

It's Easter Sunday and you know if you come to church on Easter Sunday, you are going to hear about the resurrection. You can't have resurrection Sunday without the resurrection.

One Easter, a minister was doing his children's sermon—where he has all the little kids come up front for a short message. He asked the children, "Do you know what a resurrection is?"

One little boy raised his hand. So, the pastor calls on the boy, and he answers, "I know that if you have a resurrection that lasts longer than four hours, you are supposed to call a doctor."

And that's how long it took for the congregation to quit laughing.

It shouldn't be a surprise to anyone that we're going to talk about the resurrection. The Apostle Paul says without the resurrection there is no Christianity. Our entire faith hinges on the historic fact of the empty tomb.

When it comes to the idea of resurrection, Christianity was swimming upstream. The 1st Century Roman Empire was not fertile soil for the idea of people coming back from the dead.

Outside of Judaism, there was no pagan religion in Greco-Roman culture that believed resurrection was even possible. NT Wright, one of the world's foremost New Testament scholars has done tremendous research into this issue. He writes, "Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was known to be false. Many believed the dead were non-existent...everybody knew dead people didn't and couldn't come back to bodily life."

Among the Greeks, Homer bluntly stated that resurrection simply "doesn't happen." Playwright Aeschylus writes, "Once a man has died, and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection." Plato taught that the soul was immortal. It existed before the body, and would exist after the body, but once the body was gone, it was never coming back.

The Romans, like the Greeks, did not believe in any sort of bodily resurrection. Cicero taught that the body is a prison cell. It's necessary for the moment; but no one in their right mind, having lost their body, would want it or anything like it ever again. Bodily death was not only final; it was to be welcomed.

So, when the early church comes along and proclaims not only the physical resurrection of Jesus, but also the certain hope of resurrection for those who follow him, this was truly a new and revolutionary idea.

This would become a problem in the Corinthian church were there were some false teachers in the church that were telling these early Christians that there was no such thing as resurrection, because we all know that's impossible. It's ridiculous to think that one day your body is going to be raised from the dead.

Christianity 101 – A Physically Resurrected Jesus

So Paul writes the Corinthians a letter where he deals with this problem head on. He begins by affirming the historic reality of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15, beginning with verse 3,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received

The most important thing that I taught you is the most important thing anyone ever taught me. This is Christianity 101 from day 1. This is what Christianity has always taught. It's what we've always believed. What is the core of the Christian message? Paul says,

that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Of first importance—three things: death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. (Next Slide) Paul then lists all of the eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus beginning with Peter and ending with himself. There are individual appearances, and there are group appearances, including 500 at one time. This was not a mistake. Not a hallucination. There's no such thing as a mass hallucination. Mass hysteria yes, but not hallucinations. A hallucination is something that happens in here (mind) not out here.

These weren't people expecting a resurrection. They were on the run and in hiding. It includes people hostile to the faith. Remember when Jesus first appeared to Paul, he was actively persecuting the church. He didn't believe in Jesus. He hated Jesus. The last thing Paul wanted to see was Jesus. Paul makes his case that the resurrection of Jesus is an undeniable fact of history.

Then he points out the absurdity of claiming that there can be no resurrection. If we can never be raised, then how was Jesus raised. Verses 12 through 17,

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

Paul then promises that the resurrection of Jesus is simply a deposit guaranteeing our own resurrection. We have the hope of resurrection, because Jesus has been raised. A risen Jesus is all the evidence we need. Verses 20-23,

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

What I want to do for the rest of this message is talk about our resurrection. That's Paul's whole point here— because of what happened to Jesus, we have the sure and certain hope of our own physical resurrection.

How will we be raised? What will our resurrection bodies be like? These early Christians have questions. I think some of us have the same questions too. These are questions we ask when a loved one dies, or when we are questioning our own mortality.

This Body but Better

Paul's first explanation comes from the world of farming, the planting of seeds. Our body that dies is like the seed that is planted, but the body that is raised will be the plant in full blossom. Verses 35 through 39.

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.

There will be a continuity between who we are in this body and who we will be in our resurrected bodies. If you plant a kernel of corn, you will grow corn, not beans. Your current body will die, and the body that is raised will be unmistakably, undeniably you.

This is one of the points with Jesus' own resurrection appearances. In one of Jesus' first appearances, Jesus seems to appear out of nowhere and frightened the disciples. They think they've seen a ghost. They believe at first that Jesus is a non-physical, spiritual phantom. He's not physical. In Luke 24, beginning with verse 38 Jesus says,

"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

Jesus' resurrection body is flesh and bone, and it is also very recognizable as Jesus. The disciples touch him. People recognize him as Jesus. Jesus eats lunch with his disciples. He's not just an apparition with a vague resemblance. It is him.

Paul is very clear that it will be a bodily resurrection, but it will be a different kind of body. He calls it a spiritual body or a heavenly body, not just a body suited for earthly life, but one suited for eternal existence in the supernatural realm.

Doesn't this open the door to wonder? How will our resurrection body be different from our current body? Just as there is continuity between the seed and the plant, there will be continuity between what we are now and what we will be, but we will be better, will be more.

Ways Our Body Will be Transformed

Over the next few verses Paul lays out the differences between our current bodies and our resurrection bodies.

40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

In drawing comparisons to the splendor of the sun, the moon and the stars, and their different glory, Paul is talking about their luminescence. Their glory is their glow. Paul makes the point our resurrection bodies will have a different kind of splendor and greater glory.

Starting in verse 42, Paul begins to contrast the ways in which the glory of our spiritual bodies will be different from current bodies.

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 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.

Alright, let's list these out.

1. **Perishable to Imperishable.** Perishable means breaks down. It wears out. It dies. Joints just don't work like they used to. Arteries get clogged and stiffen. Muscles atrophy and lose their strength. Hair follicles quit growing hair. Eyes grow dim. Ears lose their range of hearing.

Science calls it entropy. Doctors call it aging. Paul calls it perishable.

The best illustration of this I've ever heard is Billy Crystal's rant in *City Slickers*. His middle-aged character shows up at his son's school for Career Day to talk to the students about what he does for a living when he dispenses this lovely bit of advice:

Value this time in your life kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices, and it goes by so quickly. When you're a teenager you think you can do anything, and you do. Your twenties are a blur. Your thirties, you raise your family, you make a little money and you think to yourself, "What happened to my twenties?" Your forties, you grow a little pot belly you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother. Your fifties you have a minor surgery. You'll call it a procedure, but it's a surgery. Your sixties you have a major surgery, the music is still loud but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway. Seventies, you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale, you start eating dinner at two, lunch around ten, breakfast the night before. And you spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering "how come the kids don't call?" By your eighties, you've had a

major stroke, and you end up babbling to some Jamaican nurse who your wife can't stand but who you call mama. Any questions?

That's perishable. **The resurrection body, however—imperishable**. The word used here means immortal. Incorruptible. It does not decay. It wouldn't make much sense to be raised back to life, but to be given just another perishable body. Can you imagine— Jesus welcomes us to eternity, "Everyone be careful. You've got brand new bodies, but you've got to make them last. No, that wouldn't make any sense at all. Now this is something beyond our imagination. We've never seen imperishable before. Everything we know breaks down and wears out. Does this mean the laws of physics will be different, or that we will simply be beyond them?

Paul uses a word to describe our new bodies. Most Bible versions say "transformed" or "changed." The Greek word used here is the word from which we get metamorphosis. Much like a caterpillar becomes a butterfly we will be raised as something new.

2. Dishonor to Glory. Next, Paul says that this body that dies is a body of dishonor. This word means low status. Disgrace. Every day marked with failure, falling short of what we could and should be. This has to do with the fact that our bodies are so consumed with sin and death, we can't even conceive of what it would be like to live without these things.

Resurrection body – glory. But we will be resurrected with bodies of glory. This word is associated with things like splendor, wonder, brilliance, remarkable in appearance. This is the word Jesus used when he said, "*even Solomon in all of his splendor was not arrayed like one of these.*" This seems to be focused on our appearance.

Several incidents in Scripture could indicate that our resurrection bodies will have some sort of brilliant luminescence to them. I think of Moses after being in the presence of God on Sinai in Exodus 34. His face glowed with such radiance that the people couldn't stand to look at him. How much more will it be for us who live eternally in the brilliant presence of God in the eternal city that needs no light for he will be our light?

At the Mount of Transfiguration, the veil of Jesus humanity is lifted and Peter, James and John see Jesus in all of his brilliant glory along with Moses and Elijah who are also arrayed in dazzling light.

In Acts 9, Paul has his own personal encounter with the risen Lord, and he is struck blind by His brilliance. If we will be like him in our resurrection bodies, and will share in his glory, does that mean we will share in his luminescent splendor as well?

The next comparison/contrast focuses more on our ability.

3. Weakness to Power. The body that dies is limited by weakness. It is feeble and sickly. Limited, feeble, sickly. We know all about weakness don't we? We are so limited. We have to stop for a breather before we climb another flight of stairs. Our shoulders hurt every time we

move our arm a certain way. Our leg aches after even a short walk. We can't even walk to the bathroom without putting on our glasses. Someone else has to open the jar for you. Those of you still young enough to think I'm exaggerating. Just you wait. There are many of us here that can only daydream about waterskiing or hiking up a mountain. We know what it is to be weak, to be feeble, to be exhausted, to feel helpless.

Resurrection Body – power. But Paul says that our resurrection bodies will be raised in power. He uses the word *dunamis*. This is the word that from which we get dynamite.

Again, we can only wonder what being raised in power will be like. One writer says of our resurrection bodies, *"It will be equal to all the requirements of the eternal life. It will never grow weary; never become exhausted; never have to fail because of lack of strength."* Imagine never having to wonder if you can make it. Imagine never having to calculate just how much it will hurt. Imagine never having again to think, "If only I could do that." That's being raised in power.

4. Natural to Spiritual. Paul offers one more comparison. He says our current bodies are natural. This means physical. This is the word the Bible uses to describe animal life. It simply a physical, biological function. It is blood flowing through veins, electrical signals firing across synapses, cells doing cellular functions. It's how an evolutionary biologist might look at life, and nothing more.

Resurrection Body – Spiritual. However, Paul says we will be raised a spiritual body. What the heck is a spiritual body? In our normal way of thinking this sounds like an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms like alone together, dark light, or growing smaller. In eternity we won't be mere spirits, but neither will we be spirits confined to a physical body. We will be a spiritual body.

How can it both be a body, spiritual? There is probably more here than we can comprehend, but it's the idea that this will be a body designed for the spiritual realm, and empowered with the supernatural. It will be a body, but a literally a body that is out of this world.

What does that mean? We can't know for sure, but we can speculate? Our best evidence comes from Jesus, because he is the one resurrection body we get to see in action in the Bible. In verses 45 through 49 Paul says that our current resurrection bodies are in the image of sinful Adam, but our resurrection bodies will be in the image of Jesus.

Jesus' Resurrection Body:

What form will such a spiritual body have? Of what sort of substance will it be made? What functions will it have? What new abilities might we possess? We can only wonder. Scripture does not tell us.

The one hint we have is Jesus. 1 John 3:2 says, *"what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* This

brings us all right back to Easter. We know that Jesus rose physically from the grave. People saw him, heard him, and touched him. He cooked and ate and engaged in physical activity. His resurrection body was a physical body, but we also know there was something very different about his resurrection body. People saw him, talked to him, and walked with him without knowing who he was until their eyes were opened. He walked through walls. He disappeared from one place and instantly reappeared somewhere else far away. Were these things a part of his resurrection body, or simply miracles he performed as the Son of God? I can't say for sure. Many Bible scholars believe that the post-resurrection body of Jesus wasn't even his fully glorified body. He maintained his pre-crucifixion body as evidence of his resurrection. Remember how the disciples saw and even touched his wounds. These scholars believe that Jesus didn't receive his glorified body until he ascended into heaven.

Whatever kind of body it will be, it is a body that will not die again. Whatever kind of resurrection body that Jesus has, we are promised in Scripture that ours will be the same. Paul says in Phil 3:20-21:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Imagine that. What Jesus' body is like now, so shall ours be. My new body will be me, but more. Your new body will be you, but more.