Through his atoning death, he has removed the sting of death. He has taken upon himself the penalty of your sins. He has also taken the sting of death upon himself.

so much so that the law, what does the law do? The law condemns. But the law no longer condemns you, for your Redeemer has perfectly fulfilled the requirements of the law on your behalf. Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, drank the full poison cup, the wrath of God. He drank it all to the dregs. and he offers himself to you as an antidote to the poison, so that if you are in Christ, you have victory over death.

[30 : 35] This is the source of the Christians' victory song. It's not because we're any special, it's not because we're powerful in ourselves. The source of our victory song is Jesus Christ, our champion, our Redeemer, our Savior.

And it is because of him that death holds no fear or dread for the believer. Christ has swallowed up death forever. And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

And the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken. Think of the saints that have gone before.

Think of the reproach of being in this earthly body. Think of the reproach of sin. We talked about the humiliation of our own sin that have then incurred our bodies have paid the price of it.

What about other people's sin upon your body? We live in a world where there is hurt, there is atrocities upon atrocities.

[31 : 45] what is the hope and the solution? Here, Christ has swallowed up death forever.

The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. He will redeem all. He will restore better. Do you feel it?

do you feel the sting of death? Do you feel the pangs of death? Sickness? Pain?

Sometimes it's not just physical, heartache, loneliness, loss of loved ones. Do you feel it?

But do you hear the hope? Do you hear the words of resurrection? Here, Christ has swallowed up death forever.

[32 : 48] And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. This is our sure and certain future, brothers and sisters in Christ. This is why death holds no fear or dread for us, for us who are in Christ.

It's not that we will escape physical death. It's not that we wouldn't die of old age or even of sickness. We're not promised escape from that.

But we are promised. We can say with Paul, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain because death is nothing but a gateway to our Lord.

Death's thing is gone. It has no hold over you. Death is just an ushering into the presence of God.

And here is the words of promise. God will raise you up on the last day. You along with your loved ones who are in Christ.

[34 : 06] So, how does Paul conclude? As he gives us this wonderful promise, how does he conclude? It's not so much just to think about the future, but how does that future then impact our present reality?

Look in verse 58. Knowing this future awaits you in Christ, how will you now live in this present world?

Therefore, my beloved brothers, sisters, in Christ, he's only talking to Christians here, therefore, my beloved, in Christ, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

Do you still labor in this world? Do you strive? Yes, we all do, but it's not in vain. Dear friends, we will spend more time on verse 58 in two weeks.

But dear friends, I hope we can grasp this truth. And if we grasp this truth, I think it will free us to live for Christ in this present world.

[35 : 29] We will not be afraid of death, of what this world can do to us. We will invest our lives and our resources in the things of heaven, the things that will endure, not the things of this world that is passing away.

And Paul wants us to see that. He wants us to see that what we have in Christ is much more precious and worthy and unimaginable than anything that this world can offer us.

And so we must stop being enamored with worldly things. We must fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, our Savior, and hold on to the promise that He will raise us up on the last day.

Let us pray. O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, in whom whosoever believes shall live, though he die, and whosoever lives and believes in him shall not die eternally.

You have also taught us by your early apostle St. Paul, not to be sorry as people without hope, for them that sleep in Christ. so we pray, O Father, we pray that you will raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Jesus Christ as Redeemer, and that at the general resurrection on the last day, we may be found acceptable in your sight, and that we may receive that blessing which your well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear you, saying, come, you blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.

[37 : 34] Grant this, we ask, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our mediator and Redeemer. Amen.