

**The Resurrection Of The Body**  
**Luke 24:36-49**  
**April 14, 2024**

Earlier this year we finally got around to cleaning out our laundry room. Among the various items we discovered was the still new formal dress that our oldest daughter was supposed to wear to her senior prom. That was four years ago, when Covid shut everything down. That prom was one of several important rites of passage that she never got to experience.

I think that unworn dress symbolizes a lot of things, and not just about Covid. It could be a metaphor for how a lot of people think about life. Here we are, all dressed up, with nowhere to go. We pour our time and energy into building a life for ourselves – accumulating wealth, building a reputation, earning achievements, forming relationships, working hard, nurturing beauty, trying to do the right thing – and then death comes along and ends it all, usually far sooner than we had hoped. Like a beautiful dress that never gets worn, we wonder if it is worth it.

The anxiety around that question leads to all sorts of confusion about happens when we die. If you look and listen closely, you will hear several ideas circulating in our popular culture about the possibility of existence beyond the grave. One idea is that there is no existence beyond the grave. You die, and that is that. So, make the best of whatever short time you have,

because this is all you've got. Of course, this isn't necessarily the most popular view, because too many people find it too hopeless. So, we have come up with other ways of accounting for what happens to us when we die.

For example, there are various beliefs about reincarnation, which says that at death the soul is set free from the body, and then enters a different body to go through the whole cycle of life again, and that this process repeats itself for eternity. Others espouse some form of the idea that the soul is set free to simply become one with the universe, such that our departed loves ones now connect with us in the wind that blows or the rain that falls. Others speak about ghosts and spirits that inhabit the unseen world, who in paranormal ways can still communicate with us. Still others – and this is unfortunately true in Christian circles – think that we when we die, we become angels who grow wings and float around in God's presence.

Now these various ideas come in all shapes and sizes, and we don't have time to explore any of them in detail, but they all have at least two things in common. One, all these ideas pay close attention to the soul and yet give no thought to what happens to the body. And second, and most importantly, none of these ideas align with what Scripture teaches. The Bible has something very specific and very distinctive to say about how God deals with the reality of

death. The Bible doesn't give us a vague concept about life after death. The Bible teaches the resurrection of the body.

From the beginning of the Biblical account, our bodies are central to the story. Genesis 2:7 says, "*Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*" Note the order of things there: man did not become a living being until there was a body for that living being to inhabit. In other words, body and soul came into being together. From the beginning, we humans are physical and spiritual beings at that same time. We are not souls looking for bodies to inhabit; we are a body and a soul that live together.

But, as important as the origin of our bodily existence is, what is even more important is the destiny of our bodily existence. The central claim of the New Testament is that Jesus died on a Friday, and then was alive again on a Sunday. But as Jesus Himself emphatically makes clear, He was not alive as some disembodied spirit floating around on the breeze. Jesus was alive in the body, as a body.

In the last verses of Luke 24 Jesus meets with all the disciples together. According to what we just read, they all thought he was a ghost! But Jesus acts immediately to both calm their fears and to change their thinking. The text says he does it in

two ways. First, he shows them his hands and his feet. This is a reference to the nail marks, which confirmed his identity; he was the same Jesus they had seen executed on Friday. As Jesus himself said in verse 39, *“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”*

The second thing Jesus did was ask for a piece of broiled fish to eat. I don't know much about ghosts, but I doubt they are big fish eaters. However, if you are a Jewish man who has spent much of your life along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where people eek out an existence by fishing – well, then a piece of broiled fish is exactly what you want when you are hungry. As improbable as it might be, the Jesus who had died in the body on Friday is alive in the body on Sunday.

So, when it comes to understanding what becomes of the believer after death, here's our first clue: God gave a body to His risen son. Here's the second clue: What God did for Jesus, He will also do for us who belong to Him. Later in the New Testament, in the book of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul claims that the resurrection of Christ is a foretaste what will also happen to us. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, he says, *“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* In

other words, God thinks so highly of the body that He not only gave one to His risen Son; he will also give one to us.

Now, right away there are two things that we have to say about this resurrection body. The first is that it is gloriously different. There are some obvious differences between Jesus' resurrection body and the one He had before the crucifixion. For example, if you will remember from last week's story, the risen Jesus was able to suddenly disappear from people's sight. This suggests Jesus' resurrection body isn't limited by space and time in the way that we know it. Somehow, this resurrection body has properties that we cannot understand, and it moves through dimensions of reality that we cannot presently see.

Our first instinct might be to dismiss such stories as nonsense because it doesn't fit with our best understanding of science. And yet, the fact is that our best understanding of science is showing us that there are complex realities of space and time that science itself cannot yet explain. If you are brave enough, ask a physicist to describe quantum mechanics to you. Don't ask me, because I can't, but I can tell you that our best science is telling us there are dimensions of reality we are just beginning to understand.

In the resurrection, Jesus in his glorified state seems to fill all those dimensions. His resurrection brings together the world we can see with the world we cannot see. And as it is with him, so will

it be for us. Again, hear what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44: *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”* That last phrase is critical. We will have a spiritual body. What does that mean? I am not sure exactly; no one is sure exactly. But at the very least it means our resurrection bodies will take on some sort of glorified state.

And yet, ironically, here is the second thing we can say about our resurrection bodies: while they will be gloriously different, they will also be gloriously the same. In other words, they will still be our bodies, and we will still be known to each other by them. Notice that in all the stories we find in the gospels about Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances, the disciples are eventually able to recognize Jesus for who He is. In most cases they are confused at first, because it seems inconceivable to them that Jesus could be alive again, but once they get past that initial shock they are able to see that, yes, it is Jesus. As it was for Him, so will it be for us. There will be a continuity of our identity from this life into the life that is to come.

Now, as curious as we may be to understand how all this will happen, it is far more important we understand why all this

matters. What difference does it make whether we will experience resurrection in the body or not? I think it makes a huge difference, for at least 3 reasons. First, the “bodyliness” of our eternity in Christ is tied directly to our understanding of morality and righteousness. The choices we make about what we do with our bodies is inescapably and inextricably tied to our moral character. God created our bodies, and he has placed eternal value on our bodies, so we cannot be faithful and obedient to him unless we align our bodies – how we use them and what we do with them – according to his purposes.

Think for example about the sexual permissiveness of our culture, which tells us we should be free to do whatever we want with whoever we want whenever we want. Where does this idea come from? It comes from the idea that what we do with our bodies doesn't really matter, because it is only a body. We are told that what really matters like feelings and desires and impulses we have and that the body only exists as a means of fulfilling those non-physical things.

But the Christian view – the Biblical view – is very different. According to Scripture, the way we use our bodies is directly tied to the way we respond to the sovereignty of God, In Romans 12:1, the Apostle Paul writes, “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your **bodies***

*as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.*” There is a lot in that verse we could unpack if we had the time, but for now the key is the word “body.” Paul tells us to offer our bodies as a sacrifice, which means we should bring our physical selves into alignment with his will.

Sexuality is only one example of how this applies. This also applies to the challenge of self-care. Why should we take care of our bodies? The secular world tells us the only reason is so we can avoid or delay death, but the Christian has a different reason. We know that no matter how much we exercise or how good our nutrition is, eventually these bodies we have are going to waste away. But in the meantime, we recognize our bodies are created by God, and God has placed an eternal value on our bodies. We are therefore called to be good stewards of what God has created. What we do with our bodies is directly tied to our moral character and to our striving after righteousness. We are going to be in a body for all of eternity, we should use it in a way that honors the one who created it.

Here’s a second reason the resurrection of the body matters: it shapes and informs our ministries of care and compassion. Jesus drew lots of attention to himself because of the way he healed the sick and fed the hungry and opened the eyes of the blind and gave relief to the disabled. Now, a full Biblical



theology requires us to see that Jesus did more than just heal the sick and feed the hungry. But at the same time, Jesus' ministry was also never about less than healing the sick or feeding the hungry. And as followers of Him, we cannot be either.

In our day we have drawn an artificial distinction between physical needs and spiritual needs. In our day this gets expressed as a false choice between either saving souls for heaven or caring for physical needs in the present moment. But I emphasize this is a false choice. As followers of a crucified and risen Christ, and as those who ourselves will one day be raised up with an imperishable spiritual body, we are called to do both at the same time. Our calling is to care for the very real physical needs of our neighbors while also calling for the repentance of sin and the receiving of eternal salvation that comes only by faith in Jesus Christ. These things go hand in hand. Our Lord's brother says in James 2:15-17, *"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*

So, every time we extend the hand of compassion or mercy to someone in need; every time we provide food for the hungry; every time we offer care to the sick or comfort for the dying; every

time we sit with someone in pain or do anything to ease another's burden; every time we work for justice for the oppressed or to protect the vulnerable, we are bearing witness to the One who was raised up by the power of God, and who will one day raise us up with Him. The resurrection of the body shapes and demands our ministries of compassion and care.

This leads directly to the final point we will consider. The resurrection of the body matters because it deepens our awe and wonder at the full scope of God's saving love. God loves me enough that He is willing to save all of me and not just parts of me. The book of Genesis says we are created in the image of God, but that same book also goes on to make it clear that this image has been severely tarnished by the reality of sin. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, God is at work to restore the fullness of that image. In the resurrection we who are joined to Christ by faith will be restored to the original human glory for which we were created.

And while we are at it, so will all of creation. We turn again to the Apostle Paul, who wrote this in Romans 8:18-21 – *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by*

*the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”* Do you sense the fullness of that? The gospel isn't some vague hope about some disembodied life after death. The gospel is about nothing less the complete renewal of everything that sin has corrupted. We cannot understand everything that means. There is mystery here that our limited imaginations cannot comprehend, but God is at work to make all things new.

So, back to that prom dress still hanging in our laundry room. The young lady who never got to wear it – well, in less than four weeks she will graduate from college. We can look back at that disappointment from four years ago and laugh because life has gone on since then to be more amazing and beautiful than we could have imagined. I think that is the right metaphor for life. We are not dressed up with no place to go. Yes, this life is going to throw things at us that are hard and painful, up to and including death itself. But because of what Christ has accomplished, there is something great and glorious that awaits us. Which means that the things which matter in this life – the things that really matter – they matter for all eternity. Goodness matters. Compassion matters. Beauty matters. Righteousness matters. Justice matters. Truth

matters, because one day we will be raised up to see Him with our own eyes.