



Firwood Church

These are the notes of a sermon preached at Firwood Church by Andy Evans on the morning of the 19 April 2009; these notes are, therefore, intended to be read in conjunction with the sermon. To download sermons and other free resources, visit www.firwoodchurch.com or subscribe through iTunes.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING – WEEK 3, GOSPEL IMPLICATIONS

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

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.

⁴² So 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"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But 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. 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.

1. INTRODUCTION – THE GOSPEL

a. There are questions and there are questions

In 1 Corinthians 15 verse 12 (as we considered last week), the Apostle Paul turns his full attention to the gospel distortion within the church in Corinth and, in doing so, we find that sexual immorality, disregard for one's brothers and sisters in Christ and a disregard for unbelievers entering the church all stemmed from an over-realised eschatology. It seems that the church in Corinth believed that they had received, in all its fullness, all which is promised in Christ. We find that this over-realised eschatology is grounded upon a gospel distortion in which it was argued that there was no future resurrection of the dead.

Paul responds by applying the gospel, 'Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?' (verse 12). In so doing, Paul turns the entire terms of the debate and unpacks the richest explanation and defence of the resurrection of the Son of God found anywhere in Scripture. Paul's defence is profoundly theological, but always pastoral. He ends his defence with a blunt exhortation, 'do not go on sinning' and a stark warning against his opponents (who are, in fact, opponents of the gospel), in observing that 'some have no knowledge of God' (v. 34).

Paul now returns and directly challenges his opponents by quoting their very objections back to them, 'But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"' (v. 35). Now, consider severity of Paul's response, 'You foolish person!' (v. 36).

At Firwood Church our prayer is that unbelievers would come into our lives and the lives of the church feeling comfortable in asking difficult, even challenging, questions regarding Christ and the gospel and that we would respond in love and truth.

Now, imagine that on this very Sunday morning an unbeliever comes into the church, hears this message and then approaches one of the Pastors asking to learn more about the resurrection of the Son of God. Perhaps they might even ask, 'But how can this be possible?' or 'How can I be confident that this is true?' Imagine then if we were to respond, 'You fool'. What do you think the response of the unbeliever might be? It is reasonable to assume that such a response is most likely to repel.

Or imagine a believer coming into the church struggling with very real issues in their life, perhaps they have recently experience tragedy and very real difficulties, perhaps this has led them to question their faith. Imagine that this believer now approaches someone in the church for counsel, godly advice or reassurance and we were to respond, 'You fool!'. Such a response is unlikely to build them up, encourage or reassure them. More likely this response will further damage their confidence in the gospel.

How then should we understand Paul's response in verse 36? The answer, in part, is in understanding that there are questions and then there are questions.

You see, the church has a call to share, defend and proclaim the gospel amidst a doubting and unbelieving world. When the unbeliever comes into the church asking tough, perhaps even cynical questions, this is our opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is, in part, what Paul means when he writes to Timothy, 'preach the word; be ready in season and out of season' (2 Timothy 4:2). When unbelievers come in season, open and searching for truth, we are called to preach the word. And when unbelievers come out of season and hostile, angry and deeply cynical, we are called to preach the word.

So too when we are faced with troubled believers asking tough questions, believers practically lost and stumbling amidst their dark night of the soul. We preach the word in love and truth, we encourage, counsel and exhort and, in doing so, we help bear our brother or sister's burden (Galatians 6:2).

Paul, however, is facing an entirely different situation. Paul finds himself dealing with a question intended to undermine the gospel. This is the kind of question usually accompanied with a sneer, 'Are you really trying to tell me...?' As such, Paul is dealing with an attack upon the church of Christ. Paul's response, 'You fools!', is devastating and he is, in effect, conjuring the words of the Psalmist, 'The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."' (Psalm 14:1). Paul understands that this denial of a bodily resurrection stems from a lack of faith in the God of the Bible; 'some have no knowledge of God' (v. 34).

There is an important principle here in that there are some questions and some debates that believers should disengage from. We must take particular care where the intention is to question, undermine and contradict the gospel. Questions like, 'Is it *really* that important that Christians believe in the existence of a literal hell?' and 'Can we *really* be sure that Christ is the only way for salvation?' when asked by professing 'believers' with an intention to undermine gospel truth should be regarded with extreme caution.

Remember the strategy employed by Satan in the garden, 'Did God actually say...?' (Genesis 3:1)? Satan still employs the same schemes within the church today. Where such undermining comes from people who profess to be believers, faithful believers should disengage and church discipline must be biblically applied.

b. There are answers and there are answers

1 Corinthians 15:35-41

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.

Given this, we must ask why Paul then goes on to answer such a question? The reason for this is that Paul's concern extends beyond his opponents. Again, there is a lesson in this. In ministry and our Christian walk, the attacks can be savage and relentless. It is easy to become fixated upon the enemy and much energy can be expended in refuting and defending. Paul recognises, however, that this debate has impacted upon the wider church. Paul's answer is intended to refute and correct.

This is important. Error flourishes where there is ignorance. Bible study and preaching are important in this regard because these are the primary means through which God chooses to correct, exhort and encourage his people. We must ensure that we not only refute error, but that we also seek to correct.

And so Paul unpacks what this resurrection of the dead will look like and he arrives at four truths,

i. Death precedes life

Paul's first point is taken from a farming metaphor. Paul understands that we plant a dead seed in the ground and the result is that this seed produces a harvest of life. So too, believers die and our dead bodies are planted in the ground that they might produce a new *kind* of body.

For the believer in Christ, there is a tension with regards to how we should think about death. On the one hand, death is an affront to God. As we considered last week and will consider next week, death is an enemy and is a result of sin. In truth, this world filled with suffering, sickness and death is not the world as God intended it to be. Something is badly broken.

This is why Jesus wept at the funeral of Lazarus. Death is abhorrent to him and he mourned deeply the loss of his friend (John 11:28-37).

Christians, however, should not fear death. For the believer, death is but a sleep (1 Corinthians 15:51), more than this, death is gain because, in death, we are with Christ. This is why Paul can write so emphatically, 'My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.' (Philippians 1:23).

Paul unpacks the truth of this, yes, we will die (unless the Lord return first), but this is simply the seed from which our eternal life will spring and our resurrection body will grow.

ii. Resurrection life implies continuity

The analogy of the seed implies continuity. Paul's point is this, in death we do not become something else entirely. As a shoot springs from a dead seed, so our new body will spring forth from our dead body.

To understand how this works, think about the resurrection of Christ. Jesus' resurrection body is both similar and dissimilar to his incarnate body. This dissimilarity is seen when the women who arrive to tend the body mistake the resurrected Jesus for a gardener. This similarity is seen when Thomas is invited to place his hands in Jesus' wounds and then declares, 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:28).

It is difficult to know precisely how this relates to our resurrected bodies. I think we can surmise, however, that our resurrection body will be both different and yet distinctive. I do not believe that we will all be identical and unrecognisable. I believe that my resurrection body will be different from my present earthly body and yet I will remain distinctly me.

iii. Resurrection life implies discontinuity

And yet, Paul clearly implies that there will also be discontinuity in respect of our resurrection bodies. This is the application of the analogy between types of earthly bodies, God can create whatever he pleases, whether this be human, animal, fish or bird. In this way, Paul answers his opponents by appealing to the greatness of God as displayed in creation. This God who creates so much variety and diversity is easily capable of bringing forth new and *different* kinds of bodies for those who believe.

iii. The resurrection body will be glorious

Paul writes, 'There 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.' For clarity, we should understand that Paul's

reference to heavenly bodies is most likely a reference to stars and constellations. Paul understands, therefore, that earthly bodies and heavenly bodies are different and yet both are glorious.

Paul's point is this: we cannot be sure what kind of body we will receive, but we can be sure that it will be glorious in both its similarity and dissimilarity to our present bodies.

There is an aside worth making here in that Paul clearly states that both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies possess their own kind of glory.

Consider this in relation to earthly bodies. Paul understands that creation bears the imprint of the Creator.

Now don't get me wrong, I am not saying that sin has not ruined creation. This is why we all struggle with sickness, infirmity and, eventually, death. But, despite this ruin, our bodies still retain a glory which echoes that of the Creator.

Paul will continue, however, to demonstrate that the glory of our future *spiritual* body will outshine that of our present earthly bodies.

2. EXPLANATION OF RESURRECTION BODIES

a. Earthly and heavenly bodies

1 Corinthians 15:42-47

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"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But 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.

Paul now draws out four differences between the earthly and heavenly body,

i. Perishable/imperishable

The reason we grow old, sick, die and, eventually, rot is that our body is perishable. The first difference between our present and resurrection body is that our spiritual body (as Paul calls it at verse 44) is imperishable.

This is of huge practical importance and comfort. Imagine going into eternity with this body, what kind of shape do you think we might be in come 50, 100, 150 years time? One thing is sure, we won't stay this pretty. The truth of the gospel is this, God will prepare for us a body fit for eternity. It will not grow into decrepitude, it will not break and it will not rot.

ii. Dishonour/glory

First let us be clear, Paul has just described earthly bodies, including the human body, as 'one kind of glory', why does he now associate dishonour with our present state?

My nineteenth-month-old son, Gideon Thomas, is becoming a little tired of the toddler phase. I can tell this at meal times when he insists on feeding himself even though he struggles to bring a spoon with the food up to his mouth without smearing it all over his face and into his hair. I can tell this by the way in which he struggles as we are trying to change his nappy. I can tell this by the way he tries to dress himself but gets it all wrong, usually half strangling himself with some piece of clothing. He knows what he wants and needs to do, but his body is incapable of responding.

Most of us will end back up this way and then we will die.

This is what Paul means when he says that this body will be sown in dishonour. Many of us will die 'dishonourable' deaths in which we lose control of this body and lose our grip on dignity. The promise is, however, that we will be raised in glory and, clothed in our new resurrection bodies, we will be caught up on the clouds with him. However dishonourable our present state might be, God has something better for us and on that day we will be transformed.

iii. Weakness/power

The weakness Paul speaks of here is broader than just sickness and infirmity; Paul is referring to the weakness endemic in the human condition. When we work we grow tired, if we go without food we get hungry and will eventually starve, when we exert ourselves we sweat (and then smell bad). All of this is evidence of the weakness of this earthly body.

More than this, consider our struggle against the flesh, our failures in dealing with our own sin and our weakness when faced with temptation.

The gospel promise is that those who believe in him will be raised in power, in a new kind of body which will no longer feel the gravity of the fall and the weight of sin. Those who believe will be raised in power.

iv. Natural/spiritual body

Paul has thus far explained that this new resurrection body will be both similar and dissimilar from our present earthly body and now Paul expands upon this further.

1 Corinthians 15:44-45

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"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit

Paul's explanation is provocative. His opponents believe that they are spiritual and that they have received all that is promised in Christ and attained true spirituality. Paul has, in chapters 12 and 14, explained what true spirituality looks like, he now reminds them that a *spiritual* body awaits them when Christ returns.

Paul again appeals to the analogy between Adam and Christ, the second Adam. God breathes into Adam and he becomes a living, breathing being and, as such, he is the ancestor and pattern for all mankind. You and I, therefore, presently have the same kind of body as our forefather, Adam.

Christ returns from the grave and, like Adam, he sets the pattern for all those who believe in him, but, more than this, as God breathes life into Adam, so this second Adam will breathe life into

us. Jesus is both our Pioneer (who shows what awaits those who believe) and our great Saviour. As Paul writes elsewhere,

Philippians 3:20-21

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,
²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

The implication behind all of this, of course, is clear; the body that awaits us is more glorious than that with which we are presently clothed. The truth is, believer or unbeliever, we feel this acutely. As we get older we become slow and our body is unable to keep up with our mind (consider the aging footballer), we become fat, wrinkly and look older even though our perception of our self barely changes (this is why some men and women still dress and act like teenagers) and we grow weary and tired even though we will ourselves to persevere. Paul recognises that there is a sense, therefore, in which our bodies yearn for something more reliable, something altogether more glorious,

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

¹For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

3. The Great Promise

1 Corinthians 15:46-49

⁴⁶But 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. 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.

Paul's point is this, Adam was a man of dust; a man with a body fit for this earth. Christ, however, is the man from heaven; a man with a body fit for this heaven. Those who are his will be raised in him and will receive a body fit for heaven.

Our great hope is established upon this great promise: that on that day we will be with him and we will be like him. The great triumph is that just as Adam corrupted and ruined the entire human race, Christ has rescued, ransomed and redeemed the whole of creation, even our tired, decrepit, sin-prone bodies.

On that day we will be with him and we will be like him.

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