

“The Believer’s Resurrection”

John 6: 35-40

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Text: ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus said he will raise up his own “at the last day.” When will that be? Where will we be between physical death and that day? Will every human being who ever lived be raised up? All good questions about the “Believer’s Resurrection.” First, let us pray.

In considering this matter of resurrection, I have a question for God’s people: have you ever considered what makes a human being, an image-bearer of God himself...what is it that separates us from the animals or the plants or the planets? They have physical attributes the same as we have. But we have spiritual elements that they do not have. They cannot exist without their physical attributes. Destroy a tree...burn it up and it is gone. Destroy a man...burn him up and his body is gone but he remains. Yet, in that state without a body, he cannot be what God the creator intended him to be. That is, God never intended His image-bearers to be just spirits. No, He designed them to be both physical and spiritual beings. So, from the moment physical death became a reality for man, God was determined to correct the problem.

I think God absolutely gave His son this command: “I want you to redeem the ones I am giving you by saving their spirits and then raising them up with new bodies! As long as they exist only on a spiritual realm, they will be incomplete. A human being made in the image of God without a body is by definition incomplete. He is like a musical score without an instrument. Wind without a sailboat. Man must be a spiritual and physical being to be man as God designed him. Thus, the resurrection of the redeemed has to be true and certain if God is God as we find Him in the Bible. Our resurrections to come are not just because God is nice and loves us. God loves His own glory and His glory is diminished if man is disembodied; His Divine Design is marred. We must be resurrected.

The Lord Jesus gave a reason that he would “raise up” the sheep the Father gave him. Think about that for a moment please. We always think that our promised resurrection someday will come because Jesus loves us and went to the Cross for us. And that is true and he certainly did go to the Cross for us! But have we considered that our promised resurrection is not a separate event from the Cross but rather a continuation of his obedience to the Father’s will? I think...that the real impetus for our promised resurrection lies in this verse:

John 8:29 (NIV) ²⁹ “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”

Jesus said he always does what is pleasing to his Father. And what would please his Father is that none of us should be lost and that we should all be given new bodies! The resurrection of the believer is a “must do” on Jesus’ list! If Jesus does not raise us up he will have failed his Father and that will never happen! That’s good news! Now, at this point, let us examine three common theological misunderstandings.

FIRST: THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN BODY IS MISUNDERSTOOD.

In reality, the human body is of great importance and dignity as it was made by God! Putting it as a question: is the human body itself inherently valuable to God who made it? The answer is positively and dramatically “Yes!” In fact, the church has suffered from some real confusion about the human body. In part because of a misunderstanding of the word “flesh.” Paul by the Holy Spirit said:

Romans 13:14 (NASB) 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

But when Paul spoke of the “flesh” he was not condemning our bodies. That was simply the word he used to mean our “sin natures.” This is a classic case of our needing to understand the figurative language being used. This is why some translations, quite correctly in my view, translate that passage differently. Such as:

Romans 13:14 (NIV) 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Please note: it is also true that the Word of God uses that word “sarx” for flesh in its literal sense meaning our physical bodies. We read these words about the Lord Jesus in John’s Gospel:

John 1:14 (NIV) 14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

So, understanding Paul's use of the word requires deep study of Paul's complete theology. He would not have condemned the literal physical flesh as evil. In fact, this verse in John Chapter One re-enforces the point that the human body is of great value and has received all the more dignity by the incarnation! The Son of God...the Christ...came into the world as a man! As a human being he declared, among other things, that the body is good and was supposed to be the embodiment of a spirit that does not sin. Jesus lived in the literal flesh but did not sin! Since we are called to be like Jesus, we must strive to limit sin while in these bodies. We will not be sinless but we can move away from sin.

The born-again person must not sin with their bodies. Paul by the Holy Spirit says:

1 Corinthians 6:16 (NIV) 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

Rather, Paul says that our bodies are sacred! He writes:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV) 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The first misunderstanding that has circulated among religious people thru the ages, including among some Christians, is that our human bodies...our physical selves are not important or valuable. That could not be further from the truth. In fact, part of what makes us human is that we are spiritual beings joined to physical bodies. Little wonder then that Jesus said that he was under instructions from the Father to raise us up with new bodies. He must do that!

SECOND: THE NATURE OF GOD IS OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD.

The most prominent example of this in the Bible can be found in the theology of the Sadducees. They were a rather aristocratic group who proudly insisted that the only teachings they would follow were found in the Pentateuch...the Five Books of Moses. So, since the five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy did not explicitly teach a resurrection of the righteous, they refused to believe it.

One thing not fully realized about the Sadducees is that they did not have Messianic hopes. Therefore, they would have been dismissive about Jesus. Beyond that, they showed no interest in the concept of an afterlife. So, they not only rejected the promise of resurrection but considered it an absurd addendum to the idea of an afterlife. This explains why Jesus' reply to them is addressed not primarily to resurrection but to Heaven and afterlife itself.

One day, they decided to put Jesus on the stand and armed with their theology they came and said this:

Matthew 22:24-28 (NIV) ²⁴ "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷ Finally, the woman died. ²⁸ Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

The Sadducees are really quite clever and they think they have Jesus back on his heels in this argument. They are saying to him, in effect, "Where do you find Moses speaking of resurrection? Nowhere!" But Jesus often teaches theological truths by simple common sense. Such as when he tells them God will give good things to His own by saying:

Matthew 7:11 (NIV) ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Now...Jesus is going to prove that both the afterlife and the resurrection are assumed by Moses and he does this....not by giving them a verse...but by suggesting common sense. Let us listen closely:

Matthew 22:29-32 (NIV) ²⁹ Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰ At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

First, Jesus told them they did not understand the Scriptures. Then he said they did not understand God Himself! Why? Because God the Father is not willing to be God over the graveyard! He is not God over the dead but over the living! And because of his power, He is able to guard the living spirits of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to give them bodies suitable for eternal life!

It's interesting that Jesus did not say "Because God claims to be [Exodus 3:6] the God of the living there must be an afterlife since those men died!" No, Jesus is saying that when God says He is the God of the living, that means there is an afterlife...and there must be a resurrection! Again, in order for them to be living

human beings they must eventually be resurrected! Thus, Jesus proves the Sadducees denied God's power because they misunderstood the Word of God and thus misunderstood the nature of what makes a human a human! Body joined to spirit! And worst of all, they misunderstood God himself!

THIRD MISUNDERSTANDING: RESURRECTED BODIES CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD OR ENVISIONED...THEREFORE RESURRECTION MUST BE JUST WISHFUL THINKING!

Let us admit something. We do have very reasonable common-sense questions. Will Jesus raise up *these* bodies? What if they are already reduced to dust? What if they've been cremated either by choice or the person died in an explosion or fire? I think we cannot know. We see that the Lord Jesus Christ raised up Lazarus from the dead, and others. But they all died again while in this life. So, their resurrected bodies were not the same as the bodies we will have in the new world.

Science suggests that matter cannot be created or destroyed but only transformed. I don't know about that but I do know that a human body begins to decompose immediately at physical death. So, it would not matter to God if a body was cremated or was only dead for an hour. Resurrecting such a body would mean re-composition and God certainly could bring those same elements back together in a moment.

On the other hand, a great theologian like J.I. Packer says our current bodies are like old jalopies! We love them but they break down all the time! Packer writes:

“In raising believers, God completes their redemption by the gift not of their old bodies somehow patched up, but of new bodies for new men. Through regeneration and sanctification God has already renewed us inwardly; now we receive new bodies to match. The new body is linked with the old yet is different from it...” [“Affirming the Apostle's Creed” p. 136].

That last sentence from Dr. Packer where he speaks of a new body “linked with the old” reminds me of a project awhile back in our garage. An old bookshelf was somehow knocked forward and one side split apart. Rather than toss it out, I took some time and re-built the broken side and used the rest of the shelves to sort of resurrect it. In any case, the old was linked with the new. But those are just my modest thoughts.

The good news is that our first century Christian friends had the same set of questions! Consider how Paul responded by the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 15:35-38 (NIV) ³⁵ But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶ How foolish!

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

In that passage, Paul suggests our current bodies will be to our new bodies as a seed is to a mature plant. But the new body will be very different in critical ways! We read:

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (NIV) ⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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.

By “spiritual body” Paul does not mean invisible bodies but new bodies perfectly suited to our lives living spiritually without sin and in the new creation. That will mean many different characteristics including new brains free of sinful memories and depravity. In short, we will be much like Jesus. Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 15:49 (NIV) ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

But let’s tell the truth here. We’re not sure that we want to be quite like Jesus! We are accustomed to joy in life being primarily provided through the satisfaction of physical appetites. Recreation, romance, sports, music and media...somehow the life Jesus led seems almost emotionally austere. Yes, he feasted and even ate with his disciples after his resurrection. But we see him as the great “other” who was always the onlooker at humanity. We’re not sure what it will be like to await our resurrection in a spiritual state and then be transformed to like him!

But we forget that the Jesus we see in the Word of God was not at home here on Earth. When we see him in his real home, we will see him in his full personhood! When we are with him in resurrected bodies like he has...in a world without sin...we will experience new pleasures both physical and emotional that are will be totally satisfying. Our lives in our new bodies in a world without sin will make these lives look like we were living in a dark and damp basement. And so we end our thoughts about the believer’s resurrection with this reminder from the Word of God:

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV) ⁹ However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--

Let us pray.