

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to be with you all this morning. Our text this morning is 1 Corinthians 15, verses 35 through 49.

Let me encourage you to turn there with me. It's page 961 in the Pew Bible. Now, this is the text we'll be diving into this morning, 1 Corinthians 15, 35 through 49.

Let me pray for us as we go to God's word together. Lord, indeed, as we have just sung, that you would come and you would bind our wandering hearts to you.

Lord, we confess that we are prone to wander. We are prone to distraction. God, we are prone to seek our life and our happiness and so many lesser things.

And yet, God, we thank you for this moment that we get on this first day of the week to draw around your word, to come around your word together. And we trust, Lord, to hear you speaking to us through your spirit by the scriptures.

[1 : 17] Lord, we know that it's your word that does a mighty work in our lives and our hearts. So we pray and we ask that you would come and you would do that this morning.

Bless the reading and the preaching and the hearing of your word. For Christ's sake, we pray. Amen. 1 Corinthians 15, 35 through 49.

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 kernel.

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. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

[2 : 24] 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 and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars.

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

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

It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. 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.

[3 : 23] 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. Well, friends, I wonder what images you have in your mind when it comes to the afterlife. Yes, we're in church. We're going to talk about the afterlife. Maybe you have a fairly positive picture. Something like bright, fluffy clouds and white, ethereal robes.

Maybe a golden harp or two. Sort of a giant, disembodied day at the beach. With constant Muzak just playing in the background. Sort of an elevator ride that just never ends.

Now, of course, in the ancient world, the world of 1 Corinthians, people would have had a murkier sort of image. And on the other hand, maybe you do too.

[4 : 43] Maybe you think of a place where our spirits just live in a sort of shadowy, thinned out version of reality. Maybe a kind of sad doctor's office waiting room where no one gets called in and

you just sort of sit there reading old magazines and mulling over your earthly regrets.

Or maybe here and you don't really believe in the afterlife at all. Maybe the picture you have of the afterlife, if you want to call it that, is just of your body decomposing, your atoms returning to the earth, and, you know, if you're lucky, your reputation may be living on for a generation or two. But no real sense of life after death. Now, what's funny about all these popular images that we tend to have is that they all seem to have no place for our physical bodies.

Whether it's our spirit sitting on a shiny cloud or sulking in a murky netherworld, or even if it's just our reputations living on in the hearts of our friends, all of these images of the afterlife see our bodies as something that's pretty much just left behind, gotten rid of, done away with.

And in that way, pretty much all of our thinking about the future, about the afterlife, falls woefully short of the biblical vision.

[6 : 24] Because you see, what Christianity teaches about the future, about our ultimate hope, is the resurrection of the body and the renewal of creation in all of its material, physical, sensory goodness.

Now, don't get me wrong. The New Testament is very clear that when a believer dies in this life, they are immediately with the Lord. Jesus says to the thief on the cross, today you will be with me in paradise.

Do you remember that? Paul says in his letter to the Philippians that to depart from this life is to be with Christ. Believers do, in that sense, go to heaven when they die.

And you might think, well, man, what more do you need? To be with Christ. To see him in all of his fullness. I mean, what more could you ask for?

But being with Christ in heaven as glorious and as soul satisfying as that is and will be, that's not the last chapter of God's story for us.

[7 : 41] As we saw last week in verses 20 through 28 of 1 Corinthians 15, as we've been working through this book of 1 Corinthians sort of section by section, the day is coming when Christ will return in glory to defeat death once and for all.

And on that day, everyone who belongs to Christ, living and dead, will experience what Paul calls the resurrection of the body. Not spirits on clouds, not murky souls lingering in the shadows, not merely a reputation living on in memory, but a body raised to life, never to die again in a perfectly healed creation.

Now, if we have a hard time properly imagining the afterlife, we have an even harder time, I think, properly imagining the resurrection of the dead. If you think about it for more than 30 seconds, I think you find yourself asking the same kind of question that Paul supposes we're asking in verse 35.

Look at it again. How exactly are the dead raised, Paul? I mean, what sort of body are we talking about here? Maybe with a little bit of skepticism, maybe with a little bit of scorn.

For all of you Walking Dead fans, October 23rd, season seven, right? You know what I'm talking about.

[9 : 15] Maybe the idea of the dead coming back to life sends shivers up your spine. Something that doesn't cause you to want to break out into worship, but go grab your shotgun, right?

The resurrection of the dead doesn't sound appealing, it sounds appalling. I know I've shared this story before, but I remember walking down Grove Street with a friend who was visiting town, and as we went past Grove Street Cemetery, as we were walking, you know, over Grove Street Cemetery, over the entryway, what is it?

What does it read? The dead shall be raised. And my friend looked up at that, read the words, and said, ew. Which, of course, wasn't a very philosophical or scientific rebuttal of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, right?

She wasn't contemplating how the molecules and atoms of saints long deceased will be miraculously reconfigured at the return of Christ, if indeed that's how God decides to do it, we just don't know. But, you know, her response was an honest one, and it's one I think a lot of us maybe share.

You see, it's not that we can't wrap our minds around the resurrection. I mean, if there is an all-powerful God, logically speaking, it shouldn't be too hard for God to make that happen, right?

[10 : 38] It's not that we can't wrap our minds around the resurrection, it's that we can't quite seem to wrap our hearts around it. We can't picture the reality of it in a way that makes sense to our deep

longings for what's true and beautiful and good.

But in this text that we've just read, Paul's helping us to get there. What is the resurrection body like? And why is it actually good news?

That's what this text is all about. And it unfolds the nature of the resurrection body for us in three steps. Let's start with step one, verses 36 through 41.

Here, Paul gets us thinking about the resurrection body by using an analogy from creation. An analogy from creation. Paul, God, in his sovereign, creative power, Paul reminds us in verse 38, has made all sorts of bodies.

Verses 39 through 41 echo Genesis chapter 1. Humans, animals, birds, fish, sun, moon, stars. Do you see what Paul's doing there? He's sort of moving backwards through the creation account.

[11:56] Day 6, humans, animals. Day 5, birds in the air, fish in the sea. Day 4, sun, moon, stars. Paul's rehearsing the stunning array of different bodies that God has made to fill and adorn his creation.

Each with their own particular unique glory, brilliance, and beauty. Even star differs from star and glory, he says. Sort of waxing poetical at the end of his paragraph.

And friends, how much better do we know that truth today as space telescopes send us images of planets and galaxies and nebula that we could have never imagined all amazing and all seemingly amazingly different in glory and in beauty.

Do a Google search of Hubble pictures when you get home and just realize how amazing the things that God has made really are. But the point I think that Paul wants us to see here is that if God has created such a stunningly beautiful diversity of bodies in creation if his creative majesty can do that what might he have in store for us in the new creation?

In the great renewal? What particular bodily glory might it be possible for God to yet have in mind for us in the resurrection?

[13:30] It's sort of as if Paul wants us to watch this opening chapter of Genesis a bit like a movie trailer like an advanced clip of some highly anticipated blockbuster and he's saying that if that 60 second clip can spark your imagination and get your heart beating just imagine what it's going to be like when you sit down and watch the whole thing on full display.

But that's not all we're meant to get out of this analogy from creation. Paul directs our attention in verse 36 through 37 to a seed.

You plant a seed in the ground and figuratively speaking right it's buried it dies. And then from that seed comes something that's both the same there's an unbroken organic continuity between the seed and the plant right?

And yet at the same time it's radically and completely transformed. Picture in your mind a little acorn or as my kids like to call them the seeds with the hats right?

and now go out and find an oak tree. And what could be more different? Continuous yes but radically transformed than an acorn and an oak tree.

[15:08] So you see right there in the middle of our everyday experience of the created world is an illustration of what the resurrection will really be like. Like a seed planted in the ground that becomes not less itself but transforms into its true self when all of its potential is unlocked and set free and unfolds and unfurls in glory.

Like a tree rising in strength from a tiny seed. Like a monarch butterfly taking to flight when once its old caterpillar self could only inch along nibbling on leaves.

What will the resurrection body be like? Step one Paul says take an analogy from nature. Continuity yes it will be you and yet there will be transformation so deep it's as if the real you has finally come forth.

friend do you ever feel sometimes like you just don't fit in your body that you just feel a little dislocated and not quite right?

Don't you see the truth that Paul's pointing us to here is explaining that that there's a bodily existence for you to come that's going to unfurl and unlock your potential and be right and fitting and beautiful in the ways that your deep heart longs for and aches for and reaches for.

[16:56] That's step one. Step two now Paul gives us a description. In verses 42 through 44 there are four contrasts.

Granted the resurrection will mean this massive transformation but what sort of transformation? And we see it here. First he says it's from perishable to imperishable.

Friends our present bodies deteriorate don't they? When I was 18 I didn't really think a lot about that. Now I'm 35 and I just keep getting bigger and I get a little heavier and running around the block takes a little more sweat.

Our bodies deteriorate. Our joints get stiff. Our eyesight gets worse. We know that our bodies don't last forever. Eventually they perish but the new body, the resurrection body isn't going to deteriorate.

It's not going to grow old. It's not going to decay. And do you see what that means? It means that all those fears that we carry around that fear of injury that fear of physical pain and the loss of ability that fear of losing our eyesight maybe even that fear of losing our memory ultimately our fear of dying all those fears will be gone.

[18:19] Isaiah 25 talks about death and the fear of death like a veil spread over all the people over everyone in all nations a dark drape covering and coloring everything.

And friends isn't that true in your own experience that every great meal you share every sunny day you enjoy every friendship you make isn't all of it maybe far back in your mind covered and colored in the background by that looming reality of our transience and that looming fear of death that our bodies are perishable and yet in the resurrection that curtain is going to be thrown back cast aside and that fear will be gone and our bodies will be raised imperishable Israel describes that day like a feast of rich wine and rich food can you imagine what it will be like to eat that first meal without the looming lingering fear of deterioration and decay and death second our bodies will undergo a transformation from dishonor to glory you know our physical limitations and their deterioration are only half the story aren't they more bitter than that

I think is the dishonor in other words the shame that we feel in our bodies now some of this shame comes from cultural standards sort of values and images that our society holds up and things that we don't sort of measure up to we're too fat we're too thin we're too tall we're too short our hair isn't the right color the right length the right style we don't even have any hair and so on but you know there's also the shame that we carry not just from the cultural standards around us but because of the things that maybe have been done to us in our bodies maybe someone hurt us or took advantage of us and maybe there's no visible mark or scar but our bodies still carry the shame of that act of being wronged and being hurt and it's like a stain has been marking us all of our days and if there's the shame that we have from what's been done to us there's also the shame in our bodies from what we've done to others maybe even from what we've done to ourselves that addiction we kept feeding those scars that remind us of the years we kept running from God and hurting others and yet in the resurrection all this shame all this dishonor will be released and we will be raised in glory instead of wanting to hide instead of wanting to just disappear which is what shame sort of forces us to want to do friends we're going to be whole and we're going to be clean and others around us won't help but admire and call forth our radiance and beauty and honor and it will be celebrated and the crazy thing is that in that day that kind of celebration isn't going to make you proud and it's not going to go to your head and it's not going to make you look down on others because when you look at others they'll be glorious too and there won't be any more comparisons or envy or jealousy all those shadows will be dispelled because we will all embody the unique particular glory we were meant to have without any shame and like slide after slide of the Hubble telescope reveals one glory after another so in the resurrection there won't be favorites just breathtaking glory upon glory upon glory third in the resurrection our bodies will be transformed from weakness to strength I was watching some of the men's gymnastics yesterday on the Olympics Mike I've got an Amazon fire TV thing my brother sent it to me and it's awesome you can watch any sport any time of the day and my daughter was like dad I want to watch gymnastics so we're like alright we're going to watch gymnastics and I'll tell you what it is incredible what these guys can do I can do a somersault and I get sort of motion sick and these guys they're doing handstands with their arms like this and their heads aren't touching the ground that's insane and yet you know friends that the strength of even the most accomplished athlete will seem like weakness compared to what we will all be in the resurrection when our fatigue will be swallowed up and our chronic illnesses and limitations will be no more and when even our most severe disabilities will be healed do you remember how some of the

Christians at Corinth we looked at this a number of weeks ago you remember how some of the Christians at Corinth were calling themselves strong and looking down on members in the congregation that they thought were weak we do that too don't we but you see the coming

resurrection if we let that reality sink in again it just cuts out it just takes out our pride like the cancer that it is no matter how strong we think we are today no matter what attainments we think we've achieved physically intellectually spiritually that's nothing compared to what even the weakest Christian will be like in the resurrection and so you see when you're doing that kind of calculus this side of the resurrection we're all weak we're all the same none of us is really superior to another we all every Christian we all stand in need of God's radical transforming grace on the last day to take us to where

[25 : 11] God really wants us to be so we can't look down our noses at one another in pride we can't give in to prejudice or to racism or to classism we've all been put on the same plane all of us and we've all been promised that one day we'll be raised in strength yes all are weak and all will be made strong fourth point Paul describes the transformation of our bodies in the resurrection as going from a natural body to a spiritual body now this dichotomy is by far the trickiest of the four contrasts to understand because when we in our sort of everyday language today compare something that's natural and spiritual we usually mean something that's physical on the one hand and something that's not physical on the other right the natural is sort of physical material the spiritual is sort of immaterial but that's not actually what Paul means in this contrast for starters when he uses the word natural he's not using a word that anyone would have heard to mean material or physical rather that word natural is from the same word that we often translate as soul psuche where we get the language of psychology so

Paul's not saying that there's a material thing and an immaterial thing so what is he saying well you have to see that these adjectives that are the kind of adjectives that describe what something is powered by if after the service I was out in the parking lot with you and asked you hey do you drive an electric car or a gas car you wouldn't think that I was asking whether your car was made up of a stream of highly charged electrons or a puddle of smelly petroleum right I'm not asking you whether your car is made of electric or made of gas I'm asking you what your car is powered by what drives it it's the same thing here Paul is contrasting our present bodies with our resurrection bodies both are physical both are material but the first is powered by the ordinary human soul our natural human capacities and personality but the second the resurrection body will be completely enlivened and empowered and directed by

God's own spirit what's that going to be like I don't know but here's what I came up with as I was thinking about it psychologists and work productivity experts often talk about something called flow it's this state of being where you're performing an activity and you're totally engaged and you're totally focused and everything is clicking and there's even this sort of deep sense of enjoyment about you if you're an athlete you would call it being in the zone or if you played basketball in the early 90s you would say that you're on fire my guess is that we've all experienced maybe for you it is playing a sport you're skiing down a mountain you're running around the track and you feel that effortless flow that focus that joy that accomplishment maybe if you're lucky it happens for you at work you're writing that paper you're accomplishing that project you're swinging that hammer and you just sort of lose yourself in the work you're in the zone and if you felt it and you probably have you know that there's almost this effortless focus this absorption and effectiveness in what you're doing and it's joyful and you like it but you also know of course that most of our waking moments aren't like that we struggle and we strive we procrastinate we get distracted and above all we labor at whatever we're doing now if you felt the difference between those two states between flow and struggle then

I think we've had a small foretaste of the difference Paul's talking about here to have God's spirit empowering and enlivening our bodies through and through with no reserve isn't just going to make them imperishable and glorious and strong but it's going to mean living and being and acting without that striving and struggling that we so often experience as we go about our ordinary lives empowered by our ordinary human selves in other words friend there's coming a day when we will no longer be our own worst enemies at last God's will and our will and God's desire and our desire will be united in effortless focus and in joy and we'll stop kicking against the goads because we'll finally be wholly empowered by the spirit of the

God who made us and who loves us so this is Paul's description of the resurrection body imperishable glorious strong and on top of it all empowered by God's spirit friends does that sound too good to be true and how in the world can Paul be so confident that this is actually what it's going to be like I mean sure the Old Testament talks about resurrection Ezekiel talks about resurrection is

sort of a big metaphor for return and restoration from exile and then you have Daniel who talks about personal individual resurrection and he sort of gets a glimpse of it we're sort of shining like stars but there's nothing this specific nothing this detailed that Paul could have been drawing from none of the literature produced between the Old Testament and the New had anything like this how in the world does Paul and that's where we come to step three of

[32 : 04] Paul's argument here he gave us an analogy from creation a description of the body and now he confronts us with the reality of redemption all of this will be true of us because it is true of Christ we know God's power in creation yes but more than that we will share Christ's image in redemption at the end of verse 44 Paul says if there's a natural body there's also a spiritual body how does Paul make that jump he's not making some sort of logical deduction as if the existence of one necessarily implies the other no he's saying you know there's a natural body right this ordinary human way of being in the body well let me tell you there's also a spiritual body a body renewed and powered and made real by God's spirit and Paul knows this because he's met the one for whom it's already true because he's seen the one whom

God raised from the dead imperishable glorious strong and overflowing with God's spirit the risen Lord Jesus has opened up for us a whole new way of being human that's what this first Adam last Adam comparison is all about in these last verses all of us are in the first Adam we all belong to that sort of humanity by birth with Adam as its head we all carry his image which is the image of God that's been marred by sin fallen and so destined for the dust but friends in Christ a new possibility has opened up that another Adam has come the last Adam the only Adam we'll need now and in him we become a new humanity when we belong to Christ through faith we become bearers of his image and this image of

Christ is the image of God restored we now belong not to the dust but we belong to heaven and when Christ returns bringing heaven's glory to earth and making all things new we will receive bodies just like his imperishable glorious strong spirit filled what what's true of him is true of us the first Adam became a living being or we might translate it a living soul that's Paul quoting genesis 2 7 and the word being there the word soul there is the same word underlying natural in verse 44 this is the natural ordinary typical way of being human but the last Adam became a life giving spirit Paul saying not that Jesus came back as a ghost no he's saying that just as

Adam embodied the living soul so Christ embodies the life giving spirit of God and pours it out on us if we get our ordinary humanness from Adam we get our spirit filled humanness from Christ and Paul ends with this triumphant promise just as we have born the image of the man of dust so also shall we bear the image of the man of heaven so take a step back friends take this whole passage in do you see what Paul is doing do you see what he's saying if the resurrection of our bodies is made possible by God's power and creation it's made certain by Christ's work in redemption he's come we shall bear the image of the man of heaven what we know about the resurrection we know because of Jesus and because he's promised to raise us up with him but the full beauty of the gospel you see isn't just that the risen

Lord Jesus is now imperishable glorious powerful the beauty of the gospel is that Christ has done everything necessary to get us there with him because you see we don't deserve actually to be raised like this we don't deserve to have an imperishable glorious spirit filled bodily existence with God forever our sins have forfeited that right we have willfully stood with the first Adam we sought our life apart from God and now we rightfully receive the wages of that sin which is death but if we have stood with the first Adam the last Adam has come and he has stood with us the perfect human being fully God and fully man has come and stood with us in order to renew humanity and in standing with us what does he do he becomes perishable he becomes dishonorable he becomes weak

[37 : 42] Isaiah 53 says he had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him Isaiah goes on to say that on the cross he will be wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities he takes our place in that old perishable dishonorable weak life of death so that all who place their trust in him might have their sins forgiven and know that if Christ has died for me then I will be raised with him we're about to go to the Lord's table friends and remember Christ's sacrifice for us to remember that because Christ's body was broken for us our sins are forgiven and because

Christ's body was raised we too shall be raised this is our hope you see not some body less immaterial afterlife not merely our memories living on in the lives of our friends no our hope is the

full restoration of what's been lost in the fall all our death all our shame all our weakness all of that Christ swallowed up on the cross and rose again in power and in a beautiful way what has Christ done he's given us these physical tangible reminders in the bread and the cup he's given us something you can touch and something you can taste he's given us these things that speak again and again to our hearts of this great hope so that as we take up our cross and follow him we can be reminded and we can know that our future holds nothing less than the renewal of all creation and the resurrection of our bodies let's pray

Lord Jesus we come now to your table and we ask that you by your spirit would allow us to remember deeply and richly what you've done for us and not just remember what you've done for us Lord but to replace ourselves again into that great story of redemption that you've accomplished for us Lord help us to replot our lives again on this great arc of hope this great arc of life this great arc of resurrection that you have put us in through your death and resurrection and by your spirit Father we ask that you would do all this in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.