

Resurrection implications: Perishable to imperishable

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[0 : 00] Father God, I pray that whatever I say today, Father, as we bring your word, is truthful, it is from you, we will glorify your name and bless those who hear it. Amen.

Okay, so before I start with the sermon today, I would like to tell you a story. Now, this story is my story from when I was seven years old, perhaps.

It was around this time that I read a lot of the Reader's Digest. If you remember this publication, we had stacks of these books back then.

And through my reading, I came to be informed of this thing called the ozone layer. Now, if you didn't know, the ozone layer is a layer in the stratosphere that functions in absorbing a majority of the sun's UV radiation before making it to Earth.

But more specifically, the fact that the ozone layer was in fact depleting. depleting so much that above Antarctica, there's a huge hole in the ozone layer, miles wide, allowing UV radiation to impact the Earth.

[1 : 12] If you didn't know of this ozone layer issue, in the 70s and 80s, this was the global warming issue of the day. It was estimated that if the depletion of the ozone layer continues, it would affect the world like never before.

It would cause the loss of plants and animal life, leading to the reduction of food and water supply. The loss of plants would cause the depletion of oxygen in the atmosphere.

UV radiation in our daily lives would cause skin cancer and cataracts. It would have been chaos. Basically, what I understood was, oh no, we're all going to die.

Obviously, fast forward 23 years later, that dystopian future didn't happen. It's now global warming. But at that moment, what I was thinking about was the mere mortality of mankind.

As I pondered on the mortality, on my mortality, I really thought about our consciousness and death. Questions like, what happens when we die?

[2 : 24] Is it just like sleep, where all you perceive is darkness? Do we instantly see eternity? Or do we sleep and awake in the second coming? Now, I don't know if you have thought about these questions before or thoughts before.

But these thoughts sound quite similar to the questions raised by the Corinthian church, don't they? Now, would the Apostle Paul call me foolish for thinking these things?

Now, I don't think he would. For one, I don't think he would call a seven-year-old foolish. That would be quite unkind. But we have to understand a bit about the background of the Corinthian church to understand his rebuke in verse 35 to 36 to the foolish questioner.

We know that from chapter 1 onwards, the Corinthian church has been influenced, or was influenced in their thinking by Greco-Roman culture. Now, Pastor Brian briefly described this influence that he had that was on the Corinthians last week, but I'll go a bit further to explain.

A common teaching during that period was the prominence of the soul, or a form of dualism. They thought that the soul was pure, trapped in the physical world, in the physical body that rots and decays.

- [3 : 45] The physical body was regarded as a prison, being lowly, evil, inferior, and corrupt. It was this corrupt body that was keeping and trapping the soul in this corrupt realm from transcending back to God.

In fact, the soul leaving the body and not possessing a body was desired. Because of this belief, there was also the belief that Christ did not come to earth in a physical human body, but a body that just appeared human, leaving no footprints.

Because the physical body was evil, and Christ could not have inhabited a corrupt form. Now, it's with these influences and thoughts that invaded the minds of the Corinthian church.

And this paints a background to whom Paul was responding to. He was responding to someone who rejected the resurrection, who rejected that Jesus came down in human form.

Now, this gives us more understanding to the earlier verses in chapter 15. In verse 1 to 12, he reiterates and confirms that Jesus did not appear just in human form to communicate truth to us, but actually, he physically died, he physically was buried, and he was bodily raised to appear to Peter and a host of hundreds of eyewitnesses.

- [5 : 12] Eyewitnesses who would have seen, talked, and perhaps just like Thomas, touched the wounds of Jesus. In verse 12, Paul exclaims, How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. Paul's exclamation makes sense since some of them may have thought that there was no resurrection because the body was useless.

The resurrection of the body is unnecessary since the soul has been freed from the corrupt physical body. Now, in verse 35, But someone will ask, How are the dead raised?

With what kind of body will they come? Now, the question and Paul's response makes a bit more sense. They are ridiculing the resurrection body.

Again, the resurrection seems impossible and ridiculous to them. The body is decayed and ruined. How can this rotted corpse be raised to life and bring us into eternity?

- [6 : 13] How does Paul respond to the questioner? He first responds with two analogies to set up his answer. From verse 36 to 38 comes the first analogy, and I will call it the analogy of the sower.

It reads, Remember from last week's sermon, from the question of death.

That death is a reality. It is a reality, and it's inevitable. Death is an inevitable process for mankind. Now, we often think that death is the biggest obstacle that someone can face in their lifetime.

No matter how strong, how rich, smart, or powerful, death still comes for you at the end. It's no surprise that throughout history, since the epic of Gilgamesh to our Hollywood today, our literature, our culture, has themes of immortality, and its legends can be seen in so many civilizations.

Now, there is always this quest to try and beat death. But it's here that we are told that no matter how daunting it may be, it is just part of life.

- [7 : 48] What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. Like most plants, the seed has to be planted into the ground before the seed can sprout.

When it sprouts, the seed essentially dies. The seed is no more, but it is transformed into roots, shoots, and leaves, essentially a new plant.

In the same way, the human body, the seed has to be buried in the ground, which is death, before it can be transformed into a new body, a new plant. Now, Paul answers an aspect of the question that some Corinthians had before.

Now, remember that they thought how ridiculous the resurrection body was. Paul is first clarifying that the body before death is not the same as the body after death.

The body that was buried will not be the body that will be raised. They will be different. You will have a different body. And that is the first point here.

[8 : 54] Now, the second point of this analogy, we learn that there is continuity in creation. Now, in verse 37 and 38, it reads, When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

But God gives it a body, as he has determined. And to each kind of seed, he gives its own body. Now, we know if you want an apple tree, you plant an apple seed.

You don't plant the tree itself. You want a corn plant, you plant the corn kernel, not the stalk. You do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed.

Again, here Paul repeats the same process, saying, seed first, and the body will come after. But adds a clarification, that God gives it a body, as he has determined.

And to each kind of seed, he gives its own body. And this draws attention, of the Corinthians again, showing them from the first point, that while the seed before, is different from the body after, there is still a continuity, in creation, of the seed, to the body or plant.

[10 : 12] Now, I personally don't like, this saying that I'm going to use, but it fits this context. Now, do you know the saying, same, same, but different? Now, this must be, a saying, at least 10 years ago.

but it fits. Okay, so, the apple tree is so different, from an apple seed, in size, in a look, but genetically, it is an apple. A corn stalk, looks different from a corn kernel, but it's essentially, corn.

There is continuity. An apple seed, won't suddenly produce corn, nor, a corn kernel, become an apple tree. Similarly, for example, someone called Bill, who may have passed away, won't come back, as a bob.

He was a Bill, he will be a Bill, in the next body, as well. When he says, God gives it a body, as he has determined, and to each kind of seed, he gives its own body, we have to understand, that while the future body, will be far different, from the present body, that we live in today, it will still be us, in continuity.

Our being will be the same, but in a different body. Okay, I hope you follow me, through this first analogy, and we'll move on, to 39 to 41.

[11 : 33] Verse 39, Not all flesh is the same. People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, and fish another. They are also, heavenly bodies, and they are earthly bodies.

But the splendor, of the heavenly bodies, is one kind, and the splendor, of the earthly body, is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another, and the stars another, and stars differ, from stars in splendor.

Now, the second analogy, is an analogy, of creation. If you notice, as Paul explains, he's almost walking, in reverse, through days, four, five, six, of creation.

People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another, and these earthly bodies, have their own splendor. The sun, moon, and stars, are heavenly bodies, and they have, their own splendor.

Now, all creation, was created good, in the beginning, and even now, we can still see, the splendor, of each. The both, the heavenly, and the earthly bodies.

[12 : 41] humans, humans, naturally, can't fly, in the air, like a bird, or swim, as fast, or as long, in the water, like a fish, vice versa, most fishes, or birds, can't do what humans do.

For example, an ant, most, or some ants, can lift, 10 to 50 times, their body weight. It's amazing, that a small ant, can lift a stick, 50 times, its size.

But the same stick, to me, would be no, bigger, than a toothpick. And, now in humanity, in all its innovation, we harvest energy, and we pack, all that energy, into a device, called a cell phone, or handphone.

No ant, can do that. Right? But compared to the sun, the one that floods, the whole earth, with solar energy, through nuclear fusion, in comparison, my handphone battery, is extremely, insignificant.

No need to mention, the ants stick to the sun. An ant, a human, and the sun, are all capable, of doing splendid things, as earthly things, and as heavenly things, but this splendor, is all different.

[13 : 55] This is a splendor, of different scales, literally, of a cosmological scale. The heavenly bodies, have splendors, on a different scale, compared, to the earthly bodies.

It is true, this analogy, that Paul is using, to try and paint, a picture, of how, God is powerful, in his design, and creation. He created, each body, the way he wanted it, to be.

Now remember, the comparison, so far, seed, and plant, people, animals, bird, and fish, compared to the sun, moon, and stars. Earthly bodies, compared to, heavenly bodies.

There is a comparison, that Paul is trying, to make out for us, which he will be, continuing, in the coming verses. So the idea, in this analogy, is if God, can make the heavenly bodies, splendid, on a different scale, compared to, the earthly bodies, so will he, be able to do so, with, the resurrection, body.

Now, continue, Paul continues, in verse 22, so will it be, with the resurrection, of the dead. And when we see, so will it be, it's a conjunction, or a linking phrase, there's continuity, in his argument.

[15 : 09] Now for you to be, the body that is sown, is imperishable, is perishable, it is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in weakness. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a natural body. If there is a natural body, there is also, a spiritual body.

Now straight away, we notice again, that he is highlighting, a contrast, or he is making, a comparison. Just like what he has been doing, in the analogies, the sea compared to the plant, earthly beings, compared to the heavenly beings, it is a comparison, between, two bodies.

Also notice, how there is, similar vernacular used, to the analogy, of the sower. Sown and raised, sown and raised. So right now, our bodies are perishable.

We know, the mortality of mankind, how our present bodies, can deteriorate, and wear out. We die, and decay. But in the future, we are transformed, into something, that is indestructible, into something, that is imperishable.

[16 : 21] The present bodies, are temporary, just to last a while. But the spiritual body, is permanent, and eternal. We have a dishonour body now, because of the corruption, of sin in mankind.

In its desire, and behaviour, we sin. And also, at the time, the quarantine church, could have been facing, ridicule, persecution, or even the risk, of public execution.

This would have made, living as a Christian, dishonourable, or dishonoured, in their public treatment. But, in the future, God will raise the body, perfect, and glorious, vindicated, from all ridicule, and free, from all kinds, of sin.

Now, we are also weak, limited, by things around us, by time, by ageing, diseased, and inherently, fragile. Unable, to fully rule, over creation, as was originally, instructed by God.

But, in time, God will give us, powerful bodies, not weak, not limited, by time, or disease. The present body, that we have, is a natural body, a body that was made, for earthly use.

[17 : 35] But the spiritual body, again, is a body, of a different kind, made for a different place, made to live, eternally, in heaven. Now, when it is said, that the spiritual body, is of a different kind, it is tempting, to think, that the body, the body that Paul, was talking about, is one of an ethereal form, an apparition, or like a ghost.

But in Luke 24, Jesus specifically, addressed that idea. He said to his followers, after his resurrection, see my hands, and my feet, that it is I myself, touch me and see, for a spirit, does not have flesh, or bones, as you see, that I have.

Now, Jesus wasn't a ghost, so nor, will we be, spirits, or ghosts. We will have a body, but a body, of a different kind. Now, as Paul, has laid out, there is a radical contrast, between the natural, and the spiritual bodies.

The natural body, is so perishable, dishonoured, and weak, but the spiritual body, that is to come, is going to be, imperishable, glorious, and powerful. Paul here, spells out, the truth, of our humanity, perhaps, truths, that some of us, may be facing, truths about, our fragility, shame, and weakness.

I'm only 30 years old, this year, and I'm already complaining, about my hips, and back. But I know, that what I'm facing, is nothing, compared to what, others may be facing.

[19 : 05] Age, cancer, blindness, paralysis, or maybe, even mental illness. This is all, part and parcel, of what makes us human. But while, we are human, we have more, we have hope, even in our weakness, and fragility.

In verses 44, it says, if there is a natural body, there is also, a spiritual body. Paul is certain, that there is a spiritual body, that is to come, after this natural body.

We have hope, beyond this natural body, and I will expound, more about this, in the last section, when I conclude. But moving on, in verse 45 onwards.

So it is written, the first man, became a living being, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual, did not come first, but the natural, and after that, the spiritual.

The first man, was of the dust, of the earth, the second man, is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those, who are of the earth.

[20 : 14] And as, is the heavenly man, so also are those, who are of heaven. And just, as we have borne, the image, of the earthly man, so shall we, bear the image, of the heavenly man.

Again, verse 45, begins as a continuation, of Paul's argument. Now, Paul started with two analogies, setting up a foundation, to understand, what he was trying to argue, that he made his point, or what he was trying to convey, to the questioners, in verses 42, to 44.

The contrast between, the body now, and the body, that is to come. Now, verse 45 onwards, he is showing in scripture, the pattern, of the present body, and the resurrection body.

Paul uses scripture, to compare, and he goes to, Genesis 2, verse 7, as Adam, becoming a living being. And the last Adam, he is referring to Jesus, being the life-giving spirit.

Back in verses 21 to 23, Paul already drew, the comparison, between Adam and Christ. And he is doing again, in these verses. And he is continuing, this comparison pattern.

[21 : 24] From the pattern so far, there is a lesser, and there is a greater form. From seed, to plant, earthly, heavenly, natural, spiritual, and now, Adam, and Jesus.

Because, Jesus is the second Adam, he is greater, in every way, compared, to the first Adam. He did what Adam, could not.

Now, Adam became, becoming a living being, brought sin, into the world, through his disobedience, while Jesus, the last Adam, became a life-giving spirit.

Bring us life, everlasting, through his obedience, to the Father's will, in going, to the cross. Because of Adam, we are separated from God. But because of Christ, we are made, alive, in him.

Paul then says, in verse 46, the spiritual, did not come first, but the natural. And after that, the spiritual. Here is an order, to these things. Just as the seed, must be first, then the plant, that comes from the seed, so also must we have, the natural body, first, then the spiritual body, second.

[22 : 38] Or must begin, in the human body, with human life, before one can have, a spiritual body, with spiritual life. Now, knowing this pattern, and also knowing that, Jesus is a greater Adam, it is interesting, that when we look back, we look back at, verse 42, 44, as we went through, yes, it describes, the current state of man, yes, it describes, the extent, of the first Adam, and also, the future of, future hope, of mankind, but this is the pattern, we can hope in, because, Jesus went through it, himself.

He came to earth, as a human, he bodily perished, crucified on the cross, but was raised, from the dead, imperishable. He was dishonoured, being whipped, humiliated, struck, and publicly executed, but was raised, glorified, and exalted, to the right hand, of God.

As a human, he felt weakness, and experienced, the fragility, of the body. He was broken, at the cross, but was raised, in power. He came down to earth, in a natural body, but was raised, in a spiritual body.

He went through, what we are going through. Now, in thinking back, to last week's sermon, about the resurrection, of the dead, the resurrection of Christ, because Christ was raised, our faith, is not futile.

Because Christ was raised, so too, will we be, at the end, of days. Now, this is the pattern, that we can see, that gives us hope. Now, moving on to, verse 47, 48, the first man, the first man, was of the dust, of the earth, the second man, is of heaven.

[24 : 20] As was the earthly man, so are those, who are of the earth. And as the heavenly man, so are also, are those, who are of heaven. Now, the word dust, in Hebrew, is, I think, pronounced, pa.

Now, it is interesting, to point out, that the word, doesn't mean, earth, or soil, or mud. It literally means, land powder, or ashes.

And it's also, synonymously, used with, rubbish. Rubbish, yeah. Now, it is also, the dust, or the ash, that Israelites, would sprinkle, over their heads, in humility, and repentance.

The word, dust, connotes, a lowly, or insignificant, material. Again, we are talking about, lesser, and greater. But, being the dust, of the earth, brings a new level, a new meaning, to the term, lesser.

In comparison, with the second man, of heaven. The earthly, or natural bodies, would be like, the man, of the dust, of the earth, the first Adam. And the spiritual body, would be like, the one, who is from heaven, Jesus.

[25 : 36] Verse 49, And just as we have, born the image, of the earthly man, so shall we bear, the image, of the heavenly man. Now, if you are a believer today, you would have, instantly recognised that, as Claire was reading, this passage to us, that Paul was talking about, your present body, and the body that is to come.

It may click, just like that. But throughout, the whole passage, that we went through, Paul was actually, only drawing, contrast between, the two bodies. It's only here, in verse 49, that Paul actually, connects the two, explicitly.

It is here, that Paul applies, the hope, that we have. We bear the image, of the earthly man, therefore, we are earthly, having the natural body, during our time on earth.

But at the same time, we too, shall bear the image, of the heavenly man, having spiritual body, in eternity, with our God. We are currently, earthly, but at the same time, we have, a heavenly future.

Now this is, the hope, that we have, today as Christians. This is the hope, that I had, when I was seven years old. This is the hope, that I found, and was assured by.

[26 : 55] Now in my distress, when I was seven years old, and through my questions, so I talked to my parents, we looked in scripture, and my new mind, had a lot more pictures, back then, but the promise, and the assurance, of a heavenly future, was there.

Pictures and all. We have a hope, in the greater Adam. We have a hope, bearing, the image, of Jesus Christ. It is through, this understanding, that we have hope.

on this side of eternity, and that hope, settled my heart. To know death, is a mere pit stop, to a greater, and glorious destination.

Now as I, close the sermon today, I would like us, to consider three thoughts, as we reflect, on this passage. Now firstly, it is tempting, to think that our bodies, now doesn't matter, right?

That the body, is natural, is perishable, is temporary, anyways. So why does it matter? In a sense, yes, we have a future body, and a future glory, but at the same time, we as Christians, still have, a calling here, while we are, on this side of earth.

[28 : 14] We still have, the great commission, to make disciples, of all nations. Just as Jesus came, to seek, and save the lost, so too, should we have, this yearning, on our hearts.

In Philippians 1.21, the famous verse, that goes, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Paul is thinking, about living, and laboring, in ministry. At the same time, desiring to depart, and be with Christ.

And he answers, his questioning, in verse 24, but it's more necessary, for you, that I remain, in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will, remain, and I will continue, with you, with all of you, for your progress, and joy, in faith.

So that, through my coming, to you again, your exaltation, in Christ Jesus, will resound, on account of me. Now, how are we to labor, in ministry, with broken bodies?

Care for your bodies, as you use it, for God's kingdom. So remember, God made, each and every one of us, and each and every one of us, have our own glory, and splendor, in creation.

[29 : 27] God values you, right now, in your present body. Therefore, all your bodies matter. As I think, about the present body, I think about, circumstances where, perhaps someone, loses a limb, or a body part, from an injury, or accident, or thinking to Ukraine, and Russia right now, during a war, or maybe some sort of, car, or plane accident, where loved ones, never return, or never, seen again.

Bodies go missing, or destroyed completely. The body is perishable, and fragile. But when Christ returns, they are going to be given, a new body.

You are going to be given, a new body. It will not be like, the body you have now. It will be glorious, incorruptible, imperishable body, built to live, with the Lord, forever.

They will live in comfort, while we wait, for Christ to return, to give us, our eternal bodies. God has the power, to change our bodies, from decayed, and dishonoured, to imperishable, and glorious.

So we live, in hope, that no matter, how broken, how destroyed, our bodies may be now, our hope is resting, on the new bodies, to be given, on the day, Christ returns.

[30 : 48] And lastly, our citizenship, must belong, to heaven. not on the earth, for us to participate, it's not on the earth, for us to participate, in this glorious resurrection.

If our citizenship, is purely of the earth, then we are putting, our hope in this life, in this body, in this country, and in this current, state of affairs. Our hope, will be greatly misplaced.

Christ will return, change our bodies, and raise us, to be with him forever. Everything here, in this world, is temporary, and perishable. Citizenship, in heaven, means that we have our eyes, on his glorious return, and we wait, for him eagerly, by living lives, in full submission, to the commands, of our Lord.

Citizenship, in heaven, means we live, for the spiritual life, now, here on earth, awaiting, the reality, of his coming, not for the physical life, now. Therefore, keep your eyes, on God, for we will leave, this earth, and we will be raised, to be with the Lord, forever.

Now, let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you, for the reminder, of the hope, that awaits us, in heaven. We thank you, that you send, Jesus to us, the greater Adam, the life, giving spirit, that through him, we may have, life everlasting.

[32 : 20] Teach us Lord, to use our lives, that are pleasing, to you. Teach us, to love, what you love. Comfort us, in our weakness, and help us, fix our eyes, to the hope, that we have.

Remind us, that our citizenship, is truly to heaven, and that as we live, our lives, that we focus, on the things, of heaven, and on your son's, glorious return.

Pray all this, in Jesus name. Amen.