

SESSION SEVEN: THE RESURRECTED BODY

Opening Prayer

God of Life, we know that you have the power to overcome even death itself. Help us to live each day in the confidence of our own resurrection. We pray in the name of your resurrected son, our own Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jumpstart

Tales from the Afterlife

Read and discuss the following accounts from people who have had “near death” experiences.

- Dianne (electrocuted): “How elated I felt! Now, out of my body, I had no worries, no cares. Never had I felt like this when I was ‘alive.’ My entire spirit body was transparent, and I was inside a glowing white light that extended about three feet around me. At that moment, an awareness overtook me – I am not my physical body! This realization made me feel so free, so wonderful! My spirit was glowing with a white light that illuminated the entire room. . . . There were two things I knew for certain: first, that I was Dianne, and second, that my physical body was dead. I also knew that the duplicate of Dianne on the bed was another me, but I did not know what she represented. Now, I was beginning to feel as if I were in three places at once!”

- Ranelle (burned in a plane crash): “My hand was clear, like transparent gel, but there was light coursing through it like clear blood. But, the light didn’t run in irregular patterns as it would in veins; rather, the light shot through my hands like rays or beams.

My whole hand sparkled with light. I looked down and saw that my feet also sparkled with light. And I noticed again that they weren’t burned. My feet and hands were perfect and whole. They radiated this glistening, beaming light.”

- Pam (“died” during surgery): “I noticed that as I began to discern different figures in the light — and they were all covered with light, they were light, and had light permeating all around them — they began to form shapes I could recognize and understand. I could see that one of them was my grandmother. I don’t know if it was reality or projection, but I would know my grandmother, the sound of her, anytime, anywhere. Everyone I saw, looking back on it, fit perfectly into my understanding of what that person looked like at their best during their lives. I recognized a lot of people.”

? What do these stories have in common? How do they relate to your own beliefs about the afterlife?

? What do you think happens to the body after you die?

Paul and the Afterlife

There is no evidence that people at the time of the early Christian church were anxious about what would happen to them after death. For many, there were enough worries involved in just staying alive. Paul, however, was a Pharisee, and

Pharisees believed all people would be resurrected to face judgement during God's final destruction of evil. Dale Martin suggests that there was conflict over this issue in the Corinthian church. He writes that some of the upper class folks who held Platonic ideas about separation of body and spirit may have objected not to the idea of resurrection itself, but to the fact that Paul preached about bodily resurrection. They despised the body and found the idea of it being resuscitated repulsive. * Paul goes to great lengths in this chapter to explain that he is not talking about the resuscitation of our earthly bodies but a transformation into a new, spiritual body.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Paul writes that Christians must believe in the general resurrection of the dead in order to belief in Christ's resurrection (v. 13). And if they do not believe in the resurrection of Christ, they cannot believe in the gospel itself. Paul sees Christ's resurrection as the beginning of the general resurrection – the “first fruits” (v. 20): Because Christ has been resurrected, we soon will be too. Christ's resurrection is followed by the resurrection of all Christians, then God will destroy all enemies and finally death itself (vv. 23-26). This vision of the end times reflects Paul's apocalyptic Jewish background.

Paul writes that if people do not believe this is what will happen, then their faith is in vain, and there is no reason to put themselves in danger of persecution (v. 30). Paul mentions the practice of being baptized on behalf of someone who has died (v. 29), a custom that is not referred to anywhere else in

early Christian writings. Paul doesn't condemn the practice itself, but merely says it is meaningless if there is no resurrection.

It's Greek to Me

sarx (sarx) = flesh

psyche (SY-kee)= soul, breath

pneuma (NOO-ma) = spirit

For Paul, the human body (*soma*) has three different aspects: *sarx*, *psyche*, and *pneuma* – flesh, soul, and spirit. The resurrected body sheds the first two elements and becomes only *pneuma* – spirit. The resurrected body is thus described as a “spiritual” body.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Having affirmed the importance of the resurrection, Paul turns to character of the resurrected body. He argues against two different misperceptions: first that the body is discarded, and second that the body remains the same and is merely resuscitated. It was the latter issue that made it hard for many to accept the idea of resurrection. They found it ghoulish to think our dead bodies would come back to life.

Paul ingeniously uses the metaphor of a seed to describe both the continuity and the transformation of the body through resurrection. This also helps to emphasize that the body really does die – the seed must “die” in the ground before the plant can live and grow (v. 36). In the resurrection, the body is stripped of the stuff of earth: flesh (*sarx*) and soul (*psyche*), so that the resurrected body consists only of spirit (*pneuma*). The image of the seed also helps illustrate that there are different kinds of bodies, both earthly and heavenly, each with its own kind of seed (v. 38-41).

* Dale Martin: *The Corinthian Body*, pp. 104-108.

Exercise

Now and Then

Look together at verses 42-49, where Paul compares our current body with the resurrected body, using Adam and Christ (the “last Adam”) as models. On a board or tablet, make two columns labeled “Now” and “Then.” Under “Now,” list all the words or descriptions of the current body, the one that is sown and that is connected with Adam. Under “Then,” list all the descriptions of the resurrected body, the one that is raised and is associated with Christ. If you are using different translations, notice what words each uses for the two kinds of bodies.

Paul is often misunderstood as saying that the body and soul are separate entities, and that after the physical body dies, the soul lives on. But he is actually describing two kinds of bodies: earthly and spiritual.

Discussion Questions

- ? How well does the seed analogy help you understand the relationship between the current body and the resurrected body?
- ? What other images might convey the sense of transformation with continuity?

Background Check: In some of the Gospel accounts, Jesus’ disciples don’t recognize the risen Christ when they first see him. Look at the following passages to see how they do or do not support Paul’s argument that the body is transformed when it is resurrected:

- **Matthew 28:16-17**
- **Luke 24:13-16**
- **Luke 24:36-39**
- **John 29:14-16**
- **John 21:4**

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Now for the tricky part: How does this transformation happen? Even Paul can’t adequately explain this: it’s a mystery (v. 51). But it will happen in an instant – “in the twinkling of an eye” – accompanied by the last trumpet. God’s victory through Christ will be complete. In verse 58 Paul concludes the argument he started at the beginning of this chapter. Because God will have the final victory, our faith in Christ and the resurrection is not in vain.

Discussion Questions

- ? Do you think Paul cops out by not explaining how this transformation will happen? Why or why not?
- ? What image do you have of the last judgment?
- ? After reading Paul’s argument, how convinced are you that belief in a general resurrection is crucial to Christian faith?

What Does it Mean for Us?

In this long but fascinating description of the resurrected body, Paul tries to refute the Corinthians’ notions of either dead bodies being resuscitated or of disembodied souls floating around in heaven. While the Corinthians may have held what we would call “superstitions” about what happens after death, Christians today may resist Paul’s argument because of a more cynical, scientific mindset. His description requires us to use our imagination because the resurrection is unlike anything else we know. Like the Corinthians, we have to rely on faith, since resurrection cannot be proven scientifically. Consider that as you discuss the following questions together.

? How does Paul's description of the resurrected body compare with the near-death accounts we read in the Jumpstart exercise?

? How does Paul's description of the resurrected body influence your beliefs?

? How does belief or non-belief in bodily resurrection affect how you care for your body while you're alive?

? How has this study of 1 Corinthians affected your view of your body? Of the church?

Closing

Close this final group session with prayer thanking God for this time of study together and the hope that you will continue to value God's gifts of embodiment and sexuality and use them in responsible and loving ways. Then sing together the first verse of "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

We are one in the spirit,
We are one in the Lord,
We are one in the spirit,
We are one in the Lord,
And we pray that our unity
May one day be restored.
And they'll know we are Christians
By our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians
By our love.