

Resurrection Bodies

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

A significant part of the Christian message has to do with resurrection – not just Jesus' resurrection (which we particularly remember today), but also our future resurrection. Yet, many people have trouble believing the whole concept of resurrection. People have fairly significant questions about what's involved in it. Some people ask those questions seriously; others ask them with a cynical bent. Some people think their questions disprove the whole concept of resurrection. For example:

- In the resurrection, what age will my body be? Will it be my 20 year-old body that was full of life and energy and at the peak of its physical appearance, or will it be the decrepit old body I'll have when I die at age 99?
- If I died as a child, would my resurrection body never have a chance of developing beyond the size of a child's body?
- Will our resurrection bodies continue to grow like our current bodies? Would that suggest they'd also grow old and wear out?
- We learn from scientific observation that our bodies continually change as cells are added and taken away all the time. We also know that the processes of the food chain mean that elements part of my body 30 years ago may currently be part of your body today and may have been part of hundreds of bodies throughout history. Who gets those parts in the resurrection?

And so it goes on. We look at our current bodies and wonder about the possibility of it all. After all, these are

the only bodies we've had – except they constantly change. All our experience of human bodies is tied up with these bodies. These bodies are fragile.

- As children, we learn they cut and graze fairly easily and can't do all the things we want them to.
- As middle-aged people, we learn they don't do as much as they once did and they slow down and they get bigger round the middle.
- As older people, we learn they get riddled with cancer and break-down fairly regularly.

These bodies get older and are subject to sickness and accident and eventually wear out. What's this talk about resurrection? Surely we'd be better off with the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul. That'd be easier to defend than this idea of the immortality of the body.

Christians at Corinth back in the first century had similar problems. They couldn't quite work out how God would reanimate all these corpses – and because they couldn't work it out, they began to question whether it would happen at all. Paul deals with this issue in 1 Corinthians 15.

- In the first half of the chapter (that we've looked at over the last three years), he assures them the resurrection will happen. Jesus was raised from the dead as the firstfruits – as the One who was raised first and thus guaranteed others would follow.
- In the second half of the chapter Paul deals with questions about how it'll happen. That's the part we're looking at this morning. You can see the matter being introduced in verse 35:

*But someone may ask: How are the dead raised?
With what kind of body will they come?*

Remember God

Paul's short answer comes in the first two words of verse 36. The NIV translates them: *How foolish!* That may be a reasonably soft interpretation. Many see Paul's statement as being a bit more direct than that – You foolish person; You fool. What's the Biblical definition of a fool? Psalm 14:1

*The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God".*

By contrast, Proverbs 9:10 tells us:

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

That's Paul's meaning here. The fool's the one who fails to take God into account. We can come up with all sorts of questions and issues about *the how* of the resurrection. We may even think we've worked out a question that shows the impossibility of the resurrection. All such questions are based on our current experience – which, when compared with God's experience, is very limited. All such questions are based on what we think achievable from a human point of view and within the context of normal human resources – which, when compared with God's achievements, are very limited. When you bring God into the equation – the God of the Bible – our questions and issues are put into proper perspective. It's not necessarily that they fade away into insignificance – rather, they're seen within the context of the all-powerful and all-knowing God.

What's the issue for Paul? The issue is that God promises the resurrection.

- Paul's God knows everything – so He's not going to be surprised by some unforeseen circumstance that

will prevent Him carrying out His promise.

- Paul's God's able to do everything – so He won't be surprised by some unforeseen obstacle that's too great for His ability.

God's promised it. God's provided a sample demonstration with the resurrection of Jesus – which Paul discussed earlier in the chapter. That settles it. The resurrection will happen.

Remember Nature

Yet, having given the short answer, Paul doesn't stop there. He provides a more detailed explanation about some of the mechanics of resurrection. We aren't given full details of what's involved or what's in store – that's beyond our understanding and beyond our current experience. Rather, he gives analogies from our current knowledge to help us understand the general concept of what the resurrection will be like.

First, he points to nature. Two things. **Point #1:** we see examples in nature where bodies are transformed. The farmer takes a seed – Paul specifies a wheat seed, but any seed will do. The farmer plants that seed in the ground. Why? He expects that seed to grow into a wheat plant. The experience of generations of farmers tells him that's what happens. How's it happen?

- Does the wheat fairy come along while he's sleeping and pull out that seed and replace it with a young wheat plant?
- Does Santa Claus decide whether or not he's been a good farmer this year and dump a whole lot of new wheat seeds in his barn on Christmas Eve?

It happens because of God. He causes it to happen.

Here we have an example in our everyday experience where you put one body in the ground and it turns into a different type of body. You put a wheat seed in and God causes that seed to turn into a wheat plant. You plant an acorn in the ground and it turns into a great big oak tree. You plant a dandelion seed in the ground and it turns into thousands of dandelion plants. We have no trouble accepting those sorts of changes.

And so, in verse 42, Paul asks: Don't you think God can do the same thing with our bodies? When you and I die, our bodies will be put in the ground. It's fairly obvious such bodies are weak and perishable and not particularly honourable – if that were not the case, they wouldn't have died. Yet, don't you think God's able to transform them into some other type of body that isn't weak and perishable and subject to death? Just as God transforms the wheat seed, don't you think He can transform us?

Point #2: back to verse 39. God's already demonstrated His ability to make a huge variety of bodies. Paul lists four different types of bodies we see on earth – humans, animals, birds and fish. We find it relatively easy to tell them apart. Paul could have extended it further.

- Within the overall category of birds, there's lots of species. I can see how the bodies of kookaburras differ from the bodies of galahs and magpies.
- You watch the news and note differences between the bodies of Asians and Africans and Pacific Islanders and those of European stock.

God created this wide range of bodies – each one suitable for the entity involved.

Paul doesn't stop there. Paul refers to heavenly bodies:

the sun, the moon, the various stars. God gives those entities completely different bodies from the ones we're used to on earth. They're given bodies appropriate for their functions and their environment. Those particular bodies aren't appropriate for living on earth.

Please note what Paul's not saying here. Paul isn't adopting pagan religious ideas or astrological thinking. He's not saying these heavenly bodies are animate beings. He isn't saying the sun and moon and planets are a pantheon of gods. He's not saying that when we die we get turned into stars and twinkle in the sky for eternity. He simply says God gave those things different bodies from those which are part of our everyday experience on earth.

The implication he draws is this: if God can give all these different entities bodies appropriate to where He placed them in the scheme of things, don't you think He can also give you a body appropriate for living in eternity. Your current body's suitable for living on this earth – but isn't suitable for living in the perfection of God's kingdom. Yet, when the time comes, God will transform that body into a spiritual body suited to conditions in God's perfect kingdom. God's quite capable of providing you with an appropriate resurrection body.

Remember Jesus

Remember nature. Secondly, Paul points them to Jesus – and the contrast between Jesus (whom he calls the last Adam) and Adam. Verses 45 to 49 aren't easy to understand – and it isn't made easier by the fact they're difficult to translate from Greek into English. I think the clue is to realise Paul's talking about Jesus' resurrection and ascension. When he refers to Jesus as *the man from heaven*:

- He isn't talking about the incarnation – he isn't talking about when the eternal Son of God became human and entered history as a man. Certainly Paul believes that, but that isn't his focus in these verses.
- Here he talks about the time of Jesus' resurrection and return to heaven. At that point Jesus is given His new resurrection body and becomes the One who gives eternal life to His followers.

What do we inherit from Adam? Way back in Genesis 2:7, we read:

the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

That verse is behind Paul's thought in 1 Corinthians 15. God had the human race descend from that beginning with Adam and Eve. We too became living beings – but we've become living beings who die.

The reason for that's explained in the rest of Genesis 2 and 3. In Genesis 2:16, God commanded Adam:

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve disobeyed that command. In Genesis 3:22, God says:

The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.

God banished them from the garden. It's not that it was bad for Adam to live forever – it's that it was bad for him to live forever in a state of rebellion against God. Such a

state of rebellion isn't true life – rather, it's death. It's that state of rebellion – living beings who suffer death – that we inherit from the first Adam. *As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth.*

Now, however, the last Adam – Jesus – has come. What's He like?

- First, He's the One God raised from the dead and gave a new resurrection body – the spiritual body that's *of heaven*. Paul wrote about that earlier.
- Secondly, He's the One who brings the possibility of our resurrection. As He's been raised from the dead, so He grants that prospect to us. On the cross He dealt with the issue of our rebellion – our sin that brought death into our lives. Now that He's dealt with that issue, He can offer us life in God's perfect kingdom forever – which involves the need for a resurrection body.

Paul says: Remember Jesus – who He is, what He's done for us, and what happened to Him. You doubt the resurrection. Remember the historical facts. Jesus was raised from the dead to new resurrection life. Remember that God promises to do the same for Jesus' followers – to give them new resurrection bodies like Jesus.

Part of Corinthians' problem was they had a fascination for the word *spiritual* – but their fascination came from Greek philosophy rather than the Bible. They thought they were highly *spiritual* people. They thought they'd already arrived spiritually because all sorts of spiritual activities were going on in their meetings. They thought they already experienced the freedom of God's kingdom in their spirits and all they awaited was the time when

their spirits would be released from their bodies when they physically died. Indeed, they thought themselves so spiritually minded that it didn't matter what they did with their bodies on this earth – whether good or evil.

Paul tells them they're wrong.

- While they can experience something of a foretaste of God's kingdom now because God's Spirit lives in them, it's only a very pale foretaste. The reality of the kingdom is still future. It awaits the time when Jesus returns.
- What's more, says Paul, the reality of the kingdom is a bodily reality – a reality like Jesus' resurrection body. God's kingdom isn't a question of having an impure body and a pure spirit. Our human existence is a bodily existence – both now and in God's future kingdom. So what you do with your body matters.

Remember the Future Change

Thirdly, Paul points them to the change that must happen. It's quite apparent these current bodies of ours can't participate in God's eternal kingdom.

- These bodies perish. How can that which perishes be part of eternity?
- These bodies are mortal. How can that which is mortal be part of eternity?

It's because we're so used to thinking in those terms that we come up with all our questions about the concept of the resurrection. Quite clearly, there has to be a change of some sort for us to inhabit God's kingdom.

Yet, even more than that, these bodies are infected with sin and evil – which is why they're mortal and perishable

in the first place. How can that which is evil enter into God's pure kingdom? If God's kingdom is where everything – absolutely everything – is done according to God's perfect will, how can someone like me enter it? There are all sorts of rebellious thoughts running around my mind:

- Thoughts of greed that want all the things I see in the shops and don't already have in my house.
- Thoughts of anger when I don't get my own way.
- Thoughts of pride that compare myself with you and leave you coming off second-best.
- Thoughts of envy that look at your talents and abilities and thinks it's not fair I can't compete with you in those areas.

And so it goes on. How can someone like me enter? As soon as I get in, I'll just mess it all up again – the way Adam messed it up way back in the beginning. For me to enter God's eternal kingdom, I'll need to be changed.

That's what Paul says will happen. When Jesus returns – at the last trumpet – we'll be changed. It'll all happen in the twinkling of an eye. We'll get resurrection bodies.

- Those who've already died – they'll be given their new resurrection bodies.
- Those still alive when Jesus returns – they won't miss out. They too will be changed. They'll also be given their resurrection bodies.

Those bodies will be imperishable and immortal. Those bodies will be pure – which means those people will be pure. That's a big change. Then there'll be no more death. Then there'll be no more sin. God's perfect kingdom will have come in its fullness. That for which Jesus died will be fully achieved. It's a magnificent picture of what we'll be like.

There are those who pay big money to slow down the aging process in this life – or to slow down its effects. Some go to a lot of fuss and bother.

- They change their diets – out with all the unhealthy foods that raise their cholesterol levels and clog up their arteries; in with all the latest health foods that are guaranteed to add zest and vitality and years to your life (until next month – when they decide those foods are now unhealthy and the ones we thought were unhealthy are really good for you).
- They change their lifestyles – they get rid of stress factors and energy sappers and take up exercise to get their bodies fit and healthy so they'll last longer.
- They undergo operations to remove fat from their bodies and to take a few inches of their waistlines or their thighs or whatever.
- They endure facelifts and Botox injections and all manner of things to get rid of the age wrinkles and give themselves a younger looking appearance.

People pay good money for this and get carried away in their search for the fountain of eternal youth. To what end? They still end up in the casket.

Paul speaks about the facelift with a difference. This is a change that lasts. You won't have to go back 12 months later for another injection. Indeed, 5000 years down the track, you still won't have to get another injection. This change lasts forever. This is the new improved model that God offers that'll do you for the rest of eternity. This is a body that won't wear out or become obsolete.

So many people spend so much money trying to squeeze a few more minutes or years out of life on this earth.

They think it's worth all their time and effort and energy. They pursue it vigorously. They may even succeed. What's the point? They still haven't overcome the enemy of death. God says He's overcome that enemy for us.

- He did it in Jesus who died for our sins and was resurrected to eternal life.
- He promises it to those who trust in Jesus – they too will be resurrected to eternal life – life where death has been swallowed up.

Here's the real fountain of eternal youth – the facelift with a difference – and God makes the offer to all. You too can have this resurrection body capable of living forever in God's eternal kingdom – all you have to do is trust Jesus and join God's kingdom. It's sad to see people pursuing extra minutes of time on this earth and, at the same time, ignoring the offer of eternal life.

Remember the Lord's Work

Having reminded them – and us – of their future resurrection, Paul concludes by bringing them back to their present responsibility. Verse 58:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

If that's what our future is – resurrected bodies in God's perfect kingdom – then that has implications for what we do in the present. If that's our goal and destination, it determines what we do on the way there.

- It means there's not a great deal of relevance trying to squeeze a few more moments or experiences out of this life.
- It means there's not a great deal of profit trying to

accumulate a few more trinkets along the way.

- It means what's important is knowing where we're headed – namely, to God's kingdom – and living in the light of that now.
- It means being involved in God's work is what's important in this life.