

## **The Resurrection Body. What Kind of body will it be?**

Throughout the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul is teaching us that the Resurrection will allow us to better see and understand life's meaning and purpose. This is the argument that Paul has been developing to this point in chapter 15. As we read verse 35 Paul is anticipating an objection that will be raised by some. The objection goes something like this. Okay Paul I can believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. But think about it, he was only in the tomb for thirty-six hours and then he was resurrected. That I can understand. But what about those people who have been dead for years. Those whose skeletal remains have been unearthed. What about those who have been cremated, lost at sea, burned beyond recognition, blown to pieces in an explosion. When it comes to these scenarios we might well ask:

“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

Paul answers this question by what he writes next.

“Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.”

There is a crucial verb here which the NRSV has mistranslated. It should not be translated “come to life” but rather “brought to life”. The verb “come to life” is active, suggesting that it is something the object of the verb does. However the verb brought to life is passive, suggesting that it is an action done to the object. This is the point of verse 38. It is God who gives it a body. Paul is making the point that the Resurrection is an act of God. You have to have this as your basic assumption if you are going to believe what follows argues Paul.

Having established this Paul develops his argument about the resurrection by using horticulture as an analogy. His point being that if we look around us we will see types of Resurrection in our back garden. In verses 36-37 he is referring to the normal process of plants growing from seeds or bulbs that are placed in the ground. They die, they lose their consistency, and out of them emerges another kind of body, which although different to the seed sown is continuous with it.

When we think of the germination of seeds Paul wants us to learn three obvious

lessons.

First: Death is a necessary part of the process. Far from being an obstacle to resurrection, death is essential to it. If the seed doesn't die it cannot be raised from the dead. Therefore just as the seed has to die in order to germinate, our deaths are not an obstacle to resurrection but an ingredient necessary for it to happen.

The second lesson the germinating seed teaches is this. The body that emerges from the seed that dies is different from the one that was planted. Put a grain of wheat or a kernel of corn into the ground and what comes up? Another grain of wheat or another kernel? No! What comes up is a green stem, which does not look at all like what you put into the ground. Nevertheless it is tied to it; it is continuous from it. Yet the seed and plant are not identical. You do not sow a cauliflower, nor do you serve cauliflower-seed with roast beef. Paul is careful to describe the present body, the 'seed', as 'naked': it is not yet 'clothed' as one day it will be. When given its new body it will no longer be 'naked'. The emphasis of verse 38 is then on the new body not only as the work of the sovereign God, but as a gift; Paul wants to stress that resurrection is a work of grace.

Now, if you had never seen the process of germination before, would you have believed it if somebody had said that this is what would happen? You would have looked at him as though he were mad and said, "How can that be?" because you can put almost anything else into the ground and that will not happen. If I plant pennies, they will not produce a tree full of one hundred dollar bills.

Yet the process of germination is so familiar to us that we miss the miraculous part of it. But Paul says open your eyes and see this sign God has woven into the earth that points to the resurrection of the dead.

Paul now faces the skeptics' second question, "With what kind of body do they come?" All right, supposing there is a resurrection, they said, "What is the resurrection body like? How will it differ from the one we have now?" Paul's answer is found in the next ten verses, Verses 39 through 49. He takes it in three movements: First, he goes back again to the lessons which are visible in nature itself; then he draws the parallel with the reality of resurrection; finally, in a great theological argument, he establishes the absolute certainty that this is going to happen. First, the lesson from nature (Verses 39-41)

<sup>39</sup> Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. <sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

As Paul continues to appeal to the world around us to point to the promise of the Resurrection he reminds us that not all bodies are alike. Human bodies are different from bird bodies and animal bodies are different from fish bodies. Even the very nature of their flesh is different. The second thing Paul says at verse forty is that there are two major divisions of bodies. “There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another.”

It would be more accurate to translate what Paul is referring to here as physical objects in the sky and physical objects on the earth. The use of the phrase “heavenly bodies” can be confusing leading us to think of that dimension we call heaven when Paul is referring to the sky.

This is clarified for us when the objects Paul lists are the sun, the moon, and the stars. The earthly bodies he has already mentioned men, women, animals, birds, and fish. The point he makes is that there is a marked and deliberate difference between these objects in the sky and the objects on earth. The “heavenly bodies” shine. That is their function -- to shine, to have a glory about them. The heavenly bodies move in limitless space, which we measure in light years, but earthly bodies are limited. They have to function within a very tightly compressed time-space sphere. Heavenly bodies control and influence and affect other things. The sun affects this planet in every way. We are dependent upon it. The moon affects us too. It controls the tides and the seasons and much of our life, in ways we hardly understand. And the stars also affect the earth. So it is the nature of heavenly bodies to control and affect; and it is the nature of an earthly body to respond, to follow, to adapt.

Thus Paul is pointing out a very important lesson which nature would teach us if we had the eyes to observe. There is a wide variety of bodies, interconnected with each other and yet distinct. What is Paul saying about all this? Well, he is saying that all this has its parallel in the truth of the resurrection. If you would only read the lessons of nature you would have a panorama of theological truth about the resurrection spread before you. Just open your eyes and see it, he says. And then he goes on to

draw the parallel for us:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead.

From here he goes on to contrast our present body with this future resurrection body, pointing out that the present and future body is interconnected and yet distinct.

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.

What is there about me that is perishable? Well, it is my body. My body is losing its ability to function. It is perishing; it is decaying; it is gradually slowing down. Just as the seed buried in the ground becomes a beautiful plant, so an earthly body put into the ground in death, or scattered across the oceans, will become a body designed for the heavens, an imperishable body, no longer subject to decay. That is what Paul is teaching us here. This point is further emphasized by what Paul say next:

It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. { 1 Cor 15:43a RSV }

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. { 1 Cor 15:43b RSV }

It is sown a physical [soulish, literally, not physical] body, it is raised a spiritual body. { 1 Cor 15:44a RSV }

This physical body is an “earth suit” designed for the time I live in this world. As I stand here I am wiggling the lips of my “earth suit,” and you hear sounds coming out of it. You say that is me speaking to you. Well, yes, you are right. Behind the “earth suit” is me. I could not talk to you without it, but the “earth suit” is designed only for this life. It is not designed for anything else. It works fairly well in this life, but something could happen to this “earth suit” while I am talking to you and I would fall over and somebody would walk up here and say, “He’s dead!” But it would not be so. I would not be dead. The “earth suit” would have died, but I would be as alive as I have ever been, and already enjoying the new body, the “heaven suit,” the “eternity suit.” There is also a body designed for the heavens, as well as the earth, and what Paul is saying throughout this whole passage is that there is a definite link between the two.

You see it so wonderfully in the resurrected body of Jesus. He rose from the dead, and yet upon his body still were the marks of crucifixion by which his apostles could be absolutely sure that it was the same Jesus in the same body. And yet what a

difference! His body had been glorified, transformed. It was functioning at a different dimension and level of existence. It was able to pass through doors, able to appear and disappear, to eat or not to eat. It was able to function in fellowship with people in their “earth suits” and yet it was able to disappear from the earthly scene and still function in an “eternity suit,” a “heaven suit” that God had provided for him. What a marvelous truth this is!

Now we come to the statement of certainty about it in the closing section, beginning in the middle of Verse 44. Paul argues:

If there is a physical body there is also a spiritual body [designed to be operated by the spirit]. { 1 Cor 15:44b RSV

And then he proves it:

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being [soul]”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so 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. { 1 Cor 15:45-49 RSV }

The first Adam, Paul says, was made a living being. He had a body made from the dust, and into that body of dust God himself, a Spirit, breathed a breath, and the joining together of spirit and body produced another phenomenon called the “soul,” the personality. It is the presence of a spirit in a body that creates the soul and allows a person to function as a human being with mind, emotion, and will. That is what the first Adam was. Now, in the fall, the Holy Spirit that dwelt in the human spirit of Adam was withdrawn, and the human spirit was as though it was lifeless and dead. Man, therefore, was governed by his soul, the highest part of his being, which can feel and touch and taste and reason and think, but it has no contact with anything beyond and above. It is “dead in trespasses and sins,” {cf, Eph 2:1}. We were all born that way. Every human being is a son or daughter of the first Adam by nature.

But then there came a last Adam. Jesus, a life-giving Spirit, came, and as a Spirit he indwells, by faith, our human spirits when we receive him, when we open up our life to him. He regenerates our human spirit, and he is now, from that vantage point within

us, beginning to impart life to the soul again, to recapture the mind, the emotions and the will and bring them back under subjection to his Lordship. So we begin to experience in our life, right now, the joy of being once again in right relationship with the God, who made us. He is a life-giving Spirit, and he is waiting to impart life to the “earth suit” as well and to make it into a “heaven suit,” designed for the heavens. And the order is determined by God:

... it is not the spiritual which is first { 1 Cor 15:46a RSV }

We came into existence on a physical level, but designed by God, beyond that, is the spiritual. That is next, and death is but a stop in that process, and necessary to it. So now we are in a state of transition, as Paul goes on to describe,

The first man was from the earth, a man of dust [and we share that nature from Adam]; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is [notice the change of tense] the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. { 1 Cor 15:47-48 RSV }

Let me ask you a question: Are you “of heaven”? Having been born into this race, part of Adam’s race, have you gone on to become also a part of the Kingdom of God? Have you opened your heart to him? Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ into your human spirit so that you have the hope expressed here of becoming body, soul, and spirit, a man or woman as God intended a man or woman to be? That is the great question of all time. Are you also of those who are “of heaven?” For the promise is, Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [we look and act and talk and think like Adam], we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. { 1 Cor 15:49 RSV }

What a hope! What a difference that makes to everything in life! It transforms the way you act, the way you think. It transforms your dreams, your aspirations, what you do with your time. Everything is changed if you are a man, a woman of heaven as well as a man or woman of dust.