

“Eternity: What Awaits After Death”

Sermon # 5

“Transforming For Life Into Heaven”

1 Corinthians 15:35-52

In 1 Corinthians 15:35 the Apostle Paul asks two questions that concern us all. “But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is writing to a group of Christians who were struggling with the issue of what happens after you die. Although they were living about twenty years after the resurrection, their thinking about life and death were being influenced by their culture. I am afraid that is also a plight that we may share.

As a young man growing up in the Methodist church we recited the Apostles Creed a portion of which says. “I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.”

Recent surveys have shown that about 30% of all Americans believe in reincarnation. Reincarnation is the belief that each individual soul lives a succession of lives in various human bodies over the course of history. The purpose for such reincarnation is to gradually purify the soul so that it eventually reaches perfection. Those who believe in Reincarnation believe that we continue to be reincarnated until we get it right. The problem is that even those who say they are reincarnated have no memory of how they got it wrong in order that they might now get it right. Even harder to understand Gallop also found that 20% of those who describe themselves as born-again/evangelical Christians say they believe in reincarnation. That makes absolutely no sense. Reincarnation is diametrically contrary to the truth of the Gospel.

Even among Americans who believe in the resurrection of the dead, two-thirds believe they will not have bodies after the resurrection. (Alcorn p. 110) But in reality that is self-contradictory there can be no such thing. Resurrection by its very definition requires a body. If we didn't have bodies, we wouldn't be resurrected.

We have noted thus far in our series on “Eternity: What Awaits After Death” that physical death is the separation of the body from the soul. At death of a believer the body is committed to the grave and soul and spirit goes to be with Christ.

Death is an abnormal condition because it tears apart what God created and joined together. God intended for our bodies to last as long as our souls.

The reason we are decaying and dying is not because we have bodies. It is because sin has infected our bodies.

The Biblical doctrine of resurrection is an affirmation that we are a spiritual and physical unity and that God intends to put us back together again. Although the soul is separate from the body at death, this separation is only temporary.

Some of you could care less about what happens to your body – after you die. You are just hoping to find enough aspirin, icy/hot and duct tape to keep the thing running now. I understand how you feel, I really do, but indulge me just a bit this morning. I want to share some exciting news about what eternity holds for you physically. Hey, wait a minute did you say, physically? Yes, indeed, one day you are going experience the ultimate extreme, make-over. We can look forward to a new body.

I want to share with you this morning four truths about “Being Transformed for Life in Heaven.”

First, The New Body Is Real

Paul addresses the first question, “How are the dead raised up?” beginning in verses thirty-six.

- Death Is Necessary For Resurrection. (v. 36)

“Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” This verse says that the body is “sown” – “sown” here means “buried.” It seems obvious that there is no need for a resurrection unless one is dead.

- New Yet Part of the Old (vv. 37-38)

“And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.”

Paul uses the illustration of a seed to explain what he mean about the relationship between the old you and the new you. He says the seed doesn’t look like the fruit it will produce. When you plant a pumpkin seed it does not look like a pumpkin. Although the pumpkin seed does not look like the pumpkin, you can’t get the fruit if you don’t plant the seed.

The body that is resurrected is a brand new you. If it’s not you then it is not a resurrection. It will not be you as you were but a brand new you. Hank Hanegraaf points out that there must be continuity between the old you and new you. He said, “We see that the blueprint for our glorified bodies are in the bodies we now possess. While orthodoxy does not dictate that every cell of our present bodies will be restored in the resurrection, it does require continuity between our earthly bodies and our heavenly bodies. Just as there is continuity between our earthly bodies and the bodies we had at birth – even though all of our subatomic particles and most of our cells have been replaced – so too there will be continuity from death to resurrection, despite the fact that not every particle in our bodies will be restored. In fact

without continuity, there is no point in even using the word resurrection.” [Hank Hangraaff. Resurrection. (Nashville: Word Pub.,) p. 70]

Joni Eareckson Tada, was paralyzed in a diving accident, explains it well when she said, “Somewhere in my broken paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs against splendorous resurrected legs. I’m convinced that if there are mirrors in heaven (and why not?), the image I’ll see will be unmistakably ‘Joni,’ although a much better , brighter Joni.” [Joni Eareckson Tada. Heaven Your Real Home. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) p. 39]

Perhaps this analogy will help. At the age of sixteen I was saved. When I was saved I became a new person, yet I was still the person that I had always been. Hopefully those around me saw a lot of change but not to the point that that they could not say, “That’s John.” I was still John Hamby although a substantially changed John Hamby. This same John will undergo another change at death, and yet another change at the resurrection. But through all these changes I will continue to be who I was and always will be.” [I am indebted to Randy Alcorn’s personal analogy as a model. Heaven. p. 112]

Not only is the New Body Is Real but...

Secondly, The New Body Is Recognizable.

One of the most often asked questions concerning Heaven is, “Will we know our loved ones and will they know us?” I touched on that question last week when I asked the question. “Will we know less in Heaven then we do now?” I understand that several members of the choir looked at Les Hopp as if I were questioning whether or not we would recognize Him in Heaven. Well I think you have purposefully missed the point. Let me try again.

The only real example of what our resurrected body will be like is what we read of Jesus in the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension.

Jesus walked the earth in his resurrection body for forty days, showing us how we would live as resurrected human beings. We are going to have bodies like Jesus. (Note I did not say we were going to become little Jesus’) It was the same body He had before he died and it was recognized by his friends.

Missionary Amy Carmichael wrote, “Shall we know each other in Heaven? Shall we love and remember? I don’t think one need wonder about this or doubt for a single moment! For if we just think, we know! Would you be yourself, if you did not remember? We are told that we shall be like our Lord Jesus and does He not know and love and remember? He would not be Himself if He did not! And we should not be ourselves if we did not!”

Yet when the resurrected Lord appeared He was so different that at first they did not recognize him. He arose from the dead and yet upon His body there were still the marks of the

crucifixion, where-by his disciples knew implicitly that this was the same Jesus in the same body. He had a real body that could touch and be touched and could and did eat.

Not only is the New Body Recognizable but...

Third, The New Body Is Radically Different.

In the second question (v. 35) Paul anticipates the question about what kind of body will we have that is suitable for living forever in Heaven. In verse forty-two Paul begins answering that question by drawing a series of contrast.

1. The New Body Will Be Indestructible. (v. 42) "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

The first thing that Paul tells us is that our new resurrection bodies will be indestructible. Our new bodies are not like our old bodies. Our current bodies wear out. We get old; we begin to notice that everything does work like it use to. We begin to understand the old saying, "What does not hurt does not work!" We discover that no matter what the infomercials promise we can't stop the aging process. At best we can slow it down somewhat or camouflage it, but we can't stop it.

Our new bodies will be made to last forever. Our resurrection bodies will not be subject to disease or decay or aging. Our resurrection bodies will literally out-live the stars.

2. The New Body Will Be Glorious(v 43a) "It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory."

The word "glory" means brilliance and our new bodies will be glorious like that of the risen Christ. In

Philippians 3:21 Paul states, "Who will be transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

3. The New Body Will Be Powerful (v. 43b) "...It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

We will possess a new body with abilities beyond our widest imaginations. When Jesus was with His disciples, He had the power to come and go as he pleased, neither walls nor distance were an obstacle. According to John 20:25 Jesus came into the room without having to open the door.

But as Randy Alcorn points out, "though we know that Christ could do these things (like pass through closed doors), we are not explicitly told that we'll be able to. It may be that some

aspects of His resurrection body are unique because of His divine nature.” [Randy Alcorn. Heaven. (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2004) p. 116]

We may or may not share those special abilities that Jesus possessed but whatever abilities we do have will be more than could have ever dreamed of.

4. The New Body Will Be Infinite (v. 44a) “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body....”

To say that we will have a “spiritual body” does not mean that we will just be spirits. Somehow many Christians have come to the conclusion that life in eternity is going to be as some kind of a spirit or for lack of a better term, a ghost. I want to dispel the myth that we are going to be some kind of ghost like spiritual being. Jesus reassured His disciples, “I am not a ghost..” (Luke 24:39 NLT) R. A. Torrey writes, “We will not be disembodied spirits in the world to come, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.”

We will be raised with a body suitable for our new life!

Fourth, The New Body Is Received At Christ’s Return (vv. 51-52)

Paul answers the question “Who will be resurrected and When?” in verses fifty-one and fifty two. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

The dead in Christ will rise first and be given new glorified bodies. Living believers will follow and their bodies will be transformed. Paul further explains the sequence of events in 1 Thess.

4:16-17, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Conclusion

I love the epitaph that Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself while still a young man. It wonderfully catches the spirit of Paul's words in 1 Cor.15.

“The body of B. Franklin, printer,
(like the cover of an old book,
its contents torn out and
stripped of its lettering and gilding)
lies here, food for worms.

But the work shall not be lost;
for it will (as he believed)
appear once more,
in a new and more elegant edition,
revised and corrected
by the Author."