

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Sermon Series: The Resurrection ***

*Lesson Topic: The Resurrection—Our Common Hope * 1 Cor. 15:35-58 and 1 Thess. 4:13-18 * 3/24/24*

MAIN POINT

As Christians, we have a sure hope in our future resurrection, when our lowly bodies will be transformed to become like Christ's glorious body. And this hope should be a great motivator for us to live for Christ today.

INTRODUCTION

What is something really fun you or a family member had to wait for for a long time? How did the anticipation of finally receiving that item or event affect you in the meantime

In Romans 8:24, Paul referred to the future resurrection of our bodies as the hope in which we have been saved. As believers, we have a clear and certain hope that one day our bodies will be raised and renewed. At the rapture, the bodies of all Christians, living and dead, will be changed from these weak, perishable bodies to glorious imperishable bodies, after which we will live on the new earth with Jesus forever. This gives us a common reason for an amazing hope.

UNDERSTANDING

Last week we looked at 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 and discussed why it is vitally important for us that Christ rose from the dead. In this week's lesson, we will look at the remainder of this chapter, which begins with the questions, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" The answer to these questions will help us realize the amazing hope we have as Christians as we look forward to the resurrection of our own bodies.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-44

Paul begins answering the two questions asked in verse 35 by giving three analogies in verses 36-41. What three analogies does he use, and what point is he making with these analogies?

Paul used the analogies of how a seed grows into a plant, the differences between and the various types of flesh God has created in this world, and the differences in splendor between the heavenly bodies to help us understand the difference between our present bodies and the bodies we will receive at the rapture. In farming, a tiny seed that appears to be dead gives life to a new, much more glorious plant, which is actually based on the DNA stored in the seed. Similarly, God will transform our lowly bodies so that they will become like Christ's glorious body. Likewise, God has created many different kinds of flesh: humans, plants, animals, and birds all have different kinds of flesh. And the sun, moon, planets and stars each have differing kinds of glory in the sky. The main lesson here is that our glorified resurrected bodies will be much more glorious than our present bodies.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

How do these verses summarize the lessons Paul is teaching us through the analogies he used in 1 Corinthians 15?

Our current bodies have been made mortal by the fall and are now corrupted by our sinful natures. And these bodies are suitable for living on this earth. There are necessary changes that must occur to convert our natural bodies into immortal spiritual bodies suitable for the new heaven and new earth, where we will live forever in the presence of God.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:2, AND 1 JOHN 3:1-3

According to these verses, how well do we currently understand what our new bodies will be like?

What we will become has not yet been made known.

Note to study leader: Our current knowledge about the resurrection is compared to seeing in a mirror darkly. To understand this comment, we need to be thinking in light of (pardon the pun) first century mirrors, which are not very much like the mirrors we use today. First century mirrors were made out of polished metal, which would tarnish rapidly. So the reflection would be dark, discolored, and blurry.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:45-50

Paul makes one more comparison about how our current natural bodies will compare to our future spiritual bodies. What point is he making through the comparison between the first and last Adam?

The first man Adam was made from the dust of the ground. The second man Jesus came from heaven. And just as our current bodies bear the image of Adam, our heavenly bodies will bear the image of Christ.

Based on verse 50, what is the main reason this change in our bodies is required?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ROMANS 5:17-19

What do these verses from Romans add to the contrast between Adam and Jesus?

Adam's sin brought death to all of us. This includes physical death (dust you are, and to dust you will return"). And it also brought spiritual death to all of us. This is in direct contrast to Jesus, who made spiritual life available to all of us.

"Through the disobedience of Adam, a sentence of condemnation to death, without any promise or hope of a resurrection, passed upon all men; so, by the obedience of Christ unto death, this one grand righteous act, the sentence was so far reversed, that death shall not finally triumph, for all shall again be restored to life." Adam Clarke, Commentary on Romans

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

What is the mystery Paul referred to in verse 51? What happens to deceased Christians at the rapture? What happens to living Christians?

All Christians, the living and the dead, will be changed, exchanging the perishable for the imperishable.

How fast will this transformation take place?

In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. The word translated as "flash" in verse 52 is "atomos", which is where we get our word "atom" from. It means something that is so small, it can't be divided into anything smaller. And the word translated as "moment" is "rhipe", which means a stroke, beat, or the twinkle or blink of an eye. Either of these words alone means the briefest amount of time possible. And when they are used together, it only reinforces the speed at which this transformation will happen. When Christ returns, all believers will be instantaneously made like Him.

How should this truth affect our view of death?

Though we live in corruptible, aging bodies, we will one day be like Him. These verses describe that event as a victory where Christ is exalted and death has lost, unable to harm us ever again. This should give all of us great hope as Christians.

ASK A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

What do these verses describing the rapture add to what has been described in 1 Corinthians 15?

The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Note to study leader: The word translated as “caught up” in verse 17 is the Greek word “harpazo”, which when translated to Latin is “rapio”. This is the word from which we get the word “rapture” to describe this event.

Paul describes Christians who have died as being “asleep.” What does this imply about Christians who have died?

How is the grief of Christians different from the grief of non-Christians?

Grief is a normal response to death. Paul did not tell the believers not to mourn. Rather, Paul exhorted them not to grieve as the rest of humanity does. Atheists have no hope in the death of family or friends. These verses were written to encourage us by reminding us of the hope we have, as seen in verse 18.

Consider verse 18. What should be our response to discussing the Lord’s return for his church?

APPLICATION

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ 1 COR. 15:58, ROMANS 8:18, AND 1 PETER 1:3-4 and 8-9

How should the promise of our future resurrection affect our lives now as Christians?

This present life on earth is quite temporary, and our salvation is a sure thing. This makes all of our present sufferings not worth comparing to the eternal glory that will be revealed in us.

Why is our labor in the Lord not in vain?

In this chapter, Paul discussed the historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection, and the future reality of the resurrection of all believers. But all of it leads to his singular point and conclusion in verse 58. Our labor as Christians produces an eternal reward. The practical application is to focus our hope on the urgency of living faithfully in the present. This hope should shape everything about our lives as Christians. We live for Christ in the present because we love Him and know that everything we do for Christ matters for eternity.

“When you hear Jesus’ shout, the archangel’s voice, and God’s trumpet, you’ll know that you’re an eyeblink away from seeing your Savior’s face. Make sure you’re all about His business until He comes.”
David Jeremiah

PRAYER

Thank God for our sure hope in the resurrection, when our perishable, weak, sinful bodies will be upgraded into glorious immortal spiritual bodies. Thank God that our current lives in this present, fallen, and cursed world will be replaced by eternal life in the new heavens and new earth, where God himself will dwell with us; a place where there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for this old order of things will be done away with. Thank God for our Christian brothers and sisters at the Heights. Thank God for their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that during our time on this earth, our love for Christ and our hope in our resurrection will motivate us to live faithful lives as Christ’s ambassadors to this fallen world.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58

15:35-38. Paul compares human resurrection to the life-death-life cycle from agriculture. The seed body that dies gives rise to a totally different plant body, and yet there is retention of identity. So it is with our present bodies and our future resurrection bodies.

15:42-44. Having reviewed differentiations within the created order (vv. 35-41), Paul turns to differentiations of the resurrected body. It was sown in corruption and will be raised in incorruption. The body changes from a perishable body (a natural body) to an imperishable body (a spiritual body), though one that has physical characteristics (e.g., Luke 24:39). It is sown in dishonor and weakness, and it will be raised a glorious, imperishable body.

15:45. The first man Adam received the breath of life, a life that would become corruptible and perishable. In contrast, the last Adam (Jesus) will impart life, granting believers an incorruptible, imperishable, eternal body. Jesus will make believers alive through His life-giving Spirit, a power God alone wields.

15:46. Grammatically, the words the spiritual and the natural are in the neuter gender. They refer to two kinds of bodies (see v. 44) and not to Adam or Christ. “Spiritual” here refers to a body brought to life by the last Adam, Christ.

15:47-49. Paul contrasts the first man Adam and those who have borne his image with the second man and those who will bear his image. The first man was made of earth. This language emphasizes the transitory nature of those who are related to the first Adam, with bodies that return to dust. The “second man” from heaven refers to Jesus in His glorified humanity, as God-man and Messiah, who is coming from heaven to impart imperishable eternal bodies to those who have borne the image of the man made of dust.

15:50. Our earthly condition is such (flesh and blood and corruption, references to our perishable physical nature) that our Adamic bodies cannot inherit the kingdom, implying that they somehow must be changed.

15:51-53. Paul supports the above implication (v. 50) with an apostolic revelation that though not everyone will die before Christ’s coming, those who are alive when He comes will all be changed. No one is transported to the eternal state unchanged.

15:52. “In a moment” signifies the smallest possible division of something, in this case time. “Twinkling of an eye” similarly implies rapidity. Such will be the swiftness of the transformation of the living when the last trumpet sounds at Christ’s return.

15:53. The body that bears the image of the man of dust (the first Adam) must inevitably be changed into the incorruptibility and immortality of the body that bears the image of the man from heaven (the second Adam).

15:54-55. Paul conflates Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 in this citation. The exchange of corruptible for incorruptibility comes only when death and corruption are swallowed up by Jesus Christ. This passage does not teach the doctrine of “soul sleep”—a suspended state for believers between physical death and the change into glorified bodies. Believers are with the Lord immediately after death (see Luke 23:43; Acts 7:55-59; 2 Cor. 5:1-8).

15:56. This verse represents a theological aside that Paul developed further in a letter he wrote some months after this present one (see Rom. 7).

15:58. Most anything we do in this life is vanity (Eccl. 1:2-3), but labor in the Lord has eternal value.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

4:13. Paul was about to clear up some misunderstandings regarding death and the coming of Christ that were causing the Thessalonians a good deal of anxiety. Evidently these young Christians felt that those who died before the return of Christ would miss out. They must have thought there was a special advantage to being alive at Christ's return. This meant, in their minds, that there was a disadvantage for those who did not make it. Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians quit sorrowing and grieving like everyone else around them. People outside of Christ have no basis for facing death with hope. In the pagan world death was grim and full of despair. In our own time it is a mystery many people ignore. Consequently, deep anguish and sorrow were often expressed for the dead person. It was this kind of sorrowing that Paul wanted the Thessalonians to stop. The death of a Christian is something very different from the death of an unbeliever. The difference is the hope, the assurance, of resurrection. To straighten out their thinking and calm their fears, Paul went on to describe the coming of Christ and the place of the living and the dead in that magnificent event.

4:14. First Paul made an assertion of faith—that Jesus died and rose again. This is the bedrock of our faith. Paul then tied the truth of Christ to the unknown future. Whatever Christ does, His people follow. Wherever Christ is, His people are there. Christ died and rose again. Christians who die (fall asleep) will rise again. Christ will return again. Those who have died will return with Him. All of this is carried out by God's power.

4:15. Paul next introduced something new, a special revelation according to the Lord's own word. He received direct word from Christ about what followed. Paul's primary concern was not to teach an eschatological lesson but to assure and encourage the young church at Thessalonica. He did this by stating with the authority of Christ's words that everyone who is alive on earth at the time of Christ's coming will not go before those who have died. Paul was pointing the believers away from grief toward hope regarding those who had died.

4:16–17. Paul then handed the readers a program of sorts, an order of service. Christ is coming, and this is how it will occur: The Lord, Christ himself, will come down. There will be a lot of noise. The dead believers will rise first. Christians who are still alive on earth will rise next. Everyone meets together with Christ in the air. Eternity begins! The Lord himself will come down: The rapture of believers is a very personal affair. Christ Himself will be there in His great and shining glory. With a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God: It is debated whether this describes one great sound, or whether two or three distinct sounds will occur. The "shout" or "loud command" could signify the shout of triumph expressed by Christ, the conqueror of death, as He descends from heaven. Whether it is one or more sounds, the coming of Christ will apparently be a noisy event. It is also debated whether unbelievers will be aware of His coming. This is not clarified. It could be that, like those who accompanied Saul on the road to Damascus, something will be heard, but the source or significance will not be comprehended. The dead in Christ will rise first: The dead believer is still in Christ.

Nothing can separate us from Christ once we belong to Him—not even death. Yet, though their souls are with Christ, they are to receive resurrected bodies. It is this rising that Paul spoke of. God will bring with Jesus those who have died (v. 14). The first order of business is their resurrection to glorified bodies. After that, we who are still alive will be caught up: There is probably no great time span implied here, for everything will happen in "the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). There will be people from every nation on earth when Christ returns, and these will be "caught up." The word can be translated "snatched, swept up, carried away by force." The Lord literally "snatches" the bodies of the living, and they are transformed and their bodies glorified. These two groups, the living and the dead, will join Christ in the clouds. This is a great company. All believers back through the centuries will join those who are living at that moment, forming the church united with its head, Christ. And then we will be with the Lord forever.

4:18. Paul's conclusion: Therefore (in view of this) encourage each other with these words.