

1 Corinthians 15:35-49 AM

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[0 : 00] Well, like David said, my name is Jacob. I've been an artizo apprentice for the past few years here at St. John's, and I will be ordained tonight, Lord willing.

I can't help but feel like this is my final examination, though. And as David said, Jordan is sick today, so I'm stepping in for him.

And if Aaron Roberts is the president's choice version of David, then I'm the no-frills version of all of them. So thank you for your patience.

Friends, we're going to be looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 35 to 49, so please turn there with me in your copy of the scriptures. And just as you do, I think it'll be helpful to give a little recap of where we've been in 1 Corinthians.

Remember that in this letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul is teaching the Corinthians about true spirituality. The Corinthians had all sorts of wrong ideas about what it meant to be spiritual.

[1 : 06] So Paul is telling them that true spirituality is identifying yourself and living in line with the self-sacrificial love that is grounded in Jesus Christ.

And the way that he gave himself for us. That is the principle of the Christian life. And throughout this letter, Paul has been applying that principle to lots of different hard situations in the Corinthian church.

And in chapter 15, Paul now turns to remind the Corinthians about the foundation of that principle. It's founded on the gospel.

Jesus Christ died for our sins. He was buried in the ground. But he defeated death. And he rose again to eternal life.

And through faith in him, we have eternal life. And last week, we heard from verses 12 to 34 that the resurrection is utterly foundational to our faith.

[2 : 11] If there's no resurrection, the gospel is useless and meaningless. And worse than meaningless, it is baseless lies that we tell ourselves and other people.

So Apostle Paul says, believe in the resurrection. And in our passage today, Paul answers two questions about the resurrection. Paul anticipates these questions.

It's like someone hears Paul and says, Okay, Paul, I want to believe in the resurrection. I hear you that it's foundational. But everything around me seems to contradict it.

People are born. They live for a little while. And they die. We all suffer from sickness and death. And people don't come back from the dead.

So Paul anticipates these questions. Verse 35. Two of them. How are the dead raised? And if they are raised, what kind of body will they come with?

[3 : 22] It's pretty good questions. Or, so we think they are, until we see Paul's answer. Verse 36. You foolish person.

You fool. Why does Paul say this? Well, Paul says, if we are Christians, if we have believed in Christ, we ought to know the answer.

But friends, if you're like me, you so often don't know the answer. Even as Christians, we can be spiritually blind. So, happily for us, in this passage, the good apostle answers these two questions for us.

He answers the first question, how are the dead raised? In verses 35 to 41. And he answers the second question, what kind of body they will have? In verses 42 to 49.

So let's dive in. Question number one, verse 35. How are the dead raised? And this question is not about the mechanics of resurrection.

[4 : 33] But rather, it's about the manner of resurrection. It's about how the resurrection is possible. Remember that the Corinthians are swimming in a culture deeply influenced by Greek philosophy.

And in that culture, the body was often seen as a prison of suffering. And while the soul, your inner self, was certainly immortal, so they thought, they had no category for understanding an immortal body.

What does that even mean? So the question is, in what manner is the body raised from the dead? How is it possible?

And Paul gives them three analogies to help them understand. So first, he gives them, in verse 36, an analogy from a seed.

Let's read this together. Beginning second part of verse 36. What you sow, a seed, does not come to life until it dies.

[5 : 42] And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel. Perhaps of wheat or some other grain. And God gives it a body as he has chosen.

And to each kind of seed, its own body. So Paul says the seed is analogous to a dead body. And when it's buried in the ground, a new body will come up out of it.

Out of the bare kernel. So out of something that is seemingly lifeless, comes all manner of beautiful life.

My wife and I were at a retreat center this past week called Cedar Springs. And Cedar Springs has beautiful gardens.

And as we walked around these beautiful gardens that had thousands and thousands of beautiful trees and bushes and flowers, As we're walking around, it struck me that every single one of those beautiful trees, bushes, and flowers began as a tiny, dry, lifeless pip.

[6 : 53] Out of something seemingly lifeless comes all manner of beautiful life. But the heart of Paul's point in this analogy is really in verse 38.

Look with me. It actually doesn't come through great in the ESV. But here in verse 38, Paul is emphatic. Previously, he has said in the original three times, You sow.

You sow. You sow. And then verse 38. But God gives. God gives the seed a body as he has willed. Here's what Paul means. We sow plant seeds in our gardens. But we don't determine how or what kind of plant it will grow into.

God determines the body for each kind of plant. And he enables the life to grow. Likewise, it will be with us.

[8 : 03] As we lay our bodies into the ground in the hope of Jesus Christ, God will give us a new body according to his gracious will.

That's the first analogy. The second analogy is in verse 39. And it's about different kinds of flesh. Not all flesh is the same.

But there's one kind for humans, another for fish, another for birds, and another for fish, for animals. And this analogy piggybacks off the previous one.

It's God who determines and gives flesh to all the different kinds of plants. But he also does this for all the creatures of the earth. And here's the point.

Not all flesh on the earth is the same. But how and why God gives different creatures different flesh is not random.

[9 : 02] Rather, God gives flesh appropriate to the need. Appropriate to the environment. For fish, the right kind of body to swim through the ocean.

For birds, the right kind of body to fly in the sky and build nests. For human beings, the right kind of body to live on the earth and to bear his image.

God gives the right kind of body to each kind of creature. That's the second analogy. And the last analogy is in verses 40 and 41.

And this one can be a little bit tricky. So lean in with me. Paul is saying here that there are different kinds of glory for all the different types of bodies that God creates.

So heavenly bodies and earthly bodies have a different magnitude of glory. That is, they shine more or less brightly.

[10 : 06] And heavenly bodies even differ from one another in how brightly they shine. How much glory they have. So the sun of one level. The moon of another.

The stars of different levels of brightness. So what is Paul getting at here? Well, it's important to remember that according to scripture, all glory comes from God's greatness.

And creatures are only glorious insofar as they reflect the glory of God. So in his analogy, the more brightly a thing shines, the more of God's glory it displays.

Here's an example just to make this clear. I'm a human creature. And I reflect light. You can see me right now. That means I'm reflecting light to your eyes.

So in Paul's analogy, I'm glorious. But my glory pales in comparison to the glory of the sun, which is much, much more radiant than I am.

[11:20] You see? So Paul is saying that the difference between earthly and heavenly radiance tells us something about the difference between our earthly and our resurrection bodies.

Here's the point. Our resurrection bodies will be radiant like the sun. Because they will perfectly reflect the greatness of God.

So if we put all three of these analogies together, we see Paul's answer to the first question. If we believe and hope in Jesus Christ, though we will die and be buried in the ground like a seed, God will graciously raise us up with a new resurrection body that is perfectly suited to our new eternal life.

And which perfectly radiates God's glory in his new creation. This, according to Paul, is how it's possible for the dead to be raised.

That's the first question. The second question is, what will those resurrection bodies be like? And it's a question that, if you're anything like me, you've asked yourself a lot.

[12:43] But it's important to note here that Paul does not indulge in speculation. Rather, he is giving us a vision of our resurrection bodies, which is rooted in Scripture.

In the Old Testament Scripture. And in everything that we know about Jesus from the Gospels. And Paul is saying, this is what we know.

This is what Scripture tells us. It's not the full picture. But it's enough to give us a confident hope. So let's see how he answers this question.

First, in verses 42 to 44, Paul returns to the analogy of the seed. And he does this to tell us that our resurrection body will be superior in every way to our earthly body.

And to show us this, he gives us four contrasts in verses 42 to 44. So what is sown is perishable. But what is raised is imperishable.

[13:53] What is sown in dishonor is raised in glory. What is sown in weakness is raised in power. A physical body is sown. And a spiritual body is raised.

So what will our resurrection bodies be like? Well, the body that is now perishable, dishonored, weak, and physical, will then be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual in the resurrection. Let's take a look at each of these contrasts to see what he means. Verse 42. Our bodies are perishable.

And I'm sure this won't take much convincing for you to believe it. And I won't start to tell you about all the ways that I feel this happening in my body.

David would probably make fun of me if I did. Being a man of, well, of youth. But I'm getting older.

[14:55] I can feel it. I don't bounce back quite like I used to. And you probably know what I mean. We perish. And anyone who has sat with a loved one through a prolonged sickness, or at a bedside of a dying friend, or anyone who is experiencing chronic illness, you know that we are perishing.

And Paul tells us here that our resurrection bodies will be fit and suitable to life eternal.

They will not perish. Ever. Verse 43. Our bodies are dishonored and weak.

Paul, I should say, does not hate the body. He does not think that it is evil or vile. He's just recognizing the plain facts of the matter.

We live in dishonor and in weakness. The Bible does not teach that bodies are shameful by nature. And Paul is not saying that here.

[16:16] Rather, he's saying the opposite. He says that our bodies are noble. Think about it. Dishonor is only dishonorable to that which deserves more honor.

Our bodies were made to reflect God's glory. Our bodies were made for eternal life. But we suffer the effects of sin in our bodies.

And so we suffer dishonor and weakness. But Paul is saying it will not be this way forever. And this is good news for us.

Brothers and sisters, this changes everything about the way that we endure suffering in this life. It changes everything about the way that we live in a culture that constantly is telling us, cover up your sickness.

Cover up the fact that you're dying. Use technology to make yourself better. Remember, Paul says there will be a fulfillment of what your body is supposed to be.

[17 : 30] And it's coming in the resurrection. This is good news for any of us who feel alienated in our bodies now.

Paul is saying that our resurrection body will be perfected. We will finally be exactly what he designed us to be.

Our bodies will be honored properly in their new purpose because they will reflect God's glory and will be filled with his power. Verse 44, our bodies are now natural.

But in the resurrection, they will be spiritual. And here it's really important to understand that Paul is not contrasting natural and spiritual as in physical, material, and immaterial.

Rather, what Paul is saying here is that the contrast between physical and spiritual, natural and spiritual, is about what animates our bodies.

[18 : 41] Here's what I mean. The body that we now have is governed and animated by biological processes and functions. You breathe in and out to live.

Your muscles move your arms and legs around to do things. Your vocal cords vibrate for you to speak. Your biology animates everything you do.

And the resurrection body will be material. But it will be animated by the spirit of the living God. It will be governed by God's spirit inside of us.

It will be animated by God's processes and functions. And what that looks like, no one really knows. But Paul here is giving us a glimpse of what that future body will be like in Christ.

It will be superior in every way. Imperishable. Glorious. Powerful. And spirit-filled. And lastly, and this is the final thing.

[19 : 56] Paul tells us that our bodies will be patterned after Jesus. Look at verse 45. Whereas the first man, Adam, became a living being.

The last man, the last Adam, became a life-giving spirit. And verse 49. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, that's Adam, we shall also bear the image of the man from heaven, Jesus.

This means that our bodies will be like Jesus' body. What does this mean? Well, the new body in the resurrection will be a real body.

Remember Luke chapter 24. When Jesus appears to the disciples, Jesus says to them, Come, touch me. See that I'm real. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

The body will also be spiritual while it's physical. And you can see this in John chapter 20.

Remember Jesus comes in mysteriously through locked doors.

[21 : 17] It's a mark of his transformed spiritual body. And yet, he tells Thomas, Come, put your hand in my wound from the crucifixion.

And he eats food with them. And he talks with them. He builds a fire with them. He's a real person. Although he's perfected.

And the new body will really be us. You will be you in the resurrection. Remember John chapter 21. Jesus' disciples, when he's on the shore, they don't recognize him at first. He's transformed in some wonderful way. And yet, as they draw close, and as they hear his voice, they recognize him for who he is.

He really is the Jesus that they knew. Our resurrection bodies will be patterned after Jesus.

[22 : 26] So friends, we are going to be like Christ in eternity. Verse 49 is a promise. It's a guarantee for our future.

Brothers and sisters, anyone who believes in Christ is, even now, a new creation. If you believe in Jesus and follow him, you've already had his life-giving spirit breathed upon you.

And you have been spiritually reborn into a new creature. We will continue to suffer in our earthly bodies. But God's work of patterning us after Christ's resurrection body has already begun.

And he will finish it. So verse 48. As is the man of heaven, Jesus, so also are those who are of heaven.

This is a promise for all who are found in Christ. Let us continue to live in that hope. Amen.