

1 Corinthians Chapter 15 v 35 - 58

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[0 : 00] Corinthians and chapter 15, and we're going to read from verse 35 to the end of the chapter. There were those in the church at Corinth who, like the Sadducees before them, if you know anything of them, didn't believe in the resurrection, didn't believe that people could be raised to life once they had died. And Paul has, in the first half of this chapter, shown without question that they are wrong, that there must be a resurrection, and one of the evidences, of course, that there must be a resurrection for all people is because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and he has shown that truth. And so then he deals with a second concern or a second doubt that the people had.

Verse 35, some may ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And when you sow, you do not plant the body that will be just a seed, perhaps of wheat or something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives his own body. All flesh is not the same. Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. There are also heavenly bodies, and there are earthly bodies. But the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind. The splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another, and the star is another. And star differs from star in splendor. So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown 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 power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written, the first man, Adam, 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 from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth. And as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

[3 : 41] Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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 labor in the Lord is not in vain.

We thank God for his faithful word. We'll be turning back to that passage in a little while. Well, this morning we were considering the fifth of Jesus' I Am sayings, a series we've been pursuing over the summer holidays, and we came to I Am the Resurrection and the Life, and I said during that sermon that we would consider and think about what is the resurrection body to which the Lord Jesus Christ promises to give us in those glorious words. And so that's why we've turned to 1 Corinthians 15. It's the best place to turn to if we want to think about the resurrection body, where we're given a great deal of insight and understanding through the writing of the Apostle Paul. Now, as many of you are aware, 2015 is the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

All sorts of celebrations have been going on. However, there wasn't one ending to the Second World War. There was, in fact, two endings. The first one took place in May, May the 8th, when we celebrated VE Day, victory in Europe, the end of the war with Nazi Germany. But that wasn't the end because several months later or some months later, on August the 15th or thereabouts, the war truly ended with VJ Day, victory over Japan. I'm sure you saw that yesterday. It was only then, at long last, that hostilities really ceased and the world began to know some peace. Now, for the Christian, there is similarly a two-stage salvation promised to us in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It begins when we've put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as our Savior. It begins when we, by faith, are born again of the Spirit of God, when we are washed of our sins, some of the things we've been singing about in our very first hymn, when we know what it is to be justified and right with God.

And that comes to us through the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. We're convinced of the gospel. We know it's true. We know the things that it teaches about Jesus Christ are real, not only because the Bible says it's so, not only because it's based upon eyewitness accounts, but especially because we have felt in ourselves the powerful victory that Christ has won over us and in us. Transformation takes place. We are different people, changed people from that moment that we trust in Christ. And we find there, as we put our faith in Christ, immediately and over the coming months and years, we begin to experience and to know and understand certain unseen blessings that are promised to us. Forgiveness for all of our sins, whatever the past was. Eternal life for ourselves, that we need not fear death. The sovereign rule of a loving Heavenly Father over every affair of our lives. So that we realize that nothing happens apart from the will and goodness of God.

That's the beginning. And I need to ask you, even at the very beginning of this time, as we look in God's Word, has that happened to you? Are you somebody who can say this evening, I am someone who has known this transforming power in my life. I've known what it is to put my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior, to see myself as a sinner, and to see that my sin was taken by Him at the cross, and to put all my faith and hope and trust in Him to make me right with God. You see, everything else that I have to say has no meaning to you unless you have experienced and know that to be true. And so I ask you, have you done that? Have you called upon Christ? Have you repented of your sins? Have you been born again of His Spirit? Because all the promises that we have, all the truths that we look into, are for those who are Christ's, not for those who are without Christ.

[8 : 19] But there's another victory to come. That's only the start. That's the VE day, as it were. There's another victory for which Christ came into this world. A glorious and wonderful purpose for which He laid down His life upon the cross, suffered, died, and rose again, and rules today.

And that is what we're thinking about this evening. This second, this glorious, this coming, this certain victory. See, as I've already said by introduction, there were those in the church in Corinth who doubted and did not believe there was any resurrection of the dead. There, back in verse 12, it is, if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? As I said in that first half of the chapter, Paul shows that a real and physical resurrection of every single person must and will take place at the return of Jesus Christ as he comes to judge the living and the dead. But these resurrection doubters raise another problem, or rather, I think there's a sense of ridicule going on, mocking in their question.

How are the dead raised? How can you raise a body that's decayed and rotted in the ground? How can you put it all back together? What a mess it will be. What a horrible figure it will be.

And these people were sowing seeds of confusion amongst the believers. Paul calls them foolish, verse 36. But no doubt, there were those there, as I'm sure there are many of us here this evening who say, well, what does it mean that we should be raised from the dead?

Even today, I'm sure when we speak about these things, about eternal life and resurrection, there will be those who poo-poo, say that's it. When you're dead, you're dead. When you're in the ground, you're in the ground. There's nothing afterwards. But we know for certain, for sure, that there must be a resurrection because Christ has been raised. But what we don't know is what will it be like.

[10:30] And that's what Paul answers here. What's the gospel victory we're heading towards? Where is our life going? What will be the crowning moment for which we have sought to follow Christ and live for Christ all these years?

Well, it's summed up there, isn't it, in verses 51 and 52. Listen, he says, pay attention. I tell you a mystery. Now, in the Bible, a mystery is not something that has to be sort of found out by investigation through Sherlock Holmes or something like that. When the Bible talks about a mystery, it means something that was hidden, now revealed. Something that wasn't seen, but now God has shown us. We will not all sleep. In other words, he means die. For the Christians, death is as fearful as sleep.

It's sad, it's grievous for those left behind. But for the Christian, it's no more awful than sleep. We will not all die, but we will all be changed. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. So that's what we're looking forward to, this transformation. Being raised from the dead in an instant, in a moment, at the return of Christ. All those who've died will rise again to resurrection bodies, and all who are still alive at Christ's coming will also be changed. The question is, for those of us as Christians, what will the transformation bring? What will our bodies be like?

And of course, immediately our minds go off into all sorts of spirals, don't they? Will I be more handsome in heaven than I am now? It's hard to believe, I know. Will I be slimmer than I am now? That isn't too hard to believe. Will I have more hair in heaven? And all these sort of things.

We think about the outward, don't we? Because we live in an outward world. That isn't what Paul's concerned about, and it isn't what we should be concerned about. But we are told four wonderful things about these resurrection bodies. And the first thing is very simple and clear. They're going to be different from the bodies in which we live now. That's what he says, doesn't he? How foolish.

[12 : 50] What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be just a seed. The body that we should be raised with, the resurrection body, will be different from the body in which we live now. And Paul uses several illustrations, doesn't he, from nature to make that point. Just as the seed that you bury in the ground doesn't look anything really like the plant that will come from it, no resemblance to it. So to the body that we bury, looks nothing like the new one that will come in the resurrection. I don't want to make a big thing of this, and I hope that you won't make, pick up only on this. I believe personally that being buried is the best thing that we can do as Christians when we die. I'm not having a go at people who've had their family cremated. I'm just saying to me, there's always this lovely picture of a seed being planted in the ground in hope and faith of being raised again. That's the picture in the Bible of burial. And so that's my own personal preference. I'm not saying that it has to be that way, but I like burial better than cremation.

And so Paul goes on to say about this body, and he goes to show, look, there are different types of flesh, different types of body according to the different types of animals and creatures in the world.

All flesh, he says, verse 39, is not the same. Men of one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. We're all physically different. There's a reason for that, as he should go on and show us. And so it is also with the splendor. He says there are different, he means heavenly bodies here, he means celestial bodies up in the sky. You have the sun, it's different to the moon, and the moon is different to the stars. And each of them, and you look out on the night sky, are different. Some are twinkling, and some are dim, and some are bright, and so on. They all have a different splendor and radiance. So the body that we have now is not the body we'll be raised with in glory. Phew, that's good, isn't it? That's good news for a start. We're not going to have to have this bit of meat that we're carrying around now, that we've struggled with, that doesn't behave itself, and so on. We're going to have something different. Well, what's it going to be? If it's going to be different? Well, this transformation that we shall enjoy has three major differences to our bodies today. The first is it will be a heavenly body. A heavenly body, verse 48. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth. As is the man from heaven, so also those who are of heaven.

After all, we need a heavenly body because we're going to inherit and live for an eternity in heaven. So it needs to be fit for purpose. As he says later on there in verse 50, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Why not? Because the kingdom of God is not like this earthly kingdom in which we live. It's no good to us to have a flesh and blood body to live in a heavenly kingdom. We need a heavenly body. And so he goes through there, particularly in verses 45 and following, comparing the fact that just as all of us are descendants physically of Adam, so we all have physical bodies like Adam's, which is just right for living in this world. And God created Adam to live in the Garden of Eden when he created his body. It was just right for living in this climate.

Just as he did with all the other animals. They are equipped for the climate, the situation that they live in. So a fish would be, has scales and has fins and all the things it needs. A bird has feathers and special bones so it can fly and so on. They are built for the sky. The fish are built for the sea.

[16 : 46] We are built for the earth. But you see, this body is no good for us to live in heaven. It's unsuitable for living in heaven. It's about as suitable for living in heaven as it would be suitable to try and live on the North Pole in your Bermuda shorts and your t-shirt. In fact, worse than that, if we were to ask ourselves, what would I need to wear to live on the surface of the sun? It would be more fitting.

See, to live in heaven is to live in the glorious radiance of God. To live in the perfect holiness of God. The brightness of his marvel and his perfection. When we read about heaven, over and over again we find that those angels who worship and serve God in heaven cannot even look upon the face of God. Here's Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. He says, I saw the Lord seated on his throne.

And he describes the angels that are around him with six wings. Two wings, they cover their faces. Why do they cover their faces? Because God is so holy and glorious and pure and marvelous that to look upon him is to burn up those things that are impure in us. Do you remember when Moses went up the mountain, spent 40 days in the presence of God? He came down, his face was shining. They had to put a bag over his head.

For us to live in the full brightness and the perfect holiness of God in these bodies would mean that we would be burnt up as a crisp, if I can put it that way. Because these bodies are sinful and earthly and impure and he is holy and perfect and good. And so God has prepared for you and I dear friends a heavenly body. That heavenly body is like the Lord Jesus' body we're told here, aren't we, in verse 49.

Just as the earthly man, verse 48, so are those who are of the earth, that's us. As is the man from heaven, so also those are of heaven. Because we have become Christians, we now are those who belong to Christ.

[18 : 55] Just as we are descendants of Abraham and he is our head and he is the one who represents us and we follow in his line, as it were. So when we put our faith in Christ, we have become part of the line and the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ who is from heaven. And so just as he has a heavenly body, we must have a heavenly body.

The apostle John, as he writes and looks forward as well with this same hope, says this in his first letter, chapter 3.

Dear friends, now we are children of God. That's what happened when we put our faith in Christ. We became God's children. Became God's sons, in fact. What we will be has not yet been known, not been revealed to us yet, but we know that when he, Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. You see, we are sons of Adam, so we represent and we have bodies like Adam's body, but now we are sons of God, so like his pure and perfect son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to have a heavenly body. We are to share in the privileges and the blessings of being children of God, like the son of God. Not that we are God, of course. But here Paul makes it clear we have a heavenly body because we shall be living in a heavenly habitat. And therefore, because it is a heavenly body, he tells us it will also be a spiritual body. Verses 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. Again, it's for the same reason, so that we might inhabit heaven.

A spiritual body doesn't mean that we shall be sort of like a ghostly sort of thing, or sort of a phantom and something that lacks in substance. That's not what he means by a spiritual body.

[20 : 54] We already have a spirit, a soul. We are soul people, spiritual people. It's real, though we cannot see it. And if we are to live in eternal fellowship with God, who Jesus says is himself spirit, then we also need to inhabit a spiritual body as well. Once more, Paul compares this with Adam. The old body of Adam, which is earthly, fleshly, and the new body, which is spiritual.

We shall have a body like Christ, a spiritual body. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, that's Adam, that's our physical body. After that, the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth. The second man from heaven. There's a difference. And this incredible spiritual body, this heavenly body that we shall have, is so different to the earthly body that we have now, that he gives it two characteristics, two things that stand out about the heavenly, spiritual body we shall have is this. It shall be imperishable, and it shall be immortal. Imperishable and immortal.

What does he mean by that? Well, the first phrase, first verb, imperishable means it will not decay. It will not corrode. It will not fall apart. It will be not like these physical bodies, which are given to aging and wearing out. That spiritual heavenly body will be impervious to those things. So as we sing often, amazing grace, when we've been there a thousand years, our bodies won't look like they've been there a day. There'll be no wrinkles, no bags, no gray hairs, no baldness, no bulging tummies, no glasses, no hearing aids. I said no hearing aids.

Sorry, it's a joke. I'm sorry. I'm going on holiday soon. No, it won't be a body that creaks and groans and fails and lets us down, needs parts replacing and so on. An imperishable body. No pain, no suffering.

But it also, it is an immortal body in that it is not prone to death. It shall not die. As we thought this morning when Jesus said, I'm the resurrection and the life, the life that he gives to us is a life which is everlasting and eternal. You see, these bodies, again, are not fit for purpose, are they? Because of sin. When God created Adam and Eve and he created his body, he created a perfect body for living in this world, a body that wasn't subject to corruption, wasn't subject to decay, wasn't going to wear out and break down. That's why often people say, why is it that Adam and the others lived to nearly a thousand years old? Well, because in that sense, sin was new to them. Sin's decaying power upon them was not as advanced as it is with us. These bodies are going to die. They have to die. They have to be changed. But those bodies in heaven, those heavenly resurrection bodies are not deathless.

[24 : 22] There's nothing in them that is subject to death's power. And that's why finally, dear friends, we see here, seems to me to be the very thrust of all that Paul is saying, is that it shall be a victorious body. 54 to 57, where he speaks about this, when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, that's the old body has been clothed, changed for the imperishable, the corrupt, the moth-eaten, changed with the bright and sparkly and wonderful, and the mortal, the dying, changed with the immortal, the undying, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? That's what he's been saying earlier on as well, I believe, when he talks about verse 43, sown in dishonor, raised in glory, sown in weakness, raised in power.

Now, over the years, I've been a pastor from time to time. I've either been with somebody who's died, or I've visited undertakers and seen somebody who's passed away. Perhaps you've had the same experience.

There's nothing very spectacular and splendid about a dead body, is there? Not only is it sad and sorrowful, particularly when they're those that we love, but it's, well, ugly. There's nothing glorious about it. And even our bodies, while they're alive, they're nothing really special, are they? We paint them and we decorate them and we do all we can to make them look good, but in the end, they're really just lumps of meat, aren't they? And then they get baggy and saggy and all the other things that they shouldn't do. And there's nothing very honorable about this body and glorious about this body. Our bodies are just like the caterpillar.

You see, that's the wonderful thing, isn't it, about the caterpillar? When the caterpillar gets into the cocoon, he's changed, he's transformed. When he comes out, he's a thing of beauty, a butterfly with glorious colors. He creeps across the earth, if I can put it that way. He's a bit sort of muzzy looking. He's brown and he's a bit sort of ugly and he's like a worm. But when he's in the cocoon, when there's been that transformation and the wings spread and the sun comes out and he rises up and flies, that's a wonderful picture, I think, of the resurrection. And that's why Paul speaks about this victorious body. It's raised in power. It's raised in glory. It's raised as something beautiful and marvelous and glorious and wonderful. See, the resurrection body that we shall have, dear friends, is so different from ours that when Paul looks forward to that day, that day particularly when Christ comes to take his church, his bridegroom to himself, this is how he describes her, us, if we are Christ's, in Ephesians chapter 5.

And he will present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless. Everything that spoils us now will be removed. Everything that makes us ugly, which is sin, is removed. Everything that mars God's perfect, beautiful image in humanity will be changed so that we shall reflect and we shall radiate the beauty, the glory, the wonder of our dear husband, the Lord Jesus Christ, and of God our Creator. That's the crowning achievement of our lives. That's the great goal and that's the great culmination of what the gospel that is preached and that we've believed is leading us towards. And it's all because of Jesus Christ. Notice what Paul says, the sting of death is sin. That's why we die, because sin lives in us. And why does sin live in us?

[28 : 28] Because of the law of God which we've broken and trampled underfoot. But thanks be to God. Why? He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. The day of victory is coming because Jesus Christ has done it all for us.

Now you might say, well that's very encouraging, that's lovely, I can see, I can think about how marvelous it will be in heaven and when I get the resurrection body, but what does that mean to me today? Sometimes people think that that's Christianity is all about pie in the sky, it's all about you know, life after death, it's all about there, has nothing really to do to impact us today. Well it does, because there at the end of chapter 15 we have Paul saying therefore. Therefore, because of what I've just been laying out before you, because of what I've just been telling you about this resurrection body, because of what is yet before you, this glorious victory in Christ, here dear friends is how it impacts and affects your lives. Today, stand firm, let nothing move you. Nothing move you from this gospel in which you've placed your faith. Nothing move you into some other sphere which may say to you, look here's a better way of living, here's something which offers more hope. How can there be anything more hopeful than what he's let before us here? What has atheism got to offer the world?

Annihilation, nothingness, despite the fact it's a complete lie anyway. What have the religions of the world apart from Christianity got to offer? Purgatory, got to offer, if you're good enough you might get there. If you try hard enough, if you reach some enlightened stage and you don't have to go through being born a second time and going through that all again. I've forgotten the bird but never mind, it doesn't matter. Christianity holds out eternal life in a resurrection body which is free from sin and pain and suffering and sorrow. It holds out this hope which is definite and certain because Christ himself has died and rose again and we are following after him. How important again, I've got to stress, dear friends, to you again how essential and important and vital it is that you are a part of Jesus Christ.

Because none of these things that God offers us and promises us in Christ are yours unless Christ is first your savior, unless first you are born again of his spirit, unless you have given yourselves holy to him and your sins have been taken by him upon the cross. Because if you are Christ then all this is yours. If you are without Christ then none of this is yours.

There is a resurrection, yes, for those who are without Christ, a resurrection to everlasting and eternal ruin and sorrow and grief. And it doesn't matter how good you've lived or how religious you've been or what a nice person you are or how many friends you've got or how much money you've got.

[31 : 40] Because it's not down to any of those things, it's down to Christ and what he's done on your behalf and your faith in him. So stand firm. Yes, we live in a world where we're pulled back and forth.

We live in a world where all sorts of new ideas are coming and telling us go this way, do that thing, live like this. As you get older, as you gain into adulthood, all sorts of peers and pressures again tell you don't follow the way of your parents, don't follow the way of Christ, carve your own way.

You're pulled back and forth. But here let me assure you there is no better way than to stand firm upon what you've believed and trusted and to live and not be moved. But notice this as well.

Well, give yourself always fully to the work of the Lord because you know your labour in the Lord is not in vain. All that we do in life has to pass away. Whatever you give yourselves to, whether you give yourselves to university, to degrees, to a great career, to great training, to accumulation of money, even to family and friendships and loved ones, all those things in one sense are good. But if they become the thing that we live for, then we know that they are all passing. The only thing worth living for in this life is living for Christ. The only thing worth setting your heart upon and serving is Christ.

And the reason is because when we serve Christ and we live for him, we know that we shall not be disappointed at the end. We know that these things will last. We know that we have an eternal reward.

[33 : 25] He is our reward and he is the rewarder of all of our labours. We may feel at times in the Christian life that we are running and labouring in vain. That work that you have been doing in the Sunday school all those years. That work you have been doing amongst young people. That work you have been doing in the old folks homes all those years.

That work you have been doing in your mums and toddlers. And we feel like we have been working in vain. It is not in vain. Why is it not in vain? Because of the hope that is set before us when the Lord Jesus comes again and he says, well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.

It can be very discouraging living the Christian life. But dear friends, there is nothing worth living for in comparison to living for Christ. That is the whole of the message. That is the whole of what Paul is saying. Whatever we do for the Lord is not lost. It is not in vain. It is not pointless. It is reaping an eternal reward. An everlasting reward. It is going to pay dividends in the future to come.

Our labours do not fall to the ground unnoticed and helpless. So dear friends, this is the hope that is set before you. Does it burn in your heart?

Is it the hope that moves you and motivates you on Monday morning and Friday afternoon? The hope of life everlasting? The hope and certainty of that resurrection body which is to come? Can you say, well, whatever happens in this world, whatever I go through, whatever I suffer, whatever difficulties I endure, whatever labours I have to go through, I know that this is before me and this is certain.

[35 : 16] Close with the words of Paul, a man who himself knew much suffering and sorrow and grief and difficulty. And this is what he says. He just laid out all the difficulties he's had in life and he says, therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we're wasting away. That's the body. Yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary. What is unseen is eternal. If you haven't yet placed your hope and faith in Christ in Christ and determined to follow and live for him, I urge you in the light of all these truths to make sure that you do.

And if you are struggling in the Christian life and finding it tough, let me urge you to set your mind upon his promise of Christ's. That you shall have a resurrection body with him. A reward that nothing can take away.

Not at all. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake. Some to everlasting life. Others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens. And those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever amen