

SERMON NOTES
I Corinthians 15:23-58
“The Resurrection Body”

Intro:

- Harry Pritchett (several years ago):
- *Once upon a time I had a young friend named Philip. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome.*
- He was a pleasant child—happy, it seemed—but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children.
- *Philip went to Sunday school at the Methodist church. His teacher, also a friend of mine, taught the third-grade class with Philip and nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.*
- Philip, with his differences, was not readily accepted. Philip did not choose nor did he want to be different. *He just was. And that was just the way things were.*
- My friend had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter.
- *It was a beautiful spring day, and the assignment was for each child to go outside, find a symbol for new life, put it into the big egg he provided for each of them – the kind that pantyhose used to come in -- and bring it back to the classroom.*
- *They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises one by one.*
- The kids ran all around the church grounds, gathered their symbols, and returned to the classroom.
- They put all the eggs on a table, and then the teacher began to open them.

- He opened one, and there was a flower, and they ooh-ed and aah-ed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. "Beautiful," the girls all said, since it is hard for eight-year-old boys to say "beautiful."
- *My friend opened the next one. There was nothing there. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, "That's not fair—that's stupid!—somebody didn't do right."*
- Then my friend felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Philip was standing beside him. "It's mine," Philip said. "It's mine."
- And the children said, *"You don't ever do things right, Philip. There's nothing there!"*

- *"I did so do it," Philip said. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb is empty!"*
- There was silence, a very full silence.
- *And for you people who don't believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day last spring.*
- From that time on, Philip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in.
- *He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.*
- Philip died last summer. His family had known since the time he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny body. *And so, late last July, with an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off, Philip died.*
- At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched up to the altar, *with their Sunday school teacher, and laid on it an empty egg—an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.*
- *"It's empty. The tomb is empty."*
- What does that mean for you?
- *What does that mean for what happens to us after we die?*

I Corinthians 15:20-22 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

I. HOW ARE THE DEAD RAISED?

- *None of us can see the soul of a dead person – there is no way to verify if the soul lives on after the body dies*
- We express who we are with our bodies – *our body is as essential to our humanity as our souls are*
- But Greek philosophy – such as was common in Corinth – taught a dualism between the physical and the spiritual – *the spirit was good by nature but the body was bad or evil by nature*

- So life after death was limited to the immortality of the soul in Greek thought -- with the idea of the resurrection of the body regarded as strange and even undesirable
- *Why would anyone want to live forever in THESE bodies even if that were possible?*
- But the Bible teaches that our bodies were created as good by God and are essential to our full humanity
- *Our bodies matter to God*
- Yet no matter how hard we try to take care of our bodies in order to honor God – our bodies are mortal and are subject to sickness and disease and aging – and ultimately to death
- *One way or another, death comes to us all*
- As noted in a piece on the satirical site “*The Onion*” – “*World Death Rate Holding Steady at 100 percent*”
- Death is the great Interrupter – the great Terminator
- *Death interrupts our plans and goals and ambitions and schedules*
- And death terminates human relationships – separating husband from wife / parent from child / brother from sister / friend from friend
- How do you face the reality and certainty of death?
- *A few years ago, Pastor Steve Brown was on a plane full of people who had just been on a Caribbean cruise and had done a lot of wild partying and were still feeling it*
- Then he noticed a young woman sitting across the aisle who seemed to be having a health crisis
- *A call for help brought 3 doctors on the plane to give medical attention – but she died then and there*
- The mood on the plane changed immediately
- *The plane made an emergency landing in Dallas to offload the body of the dead woman*
- Then the plane took off to continue its flight – with many passengers noticeably shaken by the sudden death experience
- The pastor went up to one of the cabin attendants to offer his service to anyone on the plane who might want someone to talk to or pray with
- *The attendant replied: “Oh, I think everybody’s ok. We’ve given them all free drinks, and that will make them feel better.”*

- Free drinks. That's how many Americans face death.
- How about you?
- *How are you dealing with the reality that one day your body will die and return to dust – and your spirit will go to the God who made you?*
- What hope does the Gospel of Jesus Christ offer us in the face of death?
- First of all – let's make it clear that ONLY the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers any real hope in the face of death
- Other religions and philosophies talk about the immortality of the soul and nirvana and reincarnation – but only as speculation and wishful thinking
- You see, when you can't pull off the miracle of a bodily resurrection from the grave – the best you can do is speculate about the immortality of the soul
- All we know for sure is that when our bodies die – they stay dead
- *We can't see the soul of a dead person – we can't have a relationship with the soul of a dead person*
- We express our personalities with our bodies
- If Death has the last word – if the final word on the matter is that our bodies return to dust – then by separating body from soul – *Death also separates the living from the dead – and any hope of future reunions as disembodied souls after death – is merely wishful thinking*
- What is the truth that gives hope in the face of death?
- What gives us hope in the face of death is that 2000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth strode forward unafraid and entered the very stronghold of the undefeated giant – Death
- Until that time – every man who ever stood toe-to-toe with Death was easily vanquished by the great conqueror Death
- But coming forth from that darksome battle in the grave – Jesus of Nazareth emerged victorious – in a resurrected body – having conquered Death and the Grave – *and Jesus Christ now holds in his right hand the keys of Death and Hades – the keys to all the cemeteries of the world*

Revelation 1:17-18 When I (John) saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and

the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

- *Only Christianity offers any real hope for the whole person after death – body and soul – because only Christianity proclaims the bodily resurrection of the crucified Son of God as the cornerstone of its faith – and therefore, only Christianity can offer believers the hope of the resurrection of the body unto eternal life through the risen Lord*

Gary Habermas:

“In 1995 my wife, Debbie, had the flu. When it didn't go away as quickly as it should have, we went to the hospital for tests. The first sentence I remember that the doctor uttered to Debbie was, *"You've got some serious problems here."*

Debbie was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Four months later, at the age of 43 years, she passed away just after we celebrated our twenty-third wedding anniversary. I had lost my best friend.

During Debbie's suffering, I regularly took refuge in the truth of Jesus' resurrection. It had been my major research area for 25 years, and I appreciated a student who asked, *"What would you do now if Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead?"*

Jesus' bodily resurrection occupies the very center of the Christian faith. After he died on the cross to pay for our sins, Jesus was raised from the dead. He appeared to many people in his physical body that was now immortal.

How did all this help me while Debbie was dying? I imagined what God might say to me in response to my questions about Debbie. He would ask me, *"Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?"*

"Of course you did, Lord," I would respond. "But why is Debbie dying?"

"Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?" the question would come again.

"Yes, Lord, but..."

"Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?"

- If Jesus has been raised, then I can trust that Debbie will be raised someday too.

- *It was sufficient to know that because of Jesus' resurrection, and because Debbie and I belong to Jesus, then we will be together again—for all eternity!”*
- The hope of eternal life is based on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and His promise: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...”*

Philippians 3:20-21 But our 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.

- How are the dead raised?
- *By the invincible power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ who has already conquered Death and the Grave*

John 6:40 For 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.”

II. WITH WHAT KIND OF BODY?

- When a believer in Jesus Christ dies, we are separated from our body and go to be home with the Lord in heaven – but our salvation is NOT complete until we receive our resurrection bodies at the Second Coming of Christ
- *Paul goes on to explain something of the nature of the resurrection body:*

I Corinthians 15:35-38 But someone may ask, “How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?” What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn’t grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed.

- *Similarly, a natural, mortal body is sown into the ground at burial – and God will raise it a spiritual, immortal body that will bear the likeness of Christ’s own resurrection body*

I Corinthians 15:42-49 It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies. The Scriptures tell us, “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.

- God will change our lowly bodies to be like Christ’s glorious body
- *And the resurrection of the body means the restoring of the whole person – body, soul and spirit – to become like Christ*
- Already through new spiritual birth when we accept Christ and then through our spiritual growth as God renews us inwardly by the Holy Spirit – we are becoming more like Christ
- *One day this spiritual renewal will be completed and we will receive bodies to match – new bodies fit for new men and women*
- Just as our present bodies are fit for earthly living – our resurrection bodies will be fit for eternal life
- *As C.S. Lewis says – they give you unimpressive horses to learn to ride on, and only when you are ready for it are you allowed an animal that will gallop and jump*
- One day God will give us bodies that will gallop and jump and then some – bodies that are perfect / bodies that are immortal / bodies that are untiring / *bodies that will never get sick or suffer pain / bodies that are perfectly equipped to live and travel and worship and serve God forever in the new heaven and new earth*
- *For just as this fallen planet will be made new in the coming Kingdom– so will our bodies be made new*
- It is sown a natural body – it is raised a spiritual body

- *Think of planting seed corn – and from that grows a 7-8 foot corn stalk*
 - The spiritual body will be to the natural body something like what the corn stalk is to the seed corn
 - *Or think of an acorn and an oak tree*
 - So also the lowly body that is buried in the ground will be raised a glorious and powerful body in the likeness of Christ's resurrection body
 - *And by the way, our bodies will be resurrected and made new regardless of whether the believer is buried or cremated*
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- Our best clue to what our resurrection body will be like is to learn from the Gospel accounts of what Christ's resurrection body was like
 - *He was not a ghost or disembodied spirit*
 - His body was a real body – a physical body that could be touched – a body that still showed the nail scars from his crucifixion -- a body that could eat fish and bread
 - *And yet this was also a new kind of body – not merely a resuscitation of the old body*
 - It was a body that could appear in a room with the door closed and locked – *a body that could appear and disappear*
 - And it is a body that is still alive today 2000 years later
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- In some meaningful sense, our resurrected bodies will be like Christ's resurrected body
 - *Our destiny in eternity is NOT to become an angel – our destiny is to become like Christ with new hearts and new bodies*
 - *There will be both continuity and discontinuity with our present bodies*
 - We will recognize one another – and yet our appearance and bodies will also be different
 - *What age will we appear?*
 - Will children who die as children appear as children or will their bodies be fully grown?
 - *Will older adults who die in their old age appear old or young?*
 - We don't know
 - What we do know is that our spiritual bodies will be magnificent
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- Joni Eareckson Tada (paralyzed since diving accident as a teen)
 - *"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 splendid resurrected legs.

- I'm ready to have this lowly body transformed... I will bear the likeness of Jesus, the Man from heaven.
- *Like his, mine will be an actual, literal body perfectly suited for earth and heaven. Whether flinging a frisbee or flying past Ursa Major. Scaling walls or walking through them. Speaking with friends or conversing with angels.... At all times and all places we shall be perfectly suited for our environment, whether it be the new heavens or the new earth.*
- "In heaven I will be free to jump up, dance, kick and do aerobics. And although I'm sure Jesus will be delighted to watch me rise on tiptoe, there's something I plan to do that may please Him more...
- *The first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees. I will quietly kneel at the feet of Jesus.*
- To NOT move will be my chance to demonstrate heartfelt thanks to the Lord for the grace He dispensed year after year when my legs and hands were limp and motionless.
- *And after a while, I shall spring to my feet, stretch my arms, and shout out to anyone within earshot of the whole universe: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and might, honor and glory and blessing."*
- Hallelujah!

III. WHEN ARE THE DEAD RAISED?

- So.... When do we get these glorious new bodies? When will our bodies be raised from the grave?

I Corinthians 15:22-23 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

- *When? At Christ's Second Coming*

I Corinthians 15:24-26 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

- At the Coming of Christ, Death will be swallowed up in victory – and Death shall be no more
- *The age of death will come to an end when Christ returns*

I Corinthians 15:53-55 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

- For the Christian: *Death is a comma, not a period. A transition, not the end of the line.*
- And one day Death will be no more
- *Already Death has been defeated by the resurrection of Christ – and yet our mortal bodies still die – but one day Jesus Christ is coming back to earth to complete the establishment of His Kingdom -- one day our bodies will be resurrected -- one day Death will be destroyed – and there will be no more Death – and we shall all be changed into the likeness of Christ and his resurrection body*
- *What a glorious day that will be!*

I Corinthians 15:51-52 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

- Hmmm
- *That sounds kind of like the rapture in I Thessalonians 4, doesn't it?*
- But verse 23 says that the resurrection of the body occurs at Christ's coming and then comes the end
- The mention of the trumpet does relate to at least two other Scriptures: *I Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 24*

I Thessalonians 4:14-17 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And

the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

- Note first: when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died (vs. 14)
- *Then note in verse 15: “we who are alive until the coming of the Lord”*
- So there will be believers at the coming of Christ – and Paul was hoping to be among them
- *The word for “coming” is Parousia – same word as in I Cor. 15:23 – the normal word for the Second Coming of Christ*

- And then in verse 16 the description of the Parousia: *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.*
- And the dead in Christ will rise first.
- So, on the one hand, the dead in Christ are coming with Christ (vs. 14), and on the other hand, the dead in Christ are rising from the dead at his coming (verse 16)
- *Believers who have died and gone to heaven – but have not yet received their resurrected bodies – are now going to be receiving their spiritual bodies at Christ’s coming*

- This is the same event as I Corinthians 15:

I Corinthians 15:51-52 We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

- The trumpet will sound – the Lord will descend from heaven – bringing with him believers who have died and gone to heaven – who will then be changed and receive their resurrected bodies – *and those who are still alive at the coming of the Lord will also be changed and be made new with their spiritual bodies*

I Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

- This is what we know as the Rapture – same event as in I Corinthians 15

- *Those who are alive at the Coming of the Lord are said to be “caught up” together with the resurrected dead to a meeting with the Lord in the air*
- Our English word “Rapture” comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word meaning “caught up” or “snatched away”
- *Now, the key question in I Thessalonians 4 is “caught up” to where?*
- Many of you will say: *“Why, caught up to heaven, of course”*
- But what does the text say?

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

- *“Caught up together to meet the Lord in the air”*
- This Greek word for “meet” was used as a technical term for the formal reception of a visiting dignitary in which a delegation of citizens or city officials would go out to meet a dignitary on his way to the city and escort him back into the city with appropriate pomp and circumstance
- In the context of I Thess. 4, the meaning would be that the resurrected dead and the raptured living together will meet the descending Lord in the air and accompany him to earth – *providing an escort for the King as He descends in glory and honor the rest of the way to earth*
- This was how the Greek-speaking early church fathers understood this:
- For example, John Chrysostom – Bishop of Constantinople (4th cent.): *“If He (Christ) is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor. For when a king drives into a city, those who are in honor go out to meet him... “We shall be caught up in the clouds.” Do you see how great is the honor? And as He descends, we go forth to meet him, and, what is more blessed than all, so shall we be with him.”*
- The early church interpreted I Thessalonians 4 to refer to the Second Coming of Christ – *an event which included the Rapture*
- When does all of this occur in relation to the Great Tribulation?
- *There is no mention of the tribulation in I Thessalonians 4 or I Corinthians 15*
- But check out Jesus’ description of his coming in Matthew 24 –
- *First Jesus describes the tribulation in Matthew 24 and then this:*

Matthew 24:29-31 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

- This is a clear reference to the Second Coming of Christ after the tribulation
- *And included in His coming is the “gathering of the elect”*
- This seems to indicate that when Jesus returns, he will not only gather to himself all believers alive on the earth but will also bring with him all the redeemed who are in heaven
- *Consistent with I Thessalonians 4*
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- *Equally devout, Bible-believing Christians disagree as to whether the Rapture takes place before, during or at the end of the 7-year Great Tribulation at the end of the age*
- Pre-tribulational Rapture is the view that before Christ returns in glory, he will return quietly to catch up the church and take believers to heaven. This happens before the tribulation, and so the view is called the PRE-tribulational rapture. *This implies that the Church will not be on earth during the tribulation.*
- Post-tribulational Rapture is the view that the rapture and the glorious second coming are part of one simultaneous event. The saints rise to meet the Lord in the air and accompany him back as the rightful king of the earth. *This implies that the church will go through the tribulation on the earth.*
- Neither I Corinthians 15 nor I Thessalonians 4 mention the tribulation so there is no definitive timeline in either passage as there is in Matthew 24
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- It is impossible for anyone to say with certainty whether the event in I Thessalonians 4 is referring to the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church or to the Post-Tribulation Second Coming of Christ which includes a Rapture

- *The text simply does not tell us whether believers are being raptured up to heaven or whether believers are meeting the Lord in the air in order to escort Him to earth at His Second Coming*
- This is precisely why devout Christians equally committed to the authority of the Scriptures disagree in their interpretations – *we simply are not given enough information to be dogmatic – and therefore we need to hold our opinions humbly with tolerance for differing viewpoints*
- This is why our church has no official position on this matter
- *We absolutely believe in the Second Coming of Christ, but we allow for differences of opinion concerning the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation*
- Paul's main point is that when Christ returns – all believers from all time will receive resurrection bodies – never again subject to weakness, illness, aging or death
- *We shall all be changed – those who have died and those still alive at his coming*
- And death will be swallowed up in victory

I Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE?

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

- In light of the victory over death won by Jesus Christ and his resurrection – *let's live for the line of eternity and not merely for the dot of this brief mortal life on earth*
- Let's live for the advance of the Kingdom of God and not for selfish gain or selfish ambition
- *Let's live for the cause of Christ and His Gospel and not for the pleasures and treasures of this world which is passing away*

Tim Keller tells the following story:

“When my wife was growing up, every summer her family spent two weeks at a small compound of cottages on the shores of Lake Erie. Now the cottages are all gone—in fact that part of the beach is gone. Whenever she visits that childhood vacation spot, she weeps because she knows the beach is irretrievable.

That sense of irretrievability is like a death. And the older we all get, the more we realize that certain losses are irretrievable; they're gone, and that sucks the joy out of our lives.

But here's where Christ's resurrection offers something unique.

Even religions that promise a kind of spiritual future or spiritual bliss, only offer consolation for what you've lost.

But the resurrection of Christ even promises the restoration of what you've lost. *You don't just get your body back; you get the body you always wanted but you never had. You don't just get your life back; you get the life that you always wanted that you never had.*

Jesus Christ is walking proof that you will miss nothing. Nothing!

It's all coming in the future. It's going to be unimaginably wonderful.

There is no religion, no philosophy, and no human being who can offer this kind of future.

And as Christians our hope for this future is based on the historical fact of the resurrection.

So if you are not a Christian, let me ask: *Why wouldn't you want that?*

Even if you don't like different aspects of the Christian faith, why wouldn't you want this hope for restoration?”

- How about you?
- *What have you lost? Whom have you lost?*
- The resurrection of Christ promises the restoration of all that you've lost
- *Restoration of lost health / restoration of lost youthfulness / restoration of lost relationships with loved ones who have died in Christ /*
- At Christ's coming, He will make all things new
- *Death shall be no more – neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away, and the One seated on the throne is making all things new*
- Everything restored in the coming Kingdom
- And we know this hope is true and certain because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead

Prayer