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IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

The Resurrection Body

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Text

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, 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. ³⁹ For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; 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 Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Introduction

Do you remember the first time you saw a dead body? What did it look like? What did it make you think? What did it make you feel?

We have less and less exposure these days to dead bodies. My grandfather died in 1954. His dead body was put in an open casket that stayed in the living room of the house that I grew up in for several days while friends and family came by to visit.

When I was growing up, I don’t remember anything like that happening. But I do remember going to the funeral home in my small town many times. When someone died in the community his or her body was available for a viewing the day before the funeral. Friends and family would come to the funeral home to pay respects. You’d wait in a long line to get to the front to view the body and speak with the family. Then you’d come back to the funeral home or to the church the next morning for a service where you’d view the body again. Then there were pallbearers who carried the body to the hearse. Then everyone got in their cars and drove to the cemetery in a procession. You could go through stop signs and every other car on the road would pull over, and sometimes the driver would even get out of the car to honor the dead. And there would be another, shorter service by the graveside where the person’s body would be buried in the ground.

I remember this happening frequently. The funeral home was a familiar place for me growing up. I recall as a kid staring at the closed eyes of the deceased corpse,

inspecting the waxy looking skin of hands folded lifelessly across the still torso. I found death fascinating to ponder – what happened here? Ever since my little sister died at 10 days old in 1986 and I peered into her miniature coffin, I’ve been especially conscious of death. I even one time was at a wake where I saw a woman looking at a dead body and she died, right there of a massive heart attack. My early years were fairly well acquainted with death.

But I don’t think it’s something most people are very exposed to these days. We definitely don’t let dead bodies lay around our living rooms. We don’t regularly go to visitations at funeral homes to look upon the lifeless form of our friends and acquaintances. I’ve been a pastor at this church for almost 22 years and we have not once had a dead body in our building. It seems that we’re shielded more and more from this reality.

However, the fact remains that death is still coming for each and every one of us. One day, in the not-too-distant future your body is going to have no heartbeat, no brain waves, no respiration. That is something that will happen to every moving, thinking, breathing person (except for those who will be alive at the Second Coming of Christ). Then what? Is that it? Is that the end of all your reasoning, all your reflecting, all your relating, all your dreaming, all your desiring... all that makes you, you? Will you and your loved ones simply cease to exist when you die? That prospect seems inconceivable to most people.

And so as a kid growing up I remember hearing people saying while I was peering into the casket – “She’s in heaven now.” Or – “He went to be with the Lord.” As a result, I picked up this understanding that there was a soul, an immaterial essence of a person that lived on somehow, in a ghost-like existence somewhere up there. And I got the idea that this was the ultimate goal – that it was important to believe in Jesus while you were alive so that after you lived a full life down here then you would gain entry into an eternal, heavenly existence up there, while our bodies were left behind.

I could be wrong (it’s possible I am), but I don’t ever remember being told in those funeral moments growing up that someday Uncle James’ eyes are going to open back up, that great-grandpa Isch’s mouth is going to smile and talk again, that this dead corpse is going to be reanimated – not just that he’s walking streets of gold in heaven right now, but that these very legs are going to walk again. I don’t remember hearing that. It was only – “They are in a better place now.”

But that is actually not the emphasis of the Bible!

Now the Bible does indicate that the human spirit can be separated from the body and continue to have some kind of consciousness after the body dies. Jesus talked about not fearing those who can kill the body, but cannot the soul (Mt. 10:28). He told a parable about a rich man and Lazarus that assumed an intermediate immaterial existence after death (Lk. 16:19-31). He assured the repentant/believing thief on the cross next to him that – “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43). The Apostle Paul said that for him “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” and that his “desire is to depart [the body] and be with Christ (Ph. 1:21, 23). And in 2 Corinthians 5:8 he taught that you can be away from the body and yet at home with the Lord. That idea is there.

But Jesus didn’t just talk about our souls living on after death. He taught that “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out” (Jn. 5:28-29). He said, “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son

and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn. 6:39-40; 4x in Jn. 6). Jesus didn’t just die on the cross and tell the thief he would see him in heaven. The central claim of the Christian faith is that on the third day his body came back to life and walked out of the tomb. In the same book where Paul said that to die is gain, he also said, “[O]ur citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Ph. 3:20-21). And in 2 Corinthians 5 where he talks about being absent from the body and yet still with the Lord, he also says that our ultimate goal is not for our soul to be unclothed, but *further* clothed. We don’t just die and go to heaven; our hope is that we will live again in our bodies on a renewed earth.

We could point to many other passages that teach the redemption of our bodies (e.g. Rom. 8:23), but perhaps the clearest and most sustained section of Scripture that addresses all of this is 1 Corinthians 15. And we’ve been in this chapter as a church for the past 5 weeks as we prepare for our Easter celebration next Sunday. We’ve seen that the Christian message – the gospel – hangs on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. We’ve seen that this message can radically change our lives here on this earth (and we’ve seen that if it didn’t happen then there really is no point to life). But we’ve also seen that the resurrection of Christ is just the beginning of something big. His resurrected body is the firstfruits of a larger harvest – a full resurrection at the end of human history of all those who have ever lived. The period when the body is in the grave and the soul goes on is like falling asleep at night. You’re in a dream world. But one day when Christ comes again, we will wake up to live in endless Day. 1 Corinthians 15 makes clear that Christ’s resurrection is a preview of our own resurrection. This body that will one day die, will also one day come back to life. That is the amazing message of the Bible. It’s not just promising life after death, but life after life after death.¹

Now I think that’s pretty clear. And it’s cool. I hope that if you’ve grown up in or been around this church for a while then you will have gotten that. We’re not just looking forward to heaven, but to a gloriously new world with renewed bodies to inhabit it forever. Our hope is not just the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the dead.

But there are still questions we might have about this. And the skeptical will no doubt come up with all kinds of objections. How does this work, exactly? What will that be like? Will my elderly Aunt Fanny’s bony hands claw through the sod in front of her tombstone? Will my little sister still be a premature baby that can’t talk? Or a baby that can talk?? Will my grandmother have wrinkled, flabby skin? What about those who died in gruesome ways, whose funerals may have been closed casket? And what about those who have been dead a long time? “Dead bodies decompose and become part of the nutrients in the ground, and their molecules find their way into other living things. If those bodies have disintegrated and have been incorporated into other creatures, how can they be raised again?”² And there are many other similar curiosities. Like, what are we really talking about here? And that’s what Paul addresses in this next section of 1 Corinthians 15.

In short, what we’re going to see together today from vv. 35-49 is just this: **the resurrection body of a believer will be breathtakingly better than before.**

Let's pray...

The Question

Paul throughout this chapter is aware of those who think that what he's saying is fanciful nonsense. Just like today, back then there were those who thought the resurrection of the dead was impossible or silly. *Maybe there is some kind of spiritual energy that continues, but do you really expect me to believe that dead bodies will come back to life?* Paul acknowledges these kinds of detractors – “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’” Can you hear the scoffing in the tone with which the question is asked? *So do bodies that were decapitated come back headless? Do people who died at sea and got eaten by fish come back with scales and gills?*

The Response

Some may ask the question with antagonism, others with plain ignorance, but either way Paul answers – “You foolish person!” The fool is not the person who believes God raises the dead. The fool is the person who can't see how God could possibly do something like that. This Wednesday is April Fools Day. On that day I'm always reminded of Psalms 14:1 and 53:1 – “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” That is utterly foolish to think that you can put yourself in the Judge's seat and be the final say on what is true and what is possible and what can happen... you who will soon be dead. It's utterly foolish.

What Paul is doing here is very similar to what we see Jesus doing when some Sadducees, who said that there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a smug smile on their faces and a wild scenario about a woman who had been married to seven brothers successively and they asked Jesus a question that they thought showed up the utter foolishness of the idea of a resurrection. They said, “‘In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.’ But Jesus answered them, ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God’” (Mt. 22:28-29). It's like saying, “You foolish person!” They thought they were all smart and sophisticated, but they completely underestimated the power of God and deliberately misunderstood the Scriptures. Jesus said that the resurrected existence will be of a different kind such that there will not be marriage. And the Bible, even in the OT, points to this hope of a glorious future past the grave.

Similarly, Paul here is astounded at the question. The real fool is the one whose imagination is stunted when it comes to the power and goodness of God. The eternal God who spoke and BANG matter came into existence... the self-existent God who sustains trillions of galaxies and orchestrates the orbits of electrons... the loving God who intervenes in human history and reveals himself and interprets his ways to human beings in Scripture... the Creator God who is sovereign over nature is capable of bringing deceased humans back to life, no problem.

Analogies from Nature

Speaking of nature, Paul uses some analogies from nature to help us start to fathom what resurrection bodies will be like. First, he uses the picture of a seed that is planted. He says, “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” Jesus talked

about seeds this way in John 12:24. It was a common way of thinking about planting. It's spring time. Pretty soon I will go to Home Depot and buy these little, inert pieces of matter called seeds. They sit in a paper envelope on the shelves of a warehouse and then at Home Depot, doing nothing. But then you bury them in the ground, let them get wet, and wait, they germinate and grow. It's amazing! And they don't just grow into bigger seeds. They transform into a plant that comes from the seed but looks totally different.

"A specialist might point out that germination is not actually about a seed dying. [But as one biblical specialist has pointed out] Paul is not speaking as a horticulturalist or agronomist, of course, but as one who, starting out from what he knows about death and resurrection, has found a helpful analogy in the relationship between a seed and what grows from the seed following germination. The fact that the seed is buried in the ground like a dead body but (like one resurrected from the grave) refuses to just lie there but rather sends life rising up from the ground undoubtedly encouraged the analogy."³ Paul sees the dead human body buried in the ground as like a seed that is buried... and then bursts forth into life.

As a bit of an aside, have you ever thought much about cremation? The analogy could work, but not as well in the case of a body that was burned into a pile of ashes. But have you thought very deeply about this increasingly popular practice? One of the reasons why we don't see dead bodies as much anymore is due to the rapid rise in the practice of cremation. The body is burned up before a funeral and so all you see at a memorial service is at most an urn. I can't say that cremation is absolutely wrong, biblically. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). But I think the decision to cremate is often one of expedience. It's cheaper. It also prevents people from having to look death in the face. It also goes along with an increasing rootlessness in society that characterizes modern life – *Where would I be buried? I'm not really from anywhere; I'm just a floater* – which is connected with a disembodied kind of lifestyle already. Furthermore, cremation doesn't as clearly communicate a firm belief in the resurrection of the body. It kind of says, "The body doesn't matter that much; their can still live somewhere." I, personally, want to be buried in the ground like a seed, as a declaration that I will rise bodily someday. Have you thought about where you want to be buried? Have you purchased a burial plot? Do you have savings or life insurance that would cover those expenses? Something to be thinking about now and discussing with your family.

Anyway, Paul continues, "And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen." In other words, the body of uncle Bob dies and is buried, but it doesn't pop back up just like it was immediately prior to death. It comes to life in a different form. A corn seed doesn't poke its head above the ground as a corn seed. It comes out as two green leaves that grows into a stalk with green leaves. It comes from the corn seed, but it looks totally different from a corn seed. And so it is with the resurrection body that we will have. It will have some kind of continuity with our current bodies, but it will be so much more. **The resurrection body of a believer will be breathtakingly better than before.**

Paul continues with his reflections on nature – "... and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly

bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.” “What is Paul’s point in these illustrations,” asks Tom Schreiner? “It is that the God who has endowed the creatures and entities with such diversity and beauty is certainly able to raise the dead.”⁴ God has created all kinds of different bodies. He is able to re-create us with glorious bodies that are fit to life in the new world. Just as God has made a slug and an elephant or a meteor and a quasar, “[s]o it is with the resurrection of the dead.” He has made our current bodies, and he can make us new and improved bodies.

Contrasts

Next, Paul lists a series of contrasts between what our bodies are like currently and what they will be like one day when they are resurrected.

First, perishable vs. imperishable. “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.” If you took a bean and just left it on the shelf, it would eventually shrivel up and disintegrate. But if you put it in the ground with water and warmth it will burst into something dynamic and growing. It’s an analogy.

These bodies we now have are already deteriorating. The discs in your back are degenerating. The collagen in your skin is decreasing at a rate of about 1% per year. The telomeres at the ends of your chromosomes are shortening. This body is wasting away and is always just one big bump in the head away from ceasing to function. But the resurrection body will be imperishable; that is, immortal; that is, unable to die. It will not be subject to entropy. It will never wind down, but will always be winding up. It will be free from its current bondage to decay. It’s hard to imagine, but it is what we all want, isn’t it? To be able to do the things we did when we were in our prime, without pain, without the possibility of injury. No body image issues, because our bodies will be beautiful. Our current state is characterized as perishable; our eternal state will be imperishable.

Second contrast: dishonor vs. glory. “It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.” At every funeral I’ve ever been to, the body doesn’t look quite right. If the person died young, the body’s lifelessness is an embarrassment to his or her youth. Perhaps it bears evidence of a disease or an injury. If the person died old, there may be pictures or videos nearby showing what he or she once looked like when they were full of vim and vigor. But this body was atrophied. Old people deserve honor and respect, but their aged bodies are not honorable. They are sad and ugly, disfigured, unattractive. Have you spent much time with elderly people? Have you seen pictures of celebrities that once were gorgeous, but now are shockingly almost unrecognizable? As a kid I had a crush on Brooke Shields. She’s a guest character in a Hallmark show we watch called *When Calls the Heart* and she’s an old lady. My team – Purdue – lost last night. Growing up the head coach was Gene Keady. He was never really something to look at, but he was someone to respect. The winningest coach in Purdue history. The camera panned to him on the sidelines during a recent game. He’s in his 90s. I wanted the camera to move away quickly. It was pathetic, dishonorable. He couldn’t keep his tongue in his mouth.

But these bodies that are sown in dishonor will be raised in glory. Glory! That’s a good word. It means something fabulous, something spectacular, something you want

to gaze at in admiration. Our current state is characterized as dishonorable; our eternal state will be glorious.

Third, weakness vs. power. “It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.” These bodies are weak, and eventually succumb to death. We are impotent to stave it off. We are losing steam until one day we just peter out. But God promises to use his infinite power to resurrect us and give us bodies that are indefatigable. Our current state is characterized by weakness; our eternal state will be bursting with power and energy.

Fourth, natural vs. spiritual. “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” These bodies we currently have were made with the potential to die. They were made as part of a natural world that was susceptible to death and destruction. But when God remakes us and our world, it will be of a higher plane. It will be in an imperturbable state. Spiritual, meaning infused and imbued with the Holy Spirit, not spiritual in the sense of incorporeal.

Paul says, “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” He references Adam. Adam was not made initially immortal. There was a condition. He was had to obey and then he would be rewarded with eating from the Tree of Life and gaining immortality. But he didn’t. He failed and doomed us all to life in a fallen world marked by death. But Jesus came and succeeded where Adam failed. “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” Jesus lived the perfect life nobody else could, died an atoning death nobody else could, and was rewarded by rising again by the power of the Holy Spirit to a state of being nobody else could attain on their own, but he shares it with his own.

We must exist first in this natural, Adamic state. But if we are joined to Jesus by faith we will exist forever in his spiritual state. Paul explains, “But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, 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 also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.” Are you of heaven? Have you put your trust in Jesus, acknowledging your sin and hopelessness apart from him living and dying and rising again for you? Then you can be sure that perishableness, dishonor, weakness, and naturalness is not your eternal destiny. Just as Christ has been raised from the dead, you too will be someday. Death and decay don’t have the last word. Your hope isn’t just floating on a cloud in some ethereal existence. You will be reconstituted to reign with him over a renewed and restored cosmos that is incorruptible.

Conclusion

With what kind of body will you be raised? It is hard to exactly imagine. But **the resurrection body of a believer will be breathtakingly better than before**. There will be some kind of continuity but also discontinuity. How God does it exactly is beyond us. C.S. Lewis wrote – “It is... a foolish fancy... that each spirit should recover those particular units of matter which he ruled before. For one thing, they would not be enough to go round: we all live in second-hand suits and there are doubtless atoms in my chin which have served many another man, many a dog, many an eel, many a dinosaur. Nor does the unity of our bodies, even in this present life, consist in retaining the same particles. My form remains one, though the matter in it changes continually. I am, in

that respect, like a curve in a waterfall.”⁵ But it is not foolish to believe that God can bring you back together.

The resurrection body of Jesus is the pattern. “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.” Or as Paul puts it elsewhere – when he comes back Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Ph. 3:21). Even if it’s been cremated and scattered to the four winds. Think of what happened to Jesus. His body had only been dead three days. Certainly part of his skin was left on Pilate’s steps, part of his blood was absorbed in the ground on Golgotha, some of his hair was under the fingernails of the men who struck him. But after beating him to a pulp what was left of his mangled body was laid in stone tomb. And then on the third day that mass of lifeless, rotting organic matter was transformed into something **breathtakingly** beautiful – a new body.

This new body was recognizable as Jesus, but not always immediately. His voice could call Mary’s name and melt her heart. He invited people to touch him, to put their hands in his wounds, and many held on to him. He could eat broiled fish. Go for walks. He had all his old memories and retained his distinct personality in relationship with others. And yet, something was different. This wasn’t just a resuscitation back to his previous, mortal state of being. He was able to walk through closed doors. He could appear and disappear suddenly, mysteriously. He could ascend into heaven. He was no longer susceptible to death. When he appears to Paul he is emanating blinding light. It was a body, his body, but a glorified body.

And this is what we will have one day. Not immediately upon death while our corpse rots, but at the end of the age when Christ comes again and makes all creation undergo what his corpse underwent that first Easter morning. Some will rise to be punished for eternity in unimaginable horror. But for those who are in him by faith **the resurrection body will be breathtakingly better than before**. It will be like a flower from a seed. “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). “He will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Rev. 21:4). All of us who love and are longing for greater intimacy with Jesus will be gathered together with him. It’s a beautiful thought.

I have a good friend. He was my boss and mentor in my first ministry job over 20 years ago. And we became close friends. We go to a conference together every year. He’s now a pastor in Connecticut. Out there he loves going to old graveyards with tombstones from the 1600s and he’ll send me pictures of epitaphs he finds, some doggerel, some profound.

My friend has been diagnosed with MS (multiple sclerosis) – an incurable disabling disease that attacks the brain and central nervous system and results in progressive loss of muscle operation. We were together in North Carolina a couple weeks ago. As soon as I saw him, I noticed a difference from the last time in his body movements. We had a sweet time together. His faith in Christ is so encouraging. After the conference was over we had some time to kill, so I found the oldest cemetery in downtown Charlotte and we went there and walked around. He was limping. I couldn’t feel my foot because of my back issues. And we talked about the death that awaits us both, but the hope that Christ brings. It’s a death that awaits you too. Do you have the hope of the resurrection?

The Lord's Table

That first Palm Sunday the crowds cheered Jesus on, many thinking that he was just there to improve their life in this world. But he was there to die to provide atonement for sin, and be buried, and to rise again to give us an eternal hope. This is what we need. As C.S. Lewis puts it, "The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the 'first fruits', the 'pioneer of life'. He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation; a new chapter in cosmic history has opened."⁶

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus shared a meal with his followers...

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, March 29, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ See N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008).

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 799-800.

³ *Ibid.*, 801.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 321.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996 [1947]), 246-47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 236-37.