

RISE
Part 6 - “The Resurrection Body”
1 Corinthians 15:35-49

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 11, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Our daughter Emily was three years old when she first stood before an open grave. She watched as her great aunt Katie was lowered into the earth. A few days later I was putting Emily to bed. As she sat there in her yellow pajamas she said, **“Daddy, where is Katie now?”** Her tone was a combination of concern and curiosity. I said, **“Katie is with Jesus.”** When she heard this she was relieved. But then she grew confused.
 - **“But daddy, where is her body?” “Well Emily her body is in the big box you saw, which is called a coffin.”** I would have fallen over in laughter at her next question if she had not been so earnest in asking it. She said, **“But Daddy, where is Katie’s head?”** I reminded her that Katie’s head was in the coffin.
 - Then she was really confused. You see, she knew that Jesus died and rose again and so she asked, **“But daddy, where is Jesus’ head?”** I said, **“His head is in heaven with his new body.”**
- Emily’s confusion was perfectly understandable. She is a smart girl. She implicitly understood what many adult Christians don’t understand; namely that our bodies are as much a part of us as our souls.
 - So if that is the case then how can Katie be with Jesus if her body is in a coffin? And if Katie is somehow divided and in two places at once then how come Jesus’ is not divided? His head is with him in heaven.
- When it comes to life beyond the grave human beings have always had a lot of questions. Some questions arise out of genuine *curiosity*. What happens when I die? What will it be like?
 - Other questions arise out of *concern*. Where are my loved ones? Will I ever see them again?
 - Still other questions arise out of *skepticism*. Since life after death cannot be scientifically proven how can we believe it even exists?
- Paul has been answering these questions in 1 Corinthians 15. So far he has refuted those who deny the resurrection of the dead. The evidence of Christ’s resurrection proves that God can and will raise the dead.
 - Paul now turns to answer three questions about the future resurrection of those who belong to Christ.
 - First, what does it mean to be raised? Second, what will it be like to be raised? And third, how will we be raised?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RAISED?

- So let’s consider our first question then. **(SHOW SLIDE 2) What does it mean to be raised?** As we pick it up in verse 35, remember that there were some in the Corinthian church who ridiculed this idea that dead bodies could be brought back to life. As we read verse 35 we should read it with a kind of sarcastic mocking tone. Two questions are asked. **READ 35 - But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised?”** I mean come on Paul. What if a bomb obliterates a person’s body? How can such a body come back together again? That’s crazy.

- And then the second mocking question: **“With what kind of body do they come?”** Are we to imagine a bunch of zombies? Are body parts going to come out of the grave and stick together like some kind of Frankenstein?
 - These questions are all ridiculing the idea of resurrection and something that we simply cannot accept.

CHRISTIANS ARE NOT PLATONISTS

- You see these ancient people, like most people today believed in life after death but they emphatically did not believe in resurrection. We often use the word ‘resurrection’ as a synonym for life after death but that is not what it means. **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Resurrection means a new bodily existence after bodily death.**
 - No Greco-Roman person believed that. They followed the famous philosopher Plato. Plato taught that the soul is the real you because it is immortal. The body then is a prison house for the soul and at death the soul is finally liberated from it.
 - Western civilization gets its view of the afterlife from Plato. Most people today believe that when you die, the real you, the spiritual you, leaves your body to go to some happy place. Most Christians also take this view. At Christian funerals I have often hear things like, **“The real Sally is not here. This body is just a shell. The real Sally is her soul which has gone to be with God.”**
- Now I know what people mean by this and to a certain degree it is true. But it misses the core of what it means to be human and fails to appreciate what the Christian hope truly is.
 - You see Genesis 1-2 and the rest of the Bible teach that the real you is body *and* soul. To be human is to be an embodied soul. So what happens at death is that the soul is separated from the body.
 - The real you is split and death defeats your body.
- The Bible says when a Christian dies their soul goes immediately to be with God in heaven. This is why Jesus said to the thief on the cross, **“Today you will be with me in paradise”** and why Paul said, **“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”**
 - But listen carefully (and this may come as a surprise to many of you), the great hope of Christianity is not to die and have your soul go to a spiritual heaven.
 - This does happen at death but it is only a temporary and incomplete state. In fact, the Bible hardly even speaks about it.
- That’s because the great hope of Christianity is not dying and having your soul go to heaven. The great hope of Christianity is that at the second coming of Christ, God will raise all his people from the dead, reuniting their souls with their bodies.
 - God will not then whisk us off to some spiritual heaven. Rather, he will create a new earth for his people to dwell on. And then heaven, (where God dwells) will come down to earth so that God will dwell with his people forever on the earth.
- So when you stand beside the grave of a Christian you should think, **“How wonderful that his or her soul is presently with God.”** But you should also feel a sense of incompleteness and grief for death has defeated their body.
 - But God will not allow sin, death, and Satan even one victory over his people. God is not just going to rescue your soul and allow death to keep your body. No, he will redeem all of you – body and soul.
 - So as you stand beside that grave call to mind the heart of Christian hope. In the words of Jesus in John 5, **“a time is coming when all who are in their graves will**

hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

- So as you stand before that grave you must realize that our hope has not yet been realized. Both you and the one who has passed away are still waiting. We are waiting for the day when God will resurrect all his people.
 - When he has given us immortal bodies then, and only then, will death be finally defeated. On that day death will be swallowed up in victory.
- So our first question is **“what does it mean to be raised?”** We have seen that the great hope of Christianity is not for your soul to escape the body and live in a spiritual place forever.
 - The great hope is that through Jesus Christ God will give us **“a new bodily existence in a newly remade world.”**¹

WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE TO BE RAISED?

- But this brings up all kinds of questions. So our second question this morning is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 4) What will it be like to be raised?**
 - The skeptic in verse 35 cannot believe this would happen because he or she cannot believe what it will be like. **READ 35b - But someone will ask, . . . “With what kind of body do they come?”** In response Paul says in verse 36. **READ 36a - You foolish person!** This is not name-calling. Paul is calling to mind the Old Testament idea of a fool. A fool is one who does not take God into account when thinking about things.
 - Paul is saying, **“Your lack of belief in the resurrection of the dead is not due to ignorance but to a godless attitude for as Jesus said, ‘With God all things are possible.’”**
- But Paul is a gracious teacher. He wants us to understand this and so he patiently works with us.

A BODY WITH CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY TO THE PRESENT ONE

- He says that if you want to understand how God can do this and what this body will be like then look at a seed. **READ 36-38 - 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.**
 - Seeds are very unimpressive things. No one sits and adores their beauty. But when we bury a seed in the ground the most amazing thing happens. The seed will be destroyed in its present form but it will be transformed into something glorious like an oak tree.
 - You could never have imagined in a million years what an oak tree would look like just by looking at its seed. And yet in a very real sense the seed is the tree.
 - If God can do this with seeds why would it be amazing to think he could do the same thing with your body?
 - So right away we learn some things about our resurrection bodies.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 5) First, there will be continuity between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies.** All the genetic potential for the oak tree is in its seed. You don't get an oak tree from a cauliflower seed. In the same way the physical you of the present will, in some way, continue to exist into eternity. This means you will keep your individuality.
 - This is good news. So many other religions and spiritual paths talk about the afterlife being like a drop of rain going back to the sea, or of having your personality merged into

¹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 41.

the divine, or of you being swallowed up in nirvana. The Christian message does not obliterate you. In some way there is continuity. You are still you. I don't want to lose myself. I don't want to be a raindrop. That is not very exciting at all.

- After his resurrection Jesus' disciples were able to recognize him. Could it be that millions of years in eternity you will be walking along and recognize some long lost friend. **"I cannot believe it is you. Oh how I missed you. Let's catch up."** That is exciting. The future body has continuity with this present body.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 6) Second, there will be discontinuity between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies.**
 - This is the glory of this passage. Our present bodies are like seeds. As the tree is so much more glorious than the seed so will our future existence be. Although it is still the same it is totally transformed.
 - Failure to grasp this is why so many Christians have gotten a wrong idea about heaven – that is boring or undesirable.
- In his famous book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain portrays a Christian spinster named Miss Watson who does not like Huck's fun-loving spirit. According to Huck, **"She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it...I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together."**²
 - Miss Watson's heaven was less desirable than our present existence on earth. But what if she had told Huck what the Bible says about living in a new body on a new earth? What if she had spoken about all the great adventures of this life, of climbing mountains, enjoying sunsets, creating art, playing music, laughing until your stomach hurts, the warmth of friendship, the thrill of sports, and then said, **"Huck, whatever the future is like, it cannot be less than this. All of this is just a seed."**
 - That would have gotten Huck's attention.
- One commentator named Paul Beasley-Murray writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 7) "The life to come will not be a pale imitation of this life, but rather the new order of things will be more real and more vibrant. In the life to come we shall not be maimed ghosts tapping out pathetic messages at the behest of mediums. We shall be more alive than ever."**³
 - Our future bodies will have continuity with this one but they will be utterly transformed. Anthony Hoekema writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 8) "The possibilities that now rise before us boggle our minds. Will there be better 'Beethovens' on the new earth?...better Rembrandts, better Raphaels? Shall we read better poetry, better drama, and better prose? Will scientists continue to advance in technological achievement, will geologists continue to dig out the treasures of the earth, and will architects continue to build imposing and attractive structures? Will there be exciting new adventures in space travel?"**⁴
 - Your future body will be so transformed from this one that three days into eternity you will look back at your greatest imaginations of the future and laugh about how small your vision was.

² Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 6.

³ Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Message of the Resurrection*, 143.

⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *Eternal Day Off*.

A BODY PERFECTLY SUITED FOR ITS FUTURE MODE OF EXISTENCE

- But the skeptic will say, “**does that mean we will have this same kind of flesh? How ridiculous. We’ll look like Frankenstein with dead body parts coming together.**”
 - In verse 39 Paul says, “**Come on people. Nature should teach you how silly that statement is. God gives each creature a unique type of flesh but every type of flesh is properly suited to its mode of existence.**” **READ 39 - For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.**
 - So God is not locked into giving one type of body. He is creative. He gave you one body for this life. He can transform this body to fit the next life. So the third thing we learn about what it will be like is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 9) whatever our resurrection body is like it will be perfectly suited to our future mode of existence.**

A BODY WITH UNIQUE SPLENDOUR

- The fourth thing that we learn is that **(SHOW SLIDE 10) our resurrection bodies will have their own unique splendour.**
 - Paul now lifts our eyes to the heavens to make the point that although God has made all different types of bodies each one has its own splendour. **READ 40-41 - 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.** ⁴¹ **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.**
- The English poet George Herbert in his poem *The Temple* said that death used to be an executioner. We used to fear it and could not escape it. But because of what Christ has done the death is no longer an executioner but a gardener. Herbert writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 11) “An executioner at best, thou art a gardener now.”**
 - What does a gardener do? A gardener plants the seed in the earth giving it opportunity to become something it never dreamed it could be.
 - So the Christian looks death in the face and says, “**Death, when you put me in the ground you will only make me better. For as God causes a great oak tree to rise from a tiny seed you will give me a splendour that no one could ever have imagined.**” Do your worst death!

FOUR MORE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESURRECTION BODY

- Paul now ties it all together in verse 42. **READ 42 - So is it with the resurrection of the dead.** We have drawn out four characteristics of our future body. Paul now gives four more.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** The fifth thing we learn is that **our resurrection bodies will be imperishable.** **READ 43b - What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.**
 - These present bodies we have are falling apart. What hope that God will give us imperishable bodies!
 - No more grey hairs or wrinkles. No more pneumonia. No more broken bones and pulled muscles.
 - No more orthotics, glasses, heartburn, cough medicine, or indigestion. No more wheel chairs. No more walkers or canes, knee braces or pacemakers.
 - No more AIDS. No more cancer. No more strokes. No more heart attacks. No more death. Imperishable!

- **(SHOW SLIDE 13) Sixth, our resurrection bodies will be glorious. READ 43a - *It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.***
 - When a person dies we hide the dishonour of their body under make up, dimmed lights, and flowers. But the resurrected body will be glorious.
 - Listen to me friends. If you could see yourself in the future you would be tempted to bow down and worship yourself. That is how glorious the body will be.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 14) Seventh, our resurrection bodies will be raised in power. READ 43b - *It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.***
 - The ancient Greeks put a great deal of importance on physical prowess. They are the ones who gave us all those naked statues of perfectly proportioned people. And yet our bodies are so weak.
 - How many of you struggle with chronic pain, chronic illness, or chronic disease? Your weak body will be raised in power. I sure love all of you in the medical field but I can hardly wait for the day when you will be out of a job. Our bodies will be raised in power.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 15) Finally, our resurrection bodies will be supernatural.**
 - **READ 44 - *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 this verse can be very misleading. When we read that we will have a ‘spiritual body’ we take this to mean something non-physical existence, like a ghost. But that is not what it means. The difficulty arises in the fact that there is no equivalent English word for this. It is very hard to translate.
 - When Paul refers to our present natural body he means we have bodies that are human and that are suited for this age. But these natural bodies we have now are not equipped to deal with the next age. And so we will be given a ‘spiritual’ body, which means a body adapted toward the future existence we will have.
- So there you have it. Those eight points give you a taste of what it will be like to be raised. What hope!

HOW WILL WE BE RAISED?

- For the sake of time we are going to have to move quickly through the last question. We have asked, ***“what does it mean to be raised”*** and ***“what will it be like to be raised?”*** Now finally we ask, **(SHOW SLIDE 16) *“How will we be raised?”***
 - The skeptic in this passage is saying, ***“How is this even possible to be raised like this? It’s crazy.”*** But Paul writes that **(SHOW SLIDE 17) *we will be raised through the power of Christ.***
 - As we look at this Paul returns to his Adam and Christ analogy.
- **READ 45 - *Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*** We all entered into this state of life through Adam. But we will go on to the next stage of life through Christ. Adam and Christ represent the two types of bodies, two modes of life, the seed and the oak tree.
 - But the sequence is important. First we have the body of Adam made from the dust and then we will be given those resurrected bodies that are perfectly suited for heaven. **READ 46-47 - *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; the second man is from heaven.***

