

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Title: The Instantaneous Resurrection: Resurrection Part 8

Truth: Believers will be given immortal bodies and thus inherit the kingdom.

Date/Location: Sunday April 11, 2021 (previously March 17, 2019) at FBC

Outline of this Section of Scripture

The outline of the chapter is:

1. The saving gospel message, v. 1-11
 - a. The gospel message itself, v. 1-4
 - b. The corroborating witnesses of the resurrection, v. 5-11
2. A hypothetical: what if no resurrection at all? v. 12-19
3. The resurrection culminates in the kingdom and glory of God, v. 20-28
 - a. Fact of bodily resurrection for all people, v. 20-24a
 - b. The reign of Christ and the reign of the Father, v. 24b-28
4. Christianity is useless apart from resurrection, v. 29-34
5. The constitution of the resurrection body, v. 35-49
6. The glorious resurrection of believers, 50-58
 - a. The bodies of believers will be transformed, v. 50-53
 - b. When this happens, victory over death will be complete, v. 54-57
 - c. Consequently, Christians must move ahead steadfastly in God's work because we know that our hope is a real hope, not an imaginary one, v. 58.

I. Transformation of the Body, v. 50-53

A. The transformation is necessary. This is because “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But what does this mean?

1. Inheriting the kingdom means the same thing as entering the kingdom, enjoying its blessings, and serving the Lord how He assigns. There are five passages that speak of inheriting the kingdom of God – Matthew 25:34, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Cor. 15:50,

Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5. The Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians sections are warnings that unrepentant sinners will not inherit the kingdom of God (that is, they are unsaved). There are around 15 passages in Scripture that explicitly mention “entering” the kingdom.

Systems of theology that distinguish between entering and inheriting are errant in that they divide the people of God into two groups—those who are just *so-so Christians*—who will merely *enter* the kingdom—in contrast to *real disciples*, who will *inherit* the same kingdom. Such a distinction between *believers* and *disciples* cannot be sustained in the Biblical text. All true believers *are* disciples.

2. The kingdom that we are talking about here is not just equivalent to “heaven.” So what is it? The Bible teaches that there is a stage of history after the present era in which Israel will be prominent and blessed, in which the Lord will reign from Jerusalem; in which Christ’s people will reign with him in glorified bodies (Revelation 20:4, 2 Timothy 2:12); in which people in natural bodies will live, have families, carry out religious duties, and function in national groups (Zech. 14:16-17); and in which at least some people will die, but not until an advanced age (Isaiah 65:20). These conditions are better than conditions today, but fall short of the perfection of the eternal state—that which is commonly called “heaven” by the uninformed. In other words, there are two future phases of history: one is the **millennial kingdom**, and the other is the **eternal state**. They are distinct, but have some similarities. The first phase is spoken of in 1 Cor. 15:20-28. It is the **millennial kingdom**. The second phase is the issue of 1 Cor. 15:50. It is **eternity**. Here’s the thing: both are known as the kingdom of God. I like to think of them as two phases of the kingdom of God, and which is which in a given passage sometimes takes a moment to figure out.
3. Can natural-bodied people inherit the kingdom of God? From this passage, we would naturally answer negatively. But Matthew 25:34 says, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the

kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” This is spoken to people who survive the Tribulation, and who thus are still in their natural bodies. (They are going to have children, and some will die, even if well advanced in years; see Isaiah 65:20). Matthew 25 indicates natural bodies (flesh and blood) *can* inherit the kingdom, but Paul seems to suggest they cannot.

4. So what *is* the relationship of the kingdom and the transformation of the body? Paul is sliding quickly over some details, I believe. The resolution is this: To participate in the **eternal** kingdom, aka Heaven, you must have a transformed body. Mere natural, corruptible, Adamic flesh and blood cannot inherit *that* kingdom. Remember the contrasts in 1 Cor. 15:35-49. That transformation must occur to all believers before the eternal state commences.

God blesses Christians in the church with an **early** transformation, so that they can participate in the **pre-eternal** kingdom as co-regents with Christ. Christians will enjoy an early glorification whereby they can be free of sin and serve God better. So, it is true that sinful flesh and blood cannot inherit the **eternal** kingdom. But in the **millennial** kingdom, flesh and blood will participate, awaiting their final glorification.

5. Does Paul reject the idea of a material body in either kingdom? Namely, is it only disembodied spirits that can participate in the kingdom? **No**. Such a view is incongruous with the rest of the Bible’s teaching. Sin is not located in matter, material, or the body *per se*. How do we know? Christ had a material, human body, and it did not cause Him to sin. In fact, He still has flesh and bones to this very day (Luke 24:39) and will forever. Adam and Eve had bodies, and those bodies were not the cause of their sin. Sin comes from the inner man, the heart, the mind, the will. It is not merely a physical or tangible phenomenon that magically disappears if there is no body.

B. The transformation is instantaneous. Paul informs us about something that was previously unknown, but he is, with this text, making known (formerly it was a “mystery”).

1. The transformation will happen in a moment of time such that there will be living believers who will be transformed so quickly that they will not experience death (sleep). This is a grand exception to the “it is appointed to man once to die” rule that is laid down in Hebrews 9:27.
2. There are some who are dead already (asleep) and they along with the living will go through a metamorphosis, a total change.
3. It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Just as fast as you can cast a glance or blink your eye, it will be all over. These words refer to a transformation that is so fast that the time unit it takes is basically indivisible. This is a huge miracle.
4. It will happen when a trumpet sounds. This correlates perfectly with 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Some Bible teachers have made a big deal about the “last” trumpet, as if it is the last one that can ever occur in history or eternity. Let us not be so pedantic. It is simplest to consider this as the last trumpet of the church age. There will certainly be trumpet calls and announcements in the kingdom, and I see no reason there could not be similar in the heavenly state.
5. Up to this point, I have not used the term that Christians use to speak of this event: it is the *rapture*. When a reformed theologian is mystified that we dispensationalists speak of the rapture, we take them to this passage and the Thessalonians passage. We also refer to John 14 where the Lord said He would come back. These events are definitely distinct from the second coming itself. Indeed, the rapture was not revealed in the Old Testament. The second coming was revealed in general terms, but not the rapture.

Similarly, God’s plan to gather a people out of the Gentiles was revealed in the Old Testament (Isa. 42:6, 49:6); but the church as a body of Jews and Gentiles was *not* revealed until the New Testament (Eph. 3:5-6). The gospel was revealed in general terms in the Old Testament (Rom. 1:1-2), but the slow growth and interruption in the kingdom was not revealed (Matt. 13:11). The plan of God to harden Israel’s heart in order to bring the Gentiles to salvation was not revealed until the New Testament

(Rom. 11:25), but the sequence of events in which Christ suffered and then was to be glorified *was* revealed in the Old Testament (Luke 24:26-27, 1 Pet. 1:11).

C. **The transformation is radical.** Verses 52b-53 address the nature of the transformation of the body. To summarize, the transformation will be like that the difference described in 15:42-49. Dead people will be raised to life and given an incorruptible body. Living people will be changed the same way, so that mortality is swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:4).

1. The new body will be made of heavenly material; it will be a spiritual body (sustained by the Spirit, not ghostly); it will be in the image of Christ (and see Romans 8:29, 1 John 3:2), including moral likeness to Him; it will be immortal, incapable of dying.
2. Phil. 3:21 teaches that the infinite power of Christ will be applied to transform our bodies to be like His. This will be another massive miracle, one “Biblical proportions” as some secularists are fond of saying of present-day catastrophes.
3. What the Bible is talking about here is flesh and blood in the context of verses 35-49, namely the corruptible, Adamic, dusty, mortal kind of flesh and blood. The nature of the transformation will be such that these negative aspects will be eliminated.

II. Victory over Death, v. 54-57

When all these things happen, then the saying that taunts death will come to pass: “Death, where is your sting?” and “Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is translated by some as “barbs.” This is a fitting word, because if you think of a barbed arrow, it is meant to be a one-way device. In other words, it does not come out easily. So is death—once it has you, you are stuck. Except...

- A. The plain statement of the fact is found in Isaiah 25:8. God will swallow up death forever, and all tears will go away with it.
- B. This quote comes from Hosea 13:14, mocking death which has lost its stinger, like a bee with no stinger. It is harmless.

There is a question of how to interpret this verse. It appears from some English translations that Paul’s quotation is accurate. One

English translation (NET) suggests that Paul uses the verse in a sense opposite of what it means. Namely, that Hosea is saying that God will NOT have compassion and He will allow death and Sheol to have victory over His people Israel. To this student of Scripture, it appears best to take Paul's interpretation as accurate to the original context and to discard the NET. Then, we can understand that a happy prophetic parenthesis happens in verse 14a. God speaks of destruction in verse 13 and continues that theme at the end of verse 14 with "Pity is hidden from My eyes." But God inserts a little segment in 14a that promises future redemption despite the heavy judgment that Israel will face.

- C. Stop to think of this. Death is going to be defeated. All the degradation that you experience in your body, and in this world, is all going away. It will be no more. We will have to find something else to talk about instead of complaining about our aches and pains! We are able to turn the tables and taunt death.
- D. In verse 56, Paul explains the bee's stinger: it is sin. By sin comes death, just like by a bee's poison death can be the result. The Law, in turn, revealed sin and enhanced its power as human sin nature ran up against the do's and don'ts of the Law. All of that is done away now because Christ has fulfilled the Law and defeated all of sin's power.
- E. Victory over death is found in Jesus Christ, v. 57. And by the way: since the wages of sin is death, and sin can only be dealt with by the work of Jesus Christ, that means deliverance from death too can also only be found in Jesus Christ. No other way, religion, faith, system of philosophy, or anything else can give victory over death.

III. Exhortation to be Steadfast and Abounding in God's Work

- A. The ideas of steadfast and immovable point to the notion that Paul expects the church members to NOT move away from the truth of the resurrection. Someone(s) in the church was troubling them with false doctrine (like Galatians 1:7), and the believers needed to remain steadfast in the truth. Their morals were going to be corrupted if they continued to be in bad company (v. 33).

- B. Do not succumb to doubts raised by the Evil One, or by his people. They tell you that the resurrection of Christ, or of yourself, is foolish and stupid. They say it is impossible, or that it is past already (2 Tim. 2:18). But that is man's view. It is not God's truth.
- C. When you are swallowed up by doubts, you will be ineffective. For that matter, when you are swallowed up by other priorities, you will be ineffective for the Lord. How does He want you to be effective? By abounding in the work of the Lord. And what is that work? Conversion, transformation, growth, edification, worship, fellowship, etc. Those are the things you should focus upon. And when you do, your labor will not be useless for Christ. It will have an eternal impact, even if you cannot see the results now.
- D. Somewhat paradoxically, being steadfast and immovable (on the doctrine of the resurrection) means that you can move aggressively forward in the work of the Lord. Staying true means moving ahead. We will be resurrected. We are not in a position that we should just hang it up and say "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13, 1 Cor. 15:32).

Conclusion

The resurrection is necessarily true because our sin-wracked, frail bodies have to be transformed in order to be outfitted for the heavenly kingdom. Mortality has to be converted to immortality, and corruption to incorruption, for us to live with God forever. After that is done, death is conquered completely and forever.

Because Christ was raised, and He was seen by so many eyewitnesses, and because the resurrection is key to the whole Christian system, and because it will give us new bodies, and because we are certain of these things, we can serve God confidently without regressing back to such basics like "is there really a resurrection?"

You have some world-ish things you do—and some you must do—that will be burned up and be of no value in the next world. But nothing you do for Christ is a waste because His is raised, and every Christian will be raised too. Go forward in this glorious confidence, dear believer. Live for God and Christ by the Spirit.

The Father planned it,
The prophets foretold it,
The disciples doubted it,
The soldiers denied it,
The empty tomb proved it,
The angels proclaimed it,
JESUS IS RISEN!

~ Pastor Dustin Bengé