

Raised and Reigning

I Corinthians 15:35-58

Introduction

This morning we introduced a four part series that Pastor Devon will bring the punch for next week. Our short series, "Full-Bodied Faith: Implications from a Corporeal Creation" is intended to discuss some of the concerns that arise from a failure to fully understand the nature of our "creatureliness" particularly in the expression of Christian living. This morning, by examining several related texts from the first chapters of the book of Genesis, it was shown that our embodied existence was the intention of the Creator in order for us to fulfill the purpose of bearing and extending His "image" throughout the world. What we only alluded to this morning was the recognition that mankind is something *more* than merely a body. The Scriptures are clear to convey that we are not just a "dust-derived" shell. Pastor Devon and I have a goal to counter a common misconception that man's bodily existence is imperfect and somehow requires a spiritual move "beyond" to fully carry out God's plan for our lives both now and in the future. We are not proposing a view identified as "monism" that in its current expression is a materialistic view. Nor are we endorsing a mystical dualism that somehow we are merely encased in a physical "shell." We are however proposing what some in philosophical circles refers to a holistic dualism, in that we are intended to be embodied but yet we continue in continuous, conscious existence after death and prior to resurrection. Do not get lost on me at this point, This evening we will continue to lay more "groundwork" that Pastor Devon will harvest the more significant implications and application.

The failure of humankind was the context that we suggested supplied the true and perfect image of *the Son* to become the perfect human and exercise God's intent completely and comprehensively. This evening we will present a text from Paul's first letter to the church in the city of Corinth found in the fifteenth chapter that elaborates on the consequences to that event.

The church in Corinth had found itself embroiled in numerous conflicts and failures. Paul had spent some time teaching and establishing this work, and no doubt due to the city's strategic commercial location, the church was exposed to a constant influx of ideas that were both encouraging and destructive. In this letter Paul has systematically confronted them on their failures and answered their questions regarding a host of issues facing them. When we reach chapter fifteen in our reading we find an extended address regarding the nature of mankind's future existence. For Paul this is integral to the message of the gospel which is a recurring theme in many of these controversies. The power of the gospel is demonstrated in the resurrection of the Christ. Resurrection is a key feature of understanding the nature and implications of the gospel for eternity and for the "here and now."

In order to get the feel of the full argument, it is important for us to read a larger segment of text. Turn in your copy of Scripture to Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians and chapter fifteen and we will begin reading in verse thirty-five.

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 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. 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.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As 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. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Assumption (verse 38):

As this discussion of the resurrection unfolds, a rhetorical question is presented “how are the dead raised?” Now the context tells us the answer is not *how* can it happen, but with what result. Once someone is dead and decayed, *how* can they be brought back to life? Imagine trying to answer this by referring to a recent zombie movie. The answer that Paul unfolds is not that there is no longer a bodily existence, in essence a spiritual, immaterial personality. No, he says plainly, God gives it a body. We see this in verse 38. That humankind will exist as embodied remains the intention and the plan. This intention is still the principle *assumption* that Paul is using that has continuity from the first chapters of Genesis.

Analogy (verse 39):

However Paul goes on to say that the particulars of this bodily existence is different. He draws a significant comparison between various “types” of bodies. And by body he is intending us to think of restricted, local existence. The body we will possess following the resurrection will be different yet *analogous* to the body we currently hold. Paul even uses the idea of flesh, for in verse 39 he says, “not all flesh is the same.” The point is to describe difference without moving too far away from what is known about the current bodily existence.

Intention (verse 53):

When we read down to verse 50 we come to a startling fact that we often overlook in our reading. This little statement has far-reaching effects on how we read our Bibles. Paul very clearly tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” Think about this statement briefly. Think in particular about this statement with what we said from this morning’s texts in Genesis. Think about this statement with respect to the purpose or *intention* of the nature of creation.

We made the assertion that mankind was created in a special and particular way in a special and particular context to uniquely be the image bearers of the king, extending and expanding that authority over all the creation. Do we think God changed his *intention*? That is why we titled the point regarding the passage dealing with the fall as “promise.” A changed existence from one body type to another is part of the *intention*. In verse 53 we read that “this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality.” It must. An eternal, imperishable body was the intention all along and initially was created not to die. But in that execution of judgment was a promise of a new and better body.

Confidence (verse 57):

Now that “better body” is still a body. Our victory comes in “how” or more particular in our text “through whom?” Verse 57 gives our *confidence* in that our Lord Jesus Christ has won the victory. The man, born of Mary, raised in Nazareth, tempted, betrayed, crucified; all without sin, with the name, Jesus; he gives us the victory. He took on this “flesh,” redeemed it and came forth from the grave with it. Jesus went into heaven with this resurrected body, changed but still in continuity with the body he took on in the womb of Mary. Our confidence is not to be that we will be removed from this body, but that this body will be perfected and changed.

Reflect and Respond:

The traditional “reflect and respond” conclusion of this sermon is somewhat extended. Next week Pastor Devon will connect these ideas to the “nitty-gritty” of daily living. But we don’t want to leave this week until we connect the themes of today to the power of gospel. Understand the gospel to be all that God has done in Christ to bring us back into a right relationship with the Father. And the gospel involves a bodily reality. Jesus Christ procured salvation through a number of discernable events. Let’s look at several of these and see how the intention of bodily existence impacts how we see each of these works.

First of all Christ came to the earth and took on a human body. Known by theologians as “the incarnation”, this word literally means to be “in flesh.” It is the taking on of our created nature. This involved the full embodiment in both appearance and function. Robert Peterson puts the importance of the incarnation this way: “Only a divine-human Redeemer would do. If the Son had not become a human being, he could not have lived a sinless human life, died, and risen again to deliver his people. He could not have ascended, sat down at God’s right hand, poured out the Holy Spirit, interceded for his own and come again. To perform these saving works, he had to become one of us.”

Also Christ lived a sinless life in this body. Another theologian Robert Letham says this: “To be sure, Jesus is fully human: there could be no salvation unless the Word had become flesh. But did full and true humanity require sinfulness? The answer to that must be no...The ultimate goal of our salvation is seen as final deliverance from sin and its consequences. Life and righteousness will replace death and condemnation. Will we be less than human for that? In fact the reverse will be true. We shall be fulfilled as men and women, remade in the image of God.”

Christ died, his life in the body came to an end. This involved the cessation of his heartbeat and the absence of brain activity. He did not swoon, faint or somehow trick his observers and leave the tomb. He not only died physically but experienced the abandonment of His Father, because of the sins of his people, not for his own crimes.

Christ's resurrection gives us life and affirms that God's intent is to have his worship emanate from those possessing an eternal body. Christ rose with a real, although changed body. Robert Peterson again has this comment: "Because Jesus loved us, gave himself for us, and conquered death by rising from the dead, we are regenerated now. This is in anticipation of our future resurrection unto final salvation, which also is the result of Jesus' resurrection... The crucified and resurrected Christ already has begun the new age. He gives eternal life now to all who believe in him [in] regenerating them. He will raise them from the dead to eternal life in resurrected bodies when he comes again."

Christ's bodily ascension affirms an eternal bodily (although glorified) existence for humanity. Again Robert Peterson remarks: "Then Christ ascended into heaven, taking with him the complete human nature that he had during his incarnation. Once there, Christ became the forerunner of humanity. Through Christ's ascension he did everything necessary to reestablish intimate relationship between humanity and divinity. He abolished everything that separated from God those who are now joined to Christ."

Our hope is not to be removed from the body but to experience the full enabling of the Spirit. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner in their commentary on First Corinthians have this comparison derived from chapter fifteen.

The first Adam was:

Living being
Natural (soulish)
First Man
Dust/of the earth
Earthly man
His people are those who
are of the earth and bear
his image.

The last Adam was:

Life-giving spirit
Spiritual
Second Man
Of heaven
Heavenly man
His people are those who
are of heaven and shall
bear his image.

So what should we do now, in our current condition. Many of us are under the power of addiction, have the weakness of disease, face the limitations of our wisdom and are lacking in the functioning understanding of the gospel and its power. We often think of these concerns and then blame the situations on our bodily existence. The answer is not to long for an existence without our bodies but rather, live embodied now. Live now in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We must live by faith and be settled on our confident and sure hope for victory. Come next week to hear Pastor Devon talk more about our lives in this context.

Resources/References:

The quotes from Peterson are from:

Peterson, Robert A. *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*. Wheaton, Crossway. 2012.

This is a very readable discussion of the nature of the gospel and its implications.