

1 Corinthians 15

³⁵ But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?' ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: people have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour.

⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 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. ⁴⁵ So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – ⁵² 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. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ 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.'

⁵⁵ 'Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?'

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

24th April 2016

Victory over death

Cholsey

1 Corinthians 15:35 – 57

John 11:17 – 27

Apparently on Thursday night, President Obama's secret service bodyguard were asking themselves how they managed to let their commander-in-chief, the most powerful man in the world be driven from his helicopter to Windsor Castle in a 4x4 by a 94 year old man! The Duke of Edinburgh ("very smoothly"). We are amazed and impressed by the stamina and fitness of Prince Philip at 94 and the Queen at 90. But for all that amazement, we are aware that they are both ageing and neither can go on forever. The fact is that however much time and energy we might spend on trying to stay fit and young, in the long run we all die.

As Paul says, like Adam we are all formed from the dust of the earth and like Adam we are perishable – even in one sense, the last Adam – Jesus, who died on the cross.

But of course that is not the end of the story, Christ was raised physically from the dead – if that were not true, we of all people would be most to be pitied, but the historical evidence is overwhelming. And, as James reminded you last week when he was looking at the foundations of our faith, the glorious implication of this is not just that Jesus is risen and alive today but that he is the first fruits of a new kind of human being, an in-Christ human being and that one day we will have resurrection bodies just like his.

Most people today – if they believe in life after death at all - believe that we somehow continue floating around in a vague ethereal spiritual form – up there somewhere. Mediums and spiritualists try and make contact with these spirits. Often even Christians have this view of life after death. Others believe in re-incarnation and that we come back as another earthly human being – if we've been good, and if we haven't then as a dung beetle. But we don't find either of these views in the Bible, much less in the teaching of Jesus. At the time of Jesus the common Jewish view of resurrection was that expressed by Martha in our gospel reading: 'I know my brother will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jews believed that when you died you went into a kind of limbo, sometimes called *Sheol*. This was likened to being asleep. But then at on the last day, the great day of judgement, all would be physically raised to life. Jesus does not contradict this view of resurrection but says it will come into being through him – *He* is the resurrection. We could say that with the resurrection of Jesus on that first Easter morning, the last day has begun.

Well of course people might say *How on earth can a dead body become an immortal body and live forever – dead people stay dead!* Apparently a few years ago when a group of liberal theologians called the Jesus Seminar publicly presented their conclusions the Jesus could not have physically risen from the dead, they brought along someone who worked in a mortuary to confirm that dead people stay dead !! Well of course we know that and they knew that perfectly well in Jesus and Paul's time as well. Paul basically says *don't be so stupid – How foolish!* he says – we are not talking about resuscitating our old mortal bodies. In one sense that *is* what Jesus did with Lazarus, but that was only a signpost towards real resurrection, not resurrection in itself because the raised Lazarus carried on getting older one day at a time like the rest of us, and eventually died again.

But says Paul we see signs of resurrection all around us, every time you plant a seed. But what comes us with new life is not another seed it is something which while it clearly comes from the seed looks quite different.

In fact the hard outer coat of the seed – the *testa* - has to perish so that it can be split open before the seed can germinate and new life can come. Once this has happened the coat can be discarded. In the same way our physical bodies have to die before our soul our unique spirit, now planted in the soil of heaven then receives a brand new kind of body. And this new body has to be fit for its new environment. As Paul implies, a fish is not designed to live on dry land and a bird is not designed to live under water. In the same way an earthly body made from the dust of the earth is not designed to live in heaven or indeed the new heaven and the new earth John tells us about in Revelation. In that new environment there will be no more death and no more sin, no corruption. So our new bodies need as it were to be made in heaven of the stuff of heaven. v.42 *The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;* ⁴³ *it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;* ⁴⁴ *it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

If we want to know what this body will be like, we should look at the resurrection body of Jesus for he is the first-fruits, the first of the crop of this new race of heavenly resurrected human beings. Jesus' risen body had continuity with his old earthly body – it still bore the marks of his crucifixion, but often it seems the disciples had trouble recognising him. His risen body was solid and could be felt and embraced and eat broiled fish and cook a barbecue breakfast but he could suddenly appear and disappear in a locked room. It seems he could materialise and dematerialise at will or

maybe just step across from the heavenly dimension to the earthly dimension at will.

So when Paul talks about us having a *spiritual body – not ethereal or ghostly but a body born of the spirit and designed for God's kingdom – imperishable, full of God's glory and power.* (C.S Lewis *The great divorce – =divide - heaven bigger, brighter more solid*

Sophie's world: the angelic messenger's body is much more solid than the solid objects of this world)

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul describes our earthly body as being like a tent – flimsy and temporary, but our heavenly body as being like a building – solid and permanent.

Now Paul says that all followers of Christ will receive this new heavenly body at the same time at the last day. *51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed –* ⁵² *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 what happens in between our death and the last day? In this passage Paul uses the contemporary Jewish image of “sleep” but that does not necessarily mean we are unconscious in oblivion for thousands of years – it might just refer to us resting from our physical existence in that intervening period. but nevertheless in intimate fellowship with Jesus, beholding him face to face.

A person who is asleep may appear to be inert, dead to the world, but in fact in a different dimension, they are having the most glorious adventure or delightful conversation in their dreams.

Jesus said to the thief: *Today, you will be with me in paradise. Today.* But paradise is not the same as the new heaven and earth, it is a place of rest and refreshment and where we are *with Jesus.*

Similarly, Jesus told his friends: *in my Father's house there are many rooms, I am going there to prepare a place for you and then I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am i.e. in his Father's presence.*

And so in Philippians 1 Paul says v.21ff *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;*

2 Corinthians 5 ¹*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.* ²*Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead*

with our heavenly dwelling,³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

We tend to have a love hate relationship with our bodies: as we get older we may get increasingly frustrated with them; nevertheless it is natural to fear death and the idea of being dis-embodied. But if we are in Christ then we are already *clothed* with Christ, so we will never be, as it were, naked. First Jesus and then Paul teach us that as followers of Christ, we have a glorious two-fold hope in the face of death or indeed in the face of that frustration with our far-from-perfect bodies –

First, when we die we shall immediately be totally aware of the presence of Christ, wrapped up in his love, safe in our heavenly Father's home.

Secondly, one day we shall have glorious, physical, imperishable, immortal bodies like the resurrection body of Jesus, perfectly fashioned to live in the new heaven and the new earth.

It may be that, in earthly terms, thousands of years pass between our death and that final state, but it also may be that in *heaven* that time passes in the blink of an eye. What we can be sure of is that this intermediate state is *better by far* than our life here on earth.

Meanwhile, although it's good to try and keep reasonably fit and healthy so that we can both enjoy this earthly life and do the work God has given us, let's not get too obsessed by our bodies or worry about growing old.

In the long run our bodies will decay – *even the Queen's, even Joan Collins*, but in the *really* long run we shall be given new bodies that will be glorious!

Finally, what is true of our bodies is also true of our world.

We may be tempted to despair as we see the corruption, destruction and death in our world, but the resurrection of Jesus means that the last day has begun, the endgame has started as King Jesus establishes his rule.

Jesus victory over death means that, as Paul says in Romans 8, we can look forward to the day when the whole world, the whole of creation itself, will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom of the children of God

John 11

¹⁷ *On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.* ¹⁸ *Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,* ¹⁹ *and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.* ²⁰ *When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.*

²¹ *'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* ²² *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'*

²³ *Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'*

²⁴ *Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'*

²⁵ *Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'*

²⁷ *'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'*