

YOU WILL RECEIVE A RESURRECTED BODY**1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58**

Sometimes we say things that reveal an unbiblical view of God, life, reality, or truth. Not intentionally. It just happens. That's especially true of what we think happens after we die. A radio preacher, referring to a Christian woman whose Christian husband had died, said, "Little did she know that when she hugged her husband that morning, she would never hug him again." It would have been better to say instead, "She'd never again hug her husband in this life." Because God promises to resurrect back to life every follower of Jesus who has died, you will be able to hug your loved ones again. A man said of his son who died, "That's the last time I'll ever see him in his body." But the Bible teaches that because they're both followers of Jesus, they will, in fact, see each other again in their resurrected bodies. "I'll never see my daughter again on this earth," said a grieving mother. But if both are followers of Jesus, that statement is wrong. Mother and daughter will see each other again on this Earth. In the future God will restore all things and the New Heaven and the New Earth will become one new, eternal entity. Both women will be transformed and this Earth will be transformed as well, but it will still be the same mother, the same daughter, and the same Earth.

We're in the midst of a message series "Why The Resurrection Is The Great Essential" as we move through the Easter season. Last week we reflected again on the wonderful truth that because of Jesus' resurrection, death is defeated and will be destroyed. Today's message is kind of like the second part of that message. Because of Jesus' resurrection, you and I – along with every follower of Jesus – will receive a resurrected body. We will live throughout eternity in a literal, physical body that will never age, decay, or die. Now, the chapter in the Bible that's all about both Jesus' resurrection, our resurrection, and our new resurrection body is 1 Corinthians 15. Today, I want us to read and think about verses 35-58. I'd like you to take away at least three tremendous truths found here and elsewhere in Scripture. First,

I WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD, BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

That's the clear message of 1 Corinthians 15. The word "resurrection" means nothing less than someone's body becoming physically alive again after death. There's been a strong tendency to redefine the meaning of resurrection. It's been tried repeatedly with the resurrection of Jesus. For instance, it's suggested that Jesus' spirit was resurrected and went back to Heaven while His body remained in the tomb. The late John Updike, a famous American novelist who I don't usually associate with Christianity, made this amazing statement about Jesus' resurrection with which I agree wholeheartedly: "Make no mistake: if He rose at all it was as His body; if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the Church will fall.... Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping transcendence; making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier ages; let us walk through the door." In other words, if Jesus didn't get up on Easter Day – His spirit reunited with His resurrected body – we are seriously wasting our time this morning.

By the same token, Paul warns against spiritualizing away the future resurrection of our literal, earthly bodies as well. When you suggest that resurrection is just a metaphor for a new kind of life, or it's about your spirit floating up to Heaven, or some kind of spiritual rebirth, you believe something the Bible doesn't teach. A non-physical resurrection is like a sunless sunrise or being half pregnant. It's a contradiction. If the writers of the New Testament had wanted to say that only Jesus' spirit went back to Heaven or only your spirit will be in Heaven eternally, they had perfectly good ways of saying precisely that. Instead, the Bible clearly teaches that every follower of Jesus will have a new bodily existence in a newly remade world.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that Jesus' resurrection was the key event in God's plan. "And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17 NLT) Our culture makes a whole lot more out of Christmas than it does Easter and sometimes that gets reflected in how we do church. Consider this: take away the stories of Jesus' birth and you lose two chapters in Matthew and two in Luke. Take away the resurrection of Jesus, and you lose the entire New Testament. You lose the Christian faith entirely. Because of Jesus' resurrection, sin has been dealt with and death has been defeated. But if that's not the case, then you're still living in a world where sin and death are supreme and undefeated. The resurrection is proof that Jesus has already won the ultimate victory even though we don't yet see the full result of that victory. It's coming, but it's not here yet!

The Bible also teaches that your resurrection – and along with it the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth - is the fulfillment of God's plan. That's the whole point of 1 Corinthians 15. Your body will be either resurrected or transformed into a new body at what Christians refer to as the Second Coming of Jesus: "But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed." (1 Cor. 15:51-52 NLT) In addition, the Bible indicates the entire present universe is anticipating eagerly the fulfillment of God's amazing plan of salvation. "For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us." (Rom 8:22-23 NLT) God's plan of salvation is a whole lot bigger than just getting your disembodied soul up to Heaven. It's also about restoring everything affected by human sin to its original condition – including your body and including this Earth – so that God might dwell with us forever in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

I WILL HAVE A NEW BODY LIKE JESUS' NEW BODY.

Paul clearly implied that truth in what we read from 1 Corinthians 15. He was more explicit in another letter he wrote, "But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our

weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.” (Ph. 3:20-21 NLT) It also says, “We are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him.” (1 Jo 3:2 NLT) The risen Lord Jesus Christ is both the means by which you will receive a future body as well as being the model for your future body.

Some friends were hanging out one day, and the conversation grimly turned to the issue of death. One of them asked the others, “What would you like people to say about you at your funeral?” One friend answered, “I would want people to say, ‘He was a great humanitarian who cared about his community.’” A second replied, “I would want people to say, ‘He was a great husband and father, an example for many to follow.’” The third friend gave it some thought and answered, “I would hope someone says, ‘Look, he’s moving!’” Well, that will never happen at your funeral or mine, to be sure, but your body – dead for just a day, or for several years, or centuries, whatever – will indeed move again because Jesus’ body moved again.

I wish we had the time today to read all the Bible accounts of Jesus’ resurrection appearances, but we don’t. But if Jesus’ resurrected body is a model for our future resurrected bodies, what can we say? Your resurrected body will be an old and a new body. By old I mean it will be familiar to you. There will be some kind of fundamental continuity to your present body. Jesus still bore the marks of the crucifixion in His new body. He said, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself.” (Lk 24:39 NIV) But, it was clearly also a new body in many ways as well. But in the same way, you can expect your resurrected body to be significantly unlike your present body as well. There are many analogies in nature. I think the caterpillar turning into a butterfly is a picture of fundamental continuity and yet significant discontinuity. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul used the seed and plant analogy. There is fundamental continuity between an acorn and an oak tree, but there’s a lot of significant discontinuity as well. Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian author and speaker, who has been paralyzed from the neck down since suffering a spinal cord injury as a teenager, wrote, “Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become.” That’s true of all of us.

Your resurrected body will be a physical and human body. When Jesus appeared to His incredulous disciples, He said: “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” (Luke 24:39 NIV) The resurrected Jesus looked like a normal human being. His new body was suited for life on Earth. He could be touched and handled. He cooked and ate fish. He talked with the two people on the road to Emmaus and they apparently didn’t notice anything abnormal about His appearance. He didn’t have a halo around His head nor did His feet hover a few inches above the ground. You are not going to be a ghost in Heaven. You’re not going to morph into an angel. If Jesus’ resurrected body is a model, your resurrected body will be fully physical and human. I anticipate that you’ll stay the same gender and race in Heaven that you are now. Jesus didn’t stop being male or Jewish after His resurrection, did He? There’s no evidence that He suddenly become genderless or lost His ethnicity. After all, in John’s vision of Heaven it says,

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” (Rev 7:9 NIV) Being male, female, Caucasian, African, Hispanic or Asian is a God-created aspect of being human. Heaven won't erase those distinctions. It will celebrate them!

But someone might say, “Rick, what about this verse? ‘I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.’ (1 Cor. 15:50 NIV)? Doesn't that say that physical humans can't be in Heaven?” No, it doesn't. “Flesh and blood” refers there to our present bodies which have been marred and flawed by sin's effects. They're subject to disease, decay and death right now. Paul goes on to say, “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53 NIV) meaning that we are going to be given new bodies that are not subject to disease, decay and death. Paul wasn't contrasting the physical with the non-physical, but rather physicality tainted by sin and physicality untouched by sin. When God created Adam, He joined body and spirit together. Adam didn't become a living human being until both the physical and the spiritual parts of him were brought together. Your body is as much a part of you as your spirit. God intended your body to last as long as your spirit. When He restores all things, God is going to restore your body to His original intent for it.

Your resurrected body will be a transformed and perfect body. When Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed everything in Genesis 3. From time to time we hear about how leaking oil from a ship or an accident of some kind creates an oil slick on a body of water. It fouls the environment in countless ways. The curse is like that: a spiritual oil slick that has spread everywhere. Sin has resulted in both the physical and spiritual pollution of nature, animals, human beings and the entire universe in ways that are hard to imagine or describe. But God is reversing all of that. The Bible says, “(Jesus,) by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Ph 3:21 NIV) The key word there is “transform”. In a great act of power at His Second Coming, Jesus will change your present body into one that corresponds in kind to His own as part of His work of bringing all things under His control. What will that mean?

Certainly, it will mean that your physical body will be transformed and perfectly restored. It could mean that you will have new physical abilities that you don't have now. We read in the Gospel accounts that Jesus' resurrected body was capable of suddenly appearing, disappearing, and ascending to Heaven. Will we have the same abilities? Perhaps. It's safe to say that you'll no longer be susceptible to illness, injury, age or death. You will never get sick or hurt. You will not age or decline physically. If you're in a wheelchair today, God will raise you up and make you completely whole. Your mind will be transformed and perfectly restored. It will no longer be subject to dementia, clinical depression, or any kind of mental illness. In addition, your resurrected brain will no doubt be capable of doing things that the greatest genius on the Earth right now would consider unimaginable.

Your emotions will be transformed and perfectly restored. Emotions are an integral part of being human, but they've been corrupted by sin and the curse as well. In Heaven, they will be a reflection of God's emotions, rather than so often being a distortion of them in this life. Heaven will be an emotional place. There will be laughter in Heaven. There will be no tears of suffering, to be sure, but there may well be tears of joy. My wife, Cheryl, got excited when I shared with her that we might well have new, restored taste buds in Heaven. Well, why not? Hasn't the curse affected everything? If so, we will need transformed and perfected taste buds to experience transformed and perfected food! Those of you who love computers are familiar with those periodic software upgrades. When you start thinking about what you will be like in Heaven, try to imagine the best possible upgrade of you that could ever be. Then, simply recognize the fact that God will exceed your wildest imagination!

So, here's the big take away for you and me. God isn't going to abandon your present physical body, but He's not going to keep it the way it is right now either. Your body will be transformed - changed from its present weakness to perfection, from being subject to disease, decay and death to immortality. This is the defeat of Death itself in every way something can be defeated. To not have a body through all eternity would grant Death some kind of victory God will not allow. Jesus' resurrection is God's way of revealing to us that nothing that's been created by God will ever go to waste. What belongs to God will never be lost — not even these physical bodies we're in right now. A final truth.

I WILL STILL BE ME, BUT I WILL BE DIFFERENT.

The Heaven where God's people go right now – let's call it present Heaven - is a wonderful but temporary place where followers of Jesus go immediately after they die. If we had the time today to do a study of Scripture, you would see that Heaven itself will go through its own transformation sometime after Jesus' Second Coming. We might call this future Heaven. I think of one Scripture that's quite clear on this subject, "But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness." (2 Pt. 3:13 NLT) In fact, there will be an incredible and eternal merger of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Future Heaven will then be this Earth renewed and transformed and Earth will become Heaven. That's the biblical picture of where we will spend eternity.

What will that be like? Here's some strong probabilities. In Heaven, you will have a restored personal identity. The resurrected Jesus didn't become someone else. When John recognized the risen Jesus on the shores of Galilee, he said to the other disciples, "It is the Lord!" (Jo 21:7 NIV) Your own personal identity will endure from this Earth to the New Heaven and New Earth. In fact, you will probably retain the name you have now. Jesus said, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 8:11 NIV) Apparently those Old Testament saints retained their names in Heaven. Our names reflect our individuality. Your individual identity is part of your personhood. You should expect to be just as unique in Heaven as you are now. In future Heaven, you will be for the first time fully the person God created you to be.

In Heaven, you will likely have a restored relationship to physical space and time. You live in a spatial world now and the resurrection of your body demands that you will forever occupy space. You will be a physical being living forever in a physical universe. Space and physicality aren't evil. After all, God created Eden and it was a physical space. The New Heavens and the New Earth will be a physical space. Sometimes we think of Heaven as being timeless. Maybe, but the Bible never says that. In fact, there is Scriptural evidence that implies the presence of time even in Heaven. God inhabits infinity, but human beings are finite. We inhabit time. Time is our environment much like water is a fish's environment. Time isn't evil in and of itself. And in Heaven, time will never work against you. Time will pass, but you won't run out of time in Heaven. The passing of time will no longer be a threat to you, because death will be abolished. You will no longer have to be encouraged to number your days and use time wisely. Time will mean only gain in Heaven, never loss. You'll no longer equate time with unwelcome change, deterioration, or death. Maybe John Newton had it right after all in his hymn "Amazing Grace" when he wrote, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun."

Finally, in Heaven you will definitely have a restored relationship with God and other people. Your heart will be healed – not only physically but spiritually. In the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Bible says "(God) will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Rev. 21:4 NLT). All of those are either caused by sin or sin causes them. You will not be able to sin in Heaven because you will no longer have a sinful nature. Instead, you will have a completely purified heart. No longer will you be crippled by sinful desires, disabled by insincerity, or handicapped by half-heartedness. Yes, you'll have desires in Heaven, but not sinful desires. For example, you will likely still desire food, but you won't struggle with gluttony or eating disorders. You'll likely be able to express admiration and affection for other people, but it won't turn into lust or envy. You'll likely want to use and experience everything God will provide, but you won't ever become greedy or covetous. Heaven will not be the absence of your desires or longings, but rather their complete fulfillment.

The late Christian author and professor Lewis Smedes used to ask his students if they wanted to go to Heaven when they died. Everyone would raise a hand. Then he'd ask, "Be honest now—who would like to go today?" A few would raise their hands slowly, giving what they thought was the correct answer, looking around to see if they were the only ones. They were. Most people wanted a rain check. They were ready to die—just not today. Then Smedes would ask who would like to see the world set straight once and for all tomorrow: "No more common colds, no more uncommon cancers. Hungry people would have plenty; no one would lift a finger to harm another; we would be at peace with everyone, even with ourselves. Anybody interested in that?" There would be a frenzy of hand-lifting. Then Smedes would point out that if that new world is what you really want, then Heaven's where you'd like to be. In your perfect, resurrected body. For all eternity. All made possible because of the mighty resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is the great essential.