

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

At the end of the year, we often take stock of our lives and make some resolutions for the coming year. Are you going to make any “course corrections” next year? Are you on the right track? If we are honest, you may sometimes wonder if you are. Is my life moving forward or am I just spinning my wheels? What’s the point of trying if I am not getting anywhere?

In the language of 1 Corinthians, you might ask “Is my life in vain? Does it count for anything?” God has the answer. The apostle Paul has recorded it for us in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and it all depends on Jesus’ resurrection – and ours. We began looking at this magnificent chapter on the resurrection last week, and noted the prevalence of phrases like “in vain”, “useless”, “futile”, “no purpose”, “ineffective” and “worthless” all in reference to life and ministry if in fact Christ has not been raised. Life is in vain if Christ did not rise from the dead, because without the certainty of Jesus’ finished work and the guarantee of our resurrection, nothing else matters. As we looked at 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 last week, we saw that in fact Jesus rose from the dead, attested by many witnesses, and His resurrection proved that He fully paid for the sins of His people. His sacrifice for our sins was accepted. He became the prototype for resurrection from the dead – the first fruits that demonstrate what the rest of the crop will be like. All in Adam die; all in Christ will be made alive, possessing eternal life now and later being literally, physically, bodily raised from the dead just as Jesus was. That message is the fact of the resurrection.

Last week, we also saw a warning from the apostle Paul that neglecting this truth or tolerating false teaching about it leads to a shameful neglect of our stewardship of the gospel.

This week, we come to the rest of the chapter, verses 35-58, the form of the resurrection. How does it work? What will we be like in resurrected bodies? Are we even capable of understanding it? We’ll see some helpful illustrations for the resurrection body even if we don’t have all of the details.

This week, we also return to the questions raised by the apostle Paul about the vanity of life, and specifically the ultimate “what’s the point” question – what about death? If we all face death, doesn’t that mean that life is pointless? Jesus’

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

resurrection – and ours – changes everything! Even death will be defeated. It will not just be ended, but reversed.

Our future can impact our present. Living in light of our certain and glorious resurrection will strengthen us to stand firm in the truth and work hard for the Lord, knowing that nothing we experience in *this* life is in vain because of our hope in the *next* one.

This morning as we finish thinking through 1 Corinthians 15 together we'll look at three aspects of the hope that we share:

1. Resurrection: New Bodies for Deceased Believers (15:35-49)
2. Requirement: Transformed Bodies for Living Believers (15:50-57)
3. Response: Active Bodies for Steadfast Believers (15:58)

Please stand while I read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.

15:³⁵But someone will ask,

“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

³⁶You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰There 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. ⁴¹There 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.

⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Thus it is written,

“The first man Adam became a living being”;

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

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.

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² 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. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

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

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.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

1A Resurrection: New Bodies for Deceased Believers – 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Summary: This section is concerned with resurrection bodies. In verses 35-41, the apostle Paul illustrates the truth that God has created many *distinct* kinds of physical forms for His creation, and each one is suited to the purpose for which He created it. In verses 42-44, he then highlights the *differences* between the bodies that we have now and the ones that we will have after the resurrection. In verses 45-49, he outlines the *destinies* of those in Adam and in Christ.

1B Distinctions – Variety of Bodies, each for a purpose – 35-41

1C Two Questions Asked – 35

³⁵But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

1D Question 1 – How?

- About the mechanism of resurrection
- May reflect concerns about re-animating corpses, similar to recent “zombie” movies and TV shows

2D Question 2 – What Kind of Body?

- Spiritual = body-less

3D Mocking in their case, but could be sincere in ours

2C Two Questions Answered – 36, 37

³⁶You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

1D Response

- Fool (not thinking) – you should have known

2D Question 1 – How?

- In one sense, the “how” question is only answered by the illustration of planting seeds
- Man scatters seed on the ground; “He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.”

Mark 4:27

- We don’t know *how* it happens, but *that* it happens

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

3D Seed Illustration – 36b, 37

- Death precedes life; life comes out of death
- You already know that from farming – it is not so unusual after all
- Jesus used a similar illustration to make a different point: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” John 12:24
- Life that results is bigger and better – otherwise why waste the seed? “the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop” 1 Corinthians 9:10
- Are seeds a type of the resurrection? Could God have “planted” seeds in creation as an illustration of something bigger?

4D Human Experience with Continuity and Difference

- Easily distracted; train book – in one sense not the seven year old boy, but in another I am the same.
- Younger relatives – “you’ve grown so much!” – There is recognition and astonishment at how much change can be present with obvious continuity.

5D Our Questions

- Will God have to re-gather all of the molecules?
- Ultimately, it is the command of God, like the original creation
- Transition – you sow it, God gives it a body

6D Question 2 – What Kind of Body?

- Answer: the right kind for God’s purpose in our eternal existence

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

3C Three Illustrations of Bodies Suited to a Purpose – 38-41

³⁸But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

⁴⁰There 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.

⁴¹There 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.

1D Agricultural – seeds planted, life from death

2D Animal

3D Astronomical

4D Joe Rosen conversation; discouraged from discussing; unfolding revelation; “receive a body fit for the purpose”

2B Differences between earthly and heavenly bodies – 42-44

⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1C So is it with the resurrection of the dead – verse 42a

1D Transition point

2D Wait – what is it? What is the same? The fact that God will give it a body suited to its purpose; the earthly body is suited for natural life, the heavenly body is suited for supernatural life

2C Four Contrasts – 42b-44

1D Sown Perishable, Raised Imperishable

2D Sown in Dishonor, Raised in Glory

3D Sown in Weakness, Raised in Power

“... 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.” Philippians 3:20, 21

4D Sown a Natural Body, Raised a Spiritual Body

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

3B Destinies of those in Adam and Christ – 45-49

⁴⁵Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As 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. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

1C Note the connection with verse 22, able to read seamlessly

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive ...

Two sources of life – earthly / natural and spiritual / supernatural

2C Alternate translation: “let us bear the image” – verb tense; already and not yet; we should look like what we will be

3C Knowing our future changes us:

“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” 1 John 3:1-3

4C Will we all look like Jesus? Not identical to Adam but bear his image, so with Christ

Summary: There will be a resurrection of deceased believers, raised in glory in a form that is suited to eternal life with the Lord and conformed to His image.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

2A Requirement: Transformed Bodies for Living Believers – 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

Summary: In this section, the apostle Paul explains that the glorious body that we will have is not just a wonderful creation of God, it is absolutely necessary! We can't live forever without it, even if we haven't died yet.

We'll see the reason for the transformation in verses 50-53, and the result of the transformation in verses 54-57, which is the ultimate defeat and undoing of death.

1B Reason for the Transformation – 50-53

⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in 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. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

1C Cannot inherit ... must put on; we can't live forever if we are susceptible to death; not "come as you are" party

2C Need for resurrection of deceased believers is obvious; transformation of living believers less so

3C Mystery – new revelation; previously undisclosed

4C Software: edge case

5C "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him." 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10

6C Similar to 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 – order, trumpet
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

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

7C We *must* be transformed – we have to be able to be caught up in the clouds!

2B Result of the Transformation – Victory over Death – 54-57

⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

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

1C When ... final fulfillment of prophesy of the end of death; already true of Jesus, not yet of us

2C Death swallowed up – borrowed from Isaiah 25:8, 9:

⁸ He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

⁹ It will be said on that day,
“Behold, this is our God;
we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

3C Taunting of death is another personification of it; also in 15:26 as an enemy; borrowed from Hosea 13:14:

O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

4C Sting of death is sin

1D “You can’t take it with you”

2D “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” Hebrews 9:27

5C Power of sin is the law

1D “sin is not counted where there is no law” Romans 5:13

2D Law exposes our rebellious nature toward God

3D “The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” Romans 7:10, 11

6C God Gives Us the Victory through Christ

1D *God*: “God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.” Romans 8:3

2D *Gives*: “... justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” Romans 3:24

3D *Us*: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

4D *Victory*: “... he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Hebrews 9:26

5D *Christ*: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” Galatians 3:13

6D Links back to the things of first importance in verse 3: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures”

7D Christ overcame death to prove that he already overcame sin

8D Are you in Christ? Is the victory yours?

Jesus invites you to turn away from the myth of your own righteousness and instead cast yourself on His mercy. Jesus Christ can be your King and Savior; God can give you the only available victory over sin through Jesus today!

Summary: Even living believers must be transformed; clothed with immortality in order to be with God forever. The result of the resurrection and transformation will be the ultimate victory over death.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

3A Response: Active Bodies of Steadfast Believers – 1 Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸Therefore, 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.

Summary: In this section, we see our appropriate response to the truths about the literal, bodily resurrection that those in Christ will experience. In a bit of a paradox it is: “Don’t Move! Keep Moving!” or “Stay Still! Stay in Motion!” There are certain truths that we are not move away from, and yet we must not be the “frozen chosen” – we are to be busy for the Lord. Jesus said “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” John 9:4

1B Don’t Move!

1C “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” Colossians 1:23

2C Don’t tolerate bad teaching; congregational responsibility to guard the pulpit

2B Keep Moving!

1C Always – “in season and out of season” 2 Timothy 4:2

2C Abound

1D In love Philippians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 3:12

2D “More and more” 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10 Increasingly, as God gives us capacity

3D In Corinthian context, dualism – don’t give yourselves over to fleshly, sinful desires, but give yourselves to the Lord’s work; similar to verse 34 “Stop sinning”

3C Work of the Lord – there is work to be done; fulfilling the Lord’s commission will involve effort

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

3B Labor Not in Vain

- 1C What qualifies as “work of the Lord” and “labor” that is not in vain?
- 2C For those not “in Christ” everything is in vain; being in Christ means that the only thing that is “in vain” is sin
- 3C Corinthian preoccupation with the “spiritual”; they felt they were more spiritual than Paul!
- 4C Beware of seeing life as a false dichotomy (false dilemma) – spiritual vs. secular; things that “count” and things that don’t. We are commanded to obey all of God’s revealed will; both what we *are* and what we *do* in all of the roles that God has sovereignly assigned to us.
- 5C My roles
 - 1D Elder: keep watch over souls, exercise oversight, teach the word faithfully, be a good example
 - 2D Christian: work hard at work, as for the Lord
 - 3D Husband: love my wife (easy)
 - 4D Father: be a good father, and auger clogged toilets at home with a good attitude. It is not in vain!
- 6C Beware of longing to be rid of normal responsibilities of life in favor of tasks that seem more “spiritual”. This life leads to the next; nothing is wasted, nothing is in vain. The resurrection redeems laundry and dirty dishes and diapers and serving cranky customers. It is in the context of our ordinary lives that we serve our Master and carry out His commission, working together to call people to repent and submit to Him as Lord, always being ready to give an account for the hope that is in us.

Summary: We are commanded to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labor is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

The truths related to our resurrection should encourage us to guard the essentials of the gospel and motivate us to invest ourselves fully in doing God's will in every realm. As we have reviewed 1 Corinthians 15, I hope that your convictions have deepened and that it will change the way you think about every aspect of life and labor, longing to be in character *now* what we will surely be in *eternity*.

Bumper stickers sometimes summarize people's attitudes in a pithy way. You might see one that says (with slight editing) "Life's a bother ... and then you die." Don't you dare say that if you are a Christian! The resurrection of our Savior, and our inevitable resurrection or transformation changes everything. Even death will be overcome and reversed.

Is your faith in vain? No! Jesus rose from the dead, confirming that our sin debt has been paid in full. Is our preaching in vain? No! Jesus, the living one commissioned us to preach the gospel to all creation. We are telling the truth when we speak of His resurrection. Our responsibility is to be faithful. We are his ambassadors. Is our lifestyle of sacrifice and labor for the Lord in vain? No! He will raise us up from the grave or transform us to be like Him. We will enjoy the fruits of His labor for us and through us forever.

Not even death is in vain! He will conform our humble body to be like His and reverse the curse forever. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things [will] have passed away." Revelation 21:4 The believers who have died will rise better than they were sown, like an oak tree compared to an acorn!

We are called to fulfill our ministry in the midst of all sorts of ordinary tasks, serving our King and carrying out His commission even while "in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Corinthians 5:2) Living in light of our certain and glorious resurrection will strengthen us to stand firm in the truth and work hard for the Lord, knowing that nothing we experience in *this* life is in vain because of our hope in the *next* one.

Will you allow your future to change how you live today?