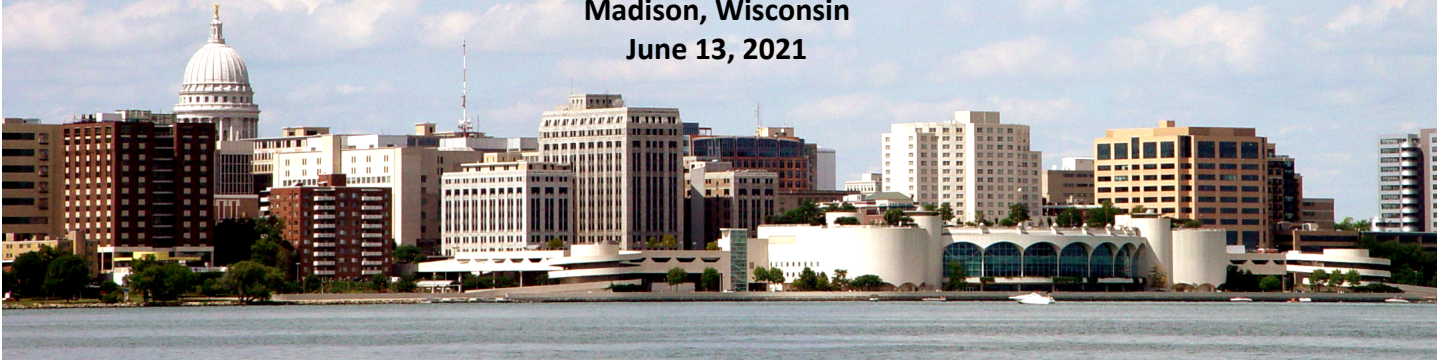


Foolish Questions

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-49 • RESURRECTION (PART 5)

Baxter T. Exum (#1599)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is good to be together this morning! I hope all of us have the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the entryway), as John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study today. And then, Caleb/Noah will be leading us in three songs before we head outside to do our visiting outdoors.

Here at the beginning, we want to be sure we explain God's plan of salvation. God loved us so much he sent his only Son, to die in our place. He was buried, he was raised up on the third day, and in response, we must believe this good news and obey it. We turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. At this point, God adds us to his kingdom, the church, and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions about this, if you would like to study together, we would invite you to get in touch.

As our tradition has been, we are passing along some good news today! And some of these are personal for me, and for some of you. The first pictures come to us from the Westside congregation down in Elgin, Illinois, as Ezekiel was baptized this week. He was baptized by his dad, Roy Mason. They worshiped at the Crystal Lake congregation a number of years ago, Ezekiel and his older sister have been with us at camp, and we are thrilled to see that Ezekiel has now obeyed the gospel.

We also have an update from Keefer Jack, a gospel preacher who was a guest preacher here in Wisconsin a number of years ago, in South Beloit, I believe. Keefer influenced one of our own kids to obey the gospel. Dad can say it, but it helps to hear it from somewhere else. We will always be thankful to Keefer for that. But this week, he posted online and said, "My baby girl is now a Christian." I don't even know where Keefer is these days, but we rejoice with his family this week.

We also rejoice with Jeaneen Parker, who was baptized at the Boulevard church of Christ over in Cleveland this week. The post says, "Look at God!!! Another soul baptized and added to the body of Christ TODAY!!!!" And they had the hashtag, "GodIsStillSavingSouls." Amen to that! Well, this is great news, but it does get better, because...

...two days later, Jeaneen posted on her personal page, and she says, “[My] uncle was baptized at the Miller Avenue Church of Christ and added to the body of Christ TODAY.” She says, “This was worth the 2-hour drive down to Columbus.” So, I don’t know whether her uncle was encouraged by her example or what, but we are thankful for these two souls and their obedience to the gospel.

And then, for the last example today, we have an update from Eugene Lawton, who preaches in Newark, New Jersey, “Thank God for another soul,” he says, “Welcome to Veronica Branch, who was baptized into Christ on Friday, June 11, 2021, at the Newark Church of Christ, Newark, NJ. She started watching me preach on our YouTube channel and then came to our Sunday morning service and Thursday night Bible Class and on Thursday expressed her desire to be baptized. Oh Praise His Holy Name. Let us praise for her!” Amen to that!

And we share all of this by way of encouragement: What these men and women have done this week, you can do today. Pull me aside after worship, get in touch with either one of our other elders, and we would be more than happy to open the word of God and study together.

This morning, I would invite you to return with me to 1 Corinthians 15. Several months ago, one of members asked for a lesson on a rather difficult verse in this chapter, and we finally got to that verse last Sunday! But, we are looking at the whole chapter, which is perhaps one of the first written accounts of the Lord’s resurrection. And Paul writes this, because some members of the church in Corinth were perhaps questioning and even denying the possibility of a future resurrection.

Several weeks ago, then, in the first eleven verses, we learned that Paul starts to combat this by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus. He starts with what they already believe and he makes a series of appeals.

Three weeks ago, we moved into the next paragraph, and we came to a new line of reasoning, as Paul encourages these people to imagine what life would be like if Christ had never been raised.

Two weeks ago, we came to verses 20-28, as Paul gives the reminder that “**...Christ HAS been raised from the dead.**” And because of this, we learned that we will rise, death will die, and God will reign.

And then, last week, we looked at the resurrection as motivation – the resurrection motivates us to be baptized, the resurrection motivates us to live dangerously for the Lord, risking everything for him, and the resurrection motivates us to live lives of sobriety.

Today, we move into verses 35-49, and we come to two questions, “**How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?**” I know sometimes we like to say that there’s no such thing as a stupid question. We understand the thought, and yet, as we are about to discover, this is not always true! And we know this, because Paul responds to these two questions by calling these people foolish. Obviously, if somebody truly doesn’t know something, that’s one thing. However, we also know that some questions are designed to create doubt. Some questions are not honest questions, but they come from devious hearts. Some questions are intended to wreak havoc. We think of some of the questions that came to Jesus from the Scribes and the Pharisees. They weren’t looking to learn, they thought they already knew it all, and so, their questions were designed to humiliate. Their questions were intended to set a trap. And that seems to be what we have here. It’s not that they wanted to know, but instead, they were taking the fact that they didn’t know and they were trying to use that to prove that the resurrection could never happen. These are foolish questions, and I say this because of Paul’s response.

This morning, then, we are looking at 1 Corinthians 15:35-49, and I want us to look at Paul's answers to these two questions. And as we are about to learn, although those asking the questions are foolish, the questions themselves need to be answered. Some of us want to know. And the longer we live, the closer we get to death, the more interested we become.

Let's look at the words of Paul in verses 35-49,

***³⁵ But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"
³⁶ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ³⁷ and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. ³⁹ All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. ⁴¹ There 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 also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

As we look at what Paul says here, let's look at those two questions (up in verse 35), and let's learn something from Paul's answers.

I. The first question is, "HOW ARE THE DEAD RAISED?"

And Paul's first response is, "**You fool!**" Again, this seems to tell us that Paul can see that this is not an honest question. Instead, this comes from those who deny the resurrection, and they are just throwing up an objection. They're not really asking, they are arguing, they are asking this in order to convince others. They are spreading doubt within the congregation. They are giving this as an obstacle to belief. They are basically inviting others to join them in their disbelief, and it almost comes in the form of a statement, not a question: There is no possible way that the dead can be raised! That's the statement hiding behind the question. Paul, then, responds by calling them foolish.

And yet, Paul continues, and he answers this objection. It's a foolish objection, but we can at least understand it. Maybe we have wondered about this ourselves. How is the resurrection even possible? When somebody dies and is buried, we can perhaps imagine that body coming back to life. But what about somebody whose body is completely destroyed in a fire? What about those who are lost at sea? What about those who are eaten by animals? I'm thinking of a situation out in the Pacific Northwest. A number of years ago, people were finding

severed feet still laced up in their shoes on various beaches. Police were baffled. Some speculated that there was a serial killer chopping off feet and leaving them on beaches throughout the Pacific Northwest. Over time, though, they came up with a new theory: People were getting lost in the woods, falling into rivers, getting washed out to sea, and sea-life would basically eat everything that wasn't laced up in a shoe, and those shoes would eventually wash up on the shore. So the question is: How will God handle that? Even as believers, we might wonder: How will those bodies ever be resurrected? And Paul, in answering this first objection, this first question, basically gives a series of illustrations, reminding us that God in his infinite power and creativity, already does a whole lot of things just as amazing on a regular basis. And if God can do this, he can also do that. It's similar to Jesus' response to the Sadducees in Matthew 22:29. When they objected to the resurrection, Jesus responded and said, ***"You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God."*** And that's what Paul does here.

A. He starts by describing a SEED...

...and he says, ***"That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else."*** In other words, do not be shocked by the concept of resurrection; we see little reminders of the resurrection all around us every day. We take what appears to be a "dead" seed, we put it in the ground, and it comes back to life, but it comes to life in a different form from what was planted. It is the same, but different. It is the same, but better. When we plant a cucumber seed in the ground, it's not a cucumber seed that pops out of the ground, but it's a little green stem with a couple of leaves on it. Genetically, it is still a cucumber, but it is more glorious than the seed itself. If we had never seen this before, if we had no knowledge of seeds and what they do, would we have ever believed that this could happen? No! It's too amazing, too different. A pumpkin seed looks nothing at all like a pumpkin! Well, so also with a body that is placed in the ground. God can handle this! God in his unlimited power and creativity is able to do something amazing. The same God who made seeds can also raise the dead. In fact, Jesus said something very similar about his own resurrection in John 12:24, ***"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."***

B. The next illustration comes in the reminder that God has created different kinds of FLESH.

And these various kinds of flesh are perfectly and creatively designed to match their environments. Some animals have scales, others have fur, some have gills, others have lungs, some have arms, others have wings, and so on. And the point is: Just as God has created humans, and animals, and birds, and fish (and just as these kinds of flesh are all different from each other), so also God is able to give us new bodies that are perfectly designed for the life to come. We should not be shocked, then, that God can raise the dead in a new form, transitioning from one life to the next. I think of the cicadas that are emerging down south of us right now, "Brood X," as it is known. I was driving through Indiana last week, and on the other side of Indianapolis I thought I was having car trouble: Windows up, A/C on, radio blaring, and I heard this awful noise. I lowered the window and realized it was the cicadas. What an amazing design! What a reminder of the resurrection! Eggs are laid in trees, the nymphs fall to the ground and burrow, and come back to the surface 17 years later. God can do just about anything! His point is: Do not limit God! If we had never seen one before, none of us could ever imagine something like a giraffe! None of us could ever imagine the life-cycle of a cicada. If we had never seen one before, none of us could ever imagine a duck-billed platypus. In the same way, concerning the resurrection: God can handle this! I'm thinking of God's message to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 32:27, ***"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"*** Of course not! Do not limit God, but look at what he has done all around us.

C. And the third illustration here is God has also created different kinds of HEAVENLY BODIES.

...the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets – and if God can do that, he can also raise the dead. Some heavenly bodies shine, others reflect, and they all have their purpose; they all have their place in God’s creation. Two days ago, I read that astronomers have just discovered a star gazillions of miles away that appears to be blinking! They have no idea what’s up with that. We have so much still to learn! And that seems to be Paul’s point here: God can do anything! Paul’s point is: Do not limit God with these foolish questions! Just because we have a hard time imagining it does not mean that God cannot do it. If you doubt the resurrection, Paul is saying: Look around you! Open your eyes! God can do anything!

II. This brings us back to the second question concerning the resurrection: WITH WHAT KIND OF BODY DO THEY COME?

In other words, let’s just say it might be possible in some way, what will our resurrected bodies be like? How will that body be different from this body? And once again, we are about to see God’s power and creativity on display here. Yes, God can do it, and this is what it will look like. So, in the rest of this paragraph, Paul makes a series of four comparisons between the old and the new...

A. ...starting with the idea that the old body is “PERISHABLE,” but the new body will be raised “IMPERISHABLE.”

When I think of *“perishable,”* I think of “perishables” at the grocery store. Vegetables have a very limited lifespan – days, or maybe a few weeks at the most. We look around us, and some creatures live longer than others. Flies and mosquitos might live for a few days or maybe weeks. There are some turtles that live longer than we do. On average we live somewhere between 70-80 years, sometimes longer. Smoking takes off 5-6 years, as does obesity. But even the healthiest of human beings have a limit. We are *“perishable,”* as Paul says. We wear out. Our brains actually lose volume as we get older. Our hearts get tired. Stuff breaks, and what doesn’t break often hurts. I think it was my grandfather who used to say something like, “After 70, it’s just patch, patch, patch.” We are *“perishable.”* And then, when we die, the body decays. If we are cremated, that decay is simply accelerated. A year or two ago, I picked my wife up at her school over on Pflaum Road, and I said, “Wow, it smells great over here, like roasting coffee.” And she said, “Nope, it’s cremation day at the funeral home over on Monona Drive.” I no longer assume that smell is roasting coffee! But the point is: We are *“perishable.”* These bodies are not permanent.

But, the new body, Paul says, will be raised *“imperishable.”* The new body will never shrivel up, and wither, and die. Our new bodies will be indestructible. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:1, referring to our bodies, ***“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*** Our new building will never wear out. So, what will our new body be like? As opposed to our old body, which is *“perishable,”* our new body will be *“imperishable.”*

B. The next comparison (in verse 43), is that this body is “SOWN IN DISHONOR,” but our new body is “RAISED IN GLORY.”

The body we are in right now is *“lacking honor”* in some sense. There is some “shame” or “embarrassment” with this body (as this word is sometimes translated). While *“perishable”* obviously emphasizes the physical, *“dishonor”* seems to emphasize the moral side of things. I’m thinking of Isaiah 64:6, where the prophet says,

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” As hard as we might try, we fail, due to human weakness. We do things we regret. The new body, though, is ***“raised in glory.”*** The new body will be characterized by ***“dignity”*** and ***“honor.”*** There’s a sense of ***“brightness”*** or ***“majesty”*** to it. I’m reminded of a guy from Detroit many years ago who had his ashes put in a 12” round fireworks shell. He went out “in a blaze of glory.” I’ve heard of people putting their loved one’s ashes in shotgun shells. Same concept. But that’s not really what Paul is talking about, is it? If you want to do that, I would love to participate. That would be the most awesome of funerals. But Paul is really making the point that our resurrected bodies will be more glorious than these bodies in some way. In these bodies, we live in a way that we have regrets, don’t we? We sin. We fail. But the next body will be different and better in some way. We think of what Paul will write a bit later, in Philippians 3:21, where he refers to Jesus and says that he , ***“...will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”*** Something better is coming.

C. The next comparison (also in verse 43) is that this body is *“sown in weakness,”* but the new body will be *“raised in power.”*

The human body is amazing, but it is also weak and fragile. We can do some amazing things, but we can also be taken out by a tiny bacteria or virus. We are susceptible to hot and cold, too much water or not enough water, too much food or not enough food. We face heart disease, and various cancers, strokes, diabetes, kidney disease, food poisoning type illnesses, allergies, genetic issues, stuff wears out, and on and on. We have some issues, don’t we?

Our new bodies, though, Paul says, will be ***“raised in power.”*** Our new bodies won’t be susceptible to disease and weakness and death, but we will be ***“raised in power.”*** We won’t need hearing aids, and canes, and glasses; no more broken bones or infections; no pacemakers. In the next life, we will no longer need to say that ***“the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”*** (Matthew 26:41). The spirit will be willing, and the flesh will be powerful.

D. The last comparison here (in answering the question about our resurrected bodies) is that this body is NATURAL, but our new body will be SPIRITUAL (we see this in verses 44-49).

Our first body was created in the image of Adam. This body is dust. One author has described this body as an “earth suit.” This body isn’t me, but it contains me. I live inside of it. It was designed for life on this earth, but not much else. If my earth suit were to completely fail right at this moment, somebody would probably call 911, a doctor would declare me dead, but I will not be dead. I will have simply moved on. When we die, we leave the natural behind. Our resurrected bodies, then, will be spiritual, made in the image of Jesus. As John says in 1 John 3:2, ***“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”*** Our new body will be ***“spiritual.”***

Conclusion:

As we look at these two questions about the resurrection, and as we back away and try to absorb some of what we’ve looked at this morning, one thing all of this points to is that these bodies we are in right now are temporary. This life is not all there is. Something much better is coming. Perhaps you have heard of an epitaph written by Benjamin Franklin, when he was a young man:

The body of B. Franklin, printer,
(like the cover of an old book,
Its contents torn out and
Stripped of its lettering and gilding)
Lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be lost;
For it will (as he believed)
Appear once more,
In a new and more elegant edition,
Revised and corrected
By the Author.

When we know that this body is temporary, when we know that something better is coming, it changes the way we live. It changes the way we treat our families. It changes the way we look at sickness and even death.

I'm looking forward to coming back together next week to look at the next paragraph as we continue to learn more about the resurrection.

Before we partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We come to you this morning asking for your help us as we look to Jesus. Just as he was raised from the dead, so we too are looking forward to whatever comes next. We ask for your help as we encourage each other as we see that day coming closer.

Thank you for forgiving our sins. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com