
Our Resurrected Bodies

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 3rd May

2 Peter 3:8-13, 1 Corinthians 15:35-44,53-58



“Lord Jesus, we pray we might be encouraged and equipped as we look into your word this day, amen.”

Someone once said, “I am not at all worried about the thought of dying. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

It’s somewhat telling how we talk about death in our Westernised culture. We don’t die. We pass away. We pass on. We depart.

Contrast the way many cultures look death square in the face. Cultures that allow room for raw visceral grief. Māori, Middle Eastern, Irish. Time is given. Grief is somewhat more permissioned.

Why is it some cultures seem to be more open and honest around death, and others, tend to reframe and repackage it? The answer is Spiritual. Cultures that look beyond this life are better at dealing with death. If we think death is a full stop rather than a comma, we are going to try to soften the blow.

For the Christian though, notwithstanding the sadness and grief around death, there is something hopeful and glorious as we look forward to what the Apostle Paul described in our passage today.

Go back a hundred years or so years, and the hope of glory, and what comes next, was regularly proclaimed from the pulpit. Not so much today. Culturally, a shift had been happening for a long time.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher commenting on the cultural shift away from Christianity wrote in 1882, " God is dead. God remains dead. And we killed him.

80 or so years later in the swinging sixties. 1966 Time magazine had on it's cover the question of the day. "Is God dead". 5 years later in 1971 John Lennon wrote these well known words.

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace.... Etc etc

Get rid of religion and all will be well. We will live as one happy and harmonious family. John Lennon perhaps was not taking into consideration the lessons of history and ones such as Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, among others, all who advocated religionless society. The result?

The 20th century is by comparison the most violent in recorded history. Some 230 million people killed via conflict, starvation, or extermination, as these religionless and atheistic societies were being constructed.

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Ironically though, as John Lennon was calling a generation to imagine a better world, where religion was not a part of it, the Beatles were introducing a generation to the spirituality of the East as they gave the Maharishi Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation, a global platform.

In the onslaught that is a part of our cultural shift, the church, I think, has lost confidence. And that I would argue that why we don't get many sermons on "the hope of glory" these days. Listen carefully. Lose sight of the glory to come and we are less likely to see the glory that surrounds us.

When I worked as a prison chaplain, occasionally I would see the most remarkable thing. A face covered by tattoos and the marks of violence. And from that same face the effervescence of Jesus shining out. Eyes that are bright and hopeful. Eyes that emanate something transcendent.

Sometimes in life you get a glimpse of eternity and transcendence. Such things can not be socially engineered. The 20th century's despots proved that. Their hoped for utopia proved to be something of a hell, certainly not a heaven. 230 million lost souls can attest to the failure of their social engineering experiment.

In our passage Paul does his best to help people understand what comes next. In the first half of ch 15, given the evidence, and speaking of Jesus, Paul asks the question, "how can we say there is no resurrection?" In the second half of ch 15 Paul tries to answer the question "what of our resurrection bodies?"

I don't mind the thought of dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens. That sums up many folks feelings.

And yet Paul says in ch 2 of 1Cor "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"

Before we pick up the text in vs 35 a small amount of background to the Cor church. They were hyper spiritual.

Because they were exercising many of the spiritual gifts, like tongues and prophecy and healings, they thought they had arrived spiritually, and in a sense they believed there was nothing more to come. Paul rather bluntly tries to help them understand they hadn't arrived. Further, they were unprepared or equipped for what comes next.

Paul does it by posing a question that he can then address. Vs 35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Paul answers his question bluntly as he challenges their spiritual arrogance.

"Fool". I paraphrase. You haven't arrived. You aren't prepared. Don't you realise the mortal can't put on immortality..... Whatever teaching was creeping into the church to make them believe they had arrived, Paul wanted them to be sure they haven't. There was more and better to come.

They had to stand firm to gospel teaching which says the best is yet to come, and the best comes as we are transformed into the image and likeness of Christ, and dwell with him on into eternity.

Vs 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. The point of the passage is to help us understand that our corrupt bodies will simply not be viable in the new creation that God will one day bring to pass.

Paul uses various illustrations like seeds, plants, animals, even celestial bodies to help us understand the principles that God has worked into creation. And how our natural world can teach us something of the spiritual world. Paul is using the known to help us understand the unknown.

Look at a seed Paul says. See the transformation that takes place after burial. A shrivelled little thing becomes something so unlike the original as to be glorious in comparison.

From seeds Paul moves to animals, birds, fish, to help us understand that different bodies are suited to different places.

Let's consider a deep sea fish. Some live 10,000 meters below the surface. There pressure is 1000 times that of sea level. Were we to dive a small amount of that distance we would be crushed in the same way a you might crush an aluminium can.

But God designed the bodies of the deep sea fish to live in their environment. Their bodies are fully solid or fluid without little air cavities so they don't get crushed by the immense pressure. For us to travel to such depths we inhabit the body of a special submarine able to sustain huge external pressure.

Paul talks about birds. They have a certain body to fit their environment. Their bones are the opposite to the deep sea creatures. They need to be light and strong. Their bones full of air. We can make pens out of their feather quills because they're hollow.

I can fly as long as I'm in a plane. I could even go into space. But I would need a space suit or my blood would boil in the sun, freeze in the shade, and be bombarded by radiation and space debris. If I took off my space suit apparently I would survive 15 seconds and my body would do the same thing as it would if you put me in a giant microwave.

In vs 42 Paul, having given various illustration to help us see our earthy body is not suited for our heavenly existence says this: "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."

Note this new body is both spiritual and material. We will not float around in eternity like disembodied ghosts. There will be a continuity with our present earthly body and our new spiritual body. Remember how the resurrected Jesus was material in the sense he could be touched and could eat.

He maintained some of the marks of the crucifixion and yet he was able to appear behind closed doors and disappear from sight. Continuity and discontinuity. So too with us. Continuity with our present existence, but with a transformation that can only be describes by comparisons

Vs 42 -44

- Perishable as compared imperishable.
- Dishonorable as compared to glorious
- Weakness as compared to power.
- Physical body as compared to Spiritual body.

Ultimately it is the difference between us now, and us as we will be when we are like Jesus. Paul illustrates that by talking about the first and second Adam and our identification with the one then the other. Vs 45 – 49

I was once asked does it make any difference if we are cremated or buried? My answer was there is not a lot of difference between dust and ash. As far as resurrection bodies there is no hint that God has to use the reconstituted parts of the old body. If he could make the existing universe out of nothing, he can make our new bodies in keeping with our new environment out of nothing or whatever God chooses.

Vs 35 How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? “Fool” says Paul. You think you know everything. Have you taken into account what God can do?

- If God can equip a fish to sustain pressure 1000 times that of what we experience.
- If he can equip a bird to soar the heights.
- If he can so equip us who are created in his image, to invent a space suit to go into space, and a diving suit to take us to depths of the ocean, I’m sure God can make sure we have a spiritual body that will be in keeping with the new heaven and earth that aged will one day bring to pass.

Let’s end practically because that is how Paul’s wonderful chapter ends.

Preaching about future glory, and what comes is very helpful for this life. It’s a great pity that the church by enlarge seems to avoid the topic.

Note how Paul finishes the chapter. It's the point of the whole discussion and it's immensely practical.

Vs 58 therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Or to say it simply. Live this life in light of the next one. Bring the hope of what will one day be into our hurting and needy world.

Let us let our future hope spur us to present action.

That is the practical outworking of Paul's glimpse into the future of those who are in Christ.

Let's pray... Lord Jesus, may we indeed, by that same power that raised you from death, that same power that lives within us now, may it indeed compel and enable us to live this life in light of what comes next, to the glory of God we pray.