

1 Corinthians 15v35-48

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Date: 04 October 2026

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[0:00] We're in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and the plan is that we'll finish out chapter 15 this evening, and I'm preaching away over the next few weeks. We'll do 16 in a few weeks.

time. Andrew Quay will be doing a series in the evenings in Romans over the next few weeks. There are some things in life that no matter how many times we're told or they are explained to us, we just don't get it. I just don't get it that massive ships, whether they be huge oil tankers or cruise ships, can float. You think about cruise ships. They have water inside them, and they still float. I think it's called the Icon of the Seas. It's the biggest cruise ship out there in the pantheon of cruise ships. The Icon of the Seas is the biggest. It weighs 250,000 tons. It's got an amusement park and multiple swimming pools. How on earth does that thing float?

I just don't get it. You say, oh, well, look, you don't understand the Archimedes principle. What the Archimedes principle tells us is that an object floats when the weight of the water it displaces equals the total weight of the object. You need to get your head around something called buoyant force root, and that's the issue. I understand the words. I know what you're saying, but I still don't get it. You can describe the science as much as you like. You can give me the information. You can give me all the details, but I still don't get how it is actually possible. Now, it's the same for many people when it comes to the Christian faith. Maybe that's you, and you're here this evening. Can I say, if that is you, keep bringing your questions, and keep asking them, and keep pursuing answers because there are answers.

But you're here, and you think to yourself, look, you've told me that God came to earth as a man. The God who made heaven and earth became a man and came to the earth that He made. He lived a perfect life. Never seen that happen before, and He died under the judgment of God for the sins of others. He rose again from the dead three days later. I've been here on Sunday nights.

[2:21] I've heard you talking about that. Never seen that happen. I don't understand how that works. Yeah, He's now seated at the right hand of God in heaven. You've told me that, and anyone who turns from their sins and puts their faith in Him will be forgiven and reconciled to God and will receive eternal life on the basis of what He has done, not on the basis of what you do. I understand the words.

I know what you're saying, but I still don't get it. Well, as I say, keep pressing in for answers if that's you. Keep coming, because the Lord Jesus tells us that if we genuinely seek Him, He's not hiding, and we will find Him.

We will come to believe it. The ability to believe those things is something that He gives as a gift. So ask Him. I think perhaps, though, the point that is most difficult to grasp in all of the story is the idea of resurrection, the idea that we've been looking at over these Sunday evenings in chapter 15 that the Apostle Paul has been discussing there. And it isn't, if we're honest, just a problem for those looking into Christianity. Because what it means for Christ to be the first fruits of a harvest of those who will be raised is something that even those who follow Christ aren't altogether clear about. So we can understand, if you look, chapter 15, verse 35, Paul introduces a possible Corinthian questioner. But someone will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? Now, it seems that the Corinthians, all the way through this letter, have been engaging with Paul in a kind of impertinent way. They're smug in themselves, and they're very accusatory in the way that they engage with him. And there's a bit of a sense of that here. Paul is kind of saying, No, I'm sure someone will ask, How are the dead raised? What kind of body do they come with?

And that's why verse 36, he says, They're being foolish. Don't come back again with the kind of superior, trying-to-be-clever way of asking the question. But in itself, the question is an understandable question, is it not? It is hard to imagine what the resurrection will look and feel like. How does this, the physical, become spiritual? How does that happen? Paul talks in verse 47,

about the natural, earthly body. He talks about a natural body or an earthly body. We can get our heads around that because we know it. We experience it. We can feel it. We can touch it. But what does the spiritual, what does the heavenly, what's that going to mean? And what does it even, what does it mean? Now, it's important, I think, to say that some sense of confusion about this, being able to get to the end of ourselves and say, I don't know, actually. That's okay. Verse 51, Paul describes it all as a mystery. There are aspects of the future resurrection that we will experience that we won't grasp until we get there, and that's okay. But as Paul teases this out, he describes for us two familiar principles that help our understanding. They are the principles of change and the principle of difference. And Paul shows us how we see them both in creation, in the world around us, and in Christ. So those are the two principles he has for us. The first is change. Point number one, change. 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. When you have seeds, they look one way. You can see them, you look at them, there's a seed, and then you plant them. They go into the ground, the seed dies, and as the plant grows, you have something that looks very different come up out of the ground. You had the seed, you put the seed in the ground, something else comes up that's very different. How does this happen? Oh, it's all about germination, it's about photosynthesis. Yes, I know what you call it, but how do these things happen? Oh, well, it's about oxygen and carbon. Yes, but how does it happen? How is it that that changes into that? [7:07] The answer is God does it. Either the world is random, and it's just a complete chance fluke, or God does it. God decides how the wheat will grow. God decides what it will look like when it comes up out of the ground. There is continuity with the seed. The seed is there, but it changes as it is clothed by God with another body. Verse 38.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. Verse 42, the seed is planted perishable. It is changed to the imperishable. It is planted in dishonor. It is changed to glory. It is planted weak. It is raised powerful. It is planted as a natural thing. It is raised as a spiritual thing.

We understand the principle of change from horticulture or agriculture. So when you think about what your future resurrection will be like, think of yourself as a seed that is sown into the ground, planted in God's garden, and the body that emerges later will have continuity with this one, but it will be changed. God will change it. God will grow out of the seed of your body planted into the ground the resurrection body that He has chosen. There will be change. Second principle is difference. 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 different kinds of seed, lots of different kinds of plants out there.

It's no different than God's garden. There are humans, there are animals, there are birds, and there are fish. And those different seeds will produce different bodies. And there will be differences between us in the resurrection. There won't be one generic person of heaven. In the resurrection, we won't all look the same with the generic kind of cookie-cutter resurrection person thing. We'll not all be the same. We're not all equal now, and we won't be then either. And each person's glory will be different according to their kind. Look at verse 40. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. For star differs from star in glory.

[9:44] When I was a boy, we went on a school trip. It was a very exotic school trip. We went to London, and we did lots of cool things. I went to the Tower of London, went to the Greenwich Observatory, and we saw singing in the rain in the London Palladium, and it actually rained in the theater.

If you're a wee boy from Belfast, that's pretty amazing, I can tell you. And it was. And we had to write. We got back to school. We had to write an essay about the trip, and we had to talk about what we thought about it all and explain what our experience was like. And I listed the various things that we had done, and I said, and we went to the Greenwich Observatory, and it was great, and we went to singing in the rain, and it was amazing, and we went, and it was brilliant, and all this kind of stuff. And I read the essay to my dad before I turned it in, and he said, he went like this, ah, very boring. You need to describe things properly, Reuben.

I said, well, singing in the rain. He said, what was it like? I said, oh, it was great. He said, that's about amount. That's a quantity. Oh, it was brilliant. That's about brightness. I tried a few others. They were no good. He said, it brought you delight. Singing in the rain was delightful. Okay, wrote that in. Mocked mercilessly by my friends at school, because that's not the kind of language that they used. Anyway, when we talked about the observatory, I ran through the same kinds of words. Stars were really far away. The sky was this and that and the other, and we cycled through these same words, and we settled then on glorious. That was the word that I was to use.

The night sky was glorious. That is the right word, isn't it? When you look at the sun, you go outside, and you say, what a glorious day. It's the same with the moon. When it's full in the night sky, you look up and you say, wow, because it's glorious. If you can find a clear night somewhere in this country, certainly you need to travel for a while. If you stare up at the stars, if you can see on a clear night in the countryside somewhere, it takes your breath away.

Now, every single one of those stars is glorious, but they aren't the same, and their glory is seen in different ways. When your time has come and your earthly body is sewn into the ground, the imperishable, glorified, powerful spiritual body that is raised will be different from the bodies of others, but it will be no less glorious than theirs. You will have a glorious resurrection body. So will the person beside you, and it will be different, but they will be no less glorious. We possess a kind of glory now, we're told. Remember back in chapter 11, man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. But those glories will be different in the transformed resurrection, as different as the difference we see now between the sun and the stars. That's what Paul is saying. Different from what we have now, and different from everyone else's resurrection bodies as well. Difference and change. These are the principles that shape how we must think about our future resurrection. And Paul brings them together in what he says next. Look at verse 42.

[13:20] 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. Your body is planted into the ground to sprout and grow, to change and to be different. It is sown, as one commentator has said, it is sown perishable, but raised with much greater glory, the glory of the imperishable. The body is dishonorable now, lacking the glory it will have. It is weak now, lacking the strength it will have. And so it will be raised in power. Your body will be sown as a body that is fit for the natural world. It has raised a body that is fit for glory. So Paul is pointing us to these principles in creation, but he also points us to Christ to emphasize the point further. Again, look at verse 44. 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 heaven, a man of dust.

The second man is from heaven, as was the man of dust, so also are those who are of 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. We're back again with the two great covenant heads of history. And Paul is saying the difference between them here isn't that one had a body and the other didn't, but that their bodies were animated in different ways. The first man, Adam, had a body that was animated by a living soul. The second Adam had a body that was animated by the Holy Spirit. The first Adam had a spirit, but his appetites and desires controlled him.

The second Adam had appetites and desires, but he was controlled by the Spirit. The first kind of body is natural, earthly, of the dust, mortal, verse 53. The second is spiritual, of heaven, immortal. So in Christ we see both change and difference. He is sown in flesh and raised in glory. Like the seed, there is continuity. When he showed himself, do you remember, to his disciples, he had the holes in his hands, he had the hole in his side from his earthly experience, but he is radiant, and he can move around in ways that a regular mortal body cannot.

He is changed. And then it follows, and that change he is also different. The glory of the earthly body is now immortal, spiritual, heavenly. Continuity, but complete transformation.

This is what we look forward to. Remember that the risen Christ is the first fruits of the harvest of those who are raised.

[16:21] We're all born in Adam, all of us, every single one, covenantally joined to him. And if we remain in him, we simply follow him into the grave. Dust returns to dust. But if we put our faith in Jesus Christ, the man of heaven, we follow him as the harvest follows the first fruits into

resurrection glory. We undergo the same transformation. There will be continuity. Somehow we will be recognizable.

I kind of picture it a bit like, you know, when you haven't seen somebody, maybe somebody from your school days, and all that time has passed, and you bump into them, and you think, there's something I recognize in the eyes or something, I don't know, something like that. Because there is continuity.

The resurrection, you, will still be you. We've been formed and shaped by our earthly experiences. But we will be completely changed and totally different.

Change and difference. We see it in creation, and we see it in Christ. The picture is kind of coming together, but we need to think, how does this apply? Paul turns then, verse 50, to press it home.

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. When he talks here about flesh and blood, he doesn't mean just those things that are physical. He's not just referring to the physical.

[17 : 59] He isn't saying that humanity can't inherit the kingdom because we're material beings. He draws the parallel with perishable. His point is that the body that we have now belongs to the natural earthly order, and that, therefore, cannot inherit the kingdom because it doesn't belong there. It isn't fit for glory. So we are clothed with the imperishable, which is fit for glory.

There will be no perishing in glory, so we need a body that is fit for there. And when the last trumpet sounds, those who are still alive will be changed, and those who have died will be changed.

On resurrection morning, as we saw last week, all things will be subject to Christ, and the trumpet blasts, dead bodies will be clothed with the imperishable, and dying bodies will put on the imperishable. Dead bodies will put on immortality, and dying bodies will put on immortality. And then another sound. Look at verse 53, or verse 54 and verse 55. There'll be another sound at that point that will ring out across the cosmos, and it will be the sound of the glorified saints belting out the victory song of death's full and final destruction. We heard about it this morning. In these earthly bodies that we possess, time is against us. Our physical decline is inevitable. It's that dustiness that Paul was talking about this morning. You can look after yourself, should look after yourself. You can biohack as much as you like. You can optimize for longevity, all that kind of language. But all that does is improve the quality of time that you have left. There is no diet or exercise or life hack that can reverse or even slow down time by a single minute. So doesn't what Paul is talking about here make you long for this new and changed and different imperishable body, a body that doesn't creak or break or wear out. My father died 30 years ago this year, and I have to remind myself of that every time

I look at photographs from our summer holidays because he seems to be in the pictures beside my children. And sometimes I'll be in the bathroom and I'll see him looking through the window and discover it's not a window, it's a mirror. That's my gray hair and my old face looking back at me. And then there's the length of time that it takes me to stand up straight in the morning. Do you feel that? I walk down the stairs and my ankles are stiff and my back is sore. My body is aching. I long for a body that is no longer hampered by my weaknesses, and I'm sure you do as well. Above all though, even more than that, don't you long for a heart that doesn't desire to sin? A heart that doesn't give in to temptation?

Flesh that isn't just done with the physical weaknesses, but also with the moral failures. That's what I want. And that's what we receive. That's what we will get at the resurrection. Total transformation as our dustiness is changed into glory. What a future. That's what you have to look forward to if you're in Christ. The next time you feel, oh, or you do that thing where you start talking to yourself, I've noticed that get, the older you get, you start narrating your, I think I'm going to get up out of my seat here, right? I think I'm going to. When you catch yourself doing that thing to yourself, all of that's on the clock. One day I'm going to be done with it all. Ah, oh, one day it's going to pass.

[22 : 01] And that desire to sin, that time when you give in again, one day I'm going to be free from all of that. But it isn't just something that we look forward to. Because, you know, all future realities actually reach back into the present in some way. The clearest example is children at Christmas.

Christmas isn't until December the 25th, but it's about mid-October when they start getting excited about it. Because that future reality is conditioning their present behavior. Well, so it is with resurrection glory. The future that we are looking forward to reaches back into the present in all

kinds of ways. What lies ahead for us? The life of faith in many ways is us lifting our heads, looking to that future and allowing that reality to reach back and change how we live now.

And I want to say it should reframe the way we think about two things in particular. The first is our weakness and the second is our purpose. How does this reframe our weakness? Well, we are flesh and blood and flesh and blood can be crushed. And so much of what our culture is all about is either denying that or trying to do something about it, somehow securing ourselves from the inevitable reality that we can be crushed because we are flesh and blood. Because of what lies ahead in the future, our crushability is okay because we have a glorious, uncrushable future. If there's no resurrection, weakness is something to be feared, ignored, or conquered. But that's not the case. In fact, that future is the antidote to weakness in its greatest expression, namely death. If you know that death has lost its sting, our present weakness is okay because that future is going to transform everything. Nothing injects courage like knowing that the worst anyone can do to you is the very means by which you will win.

Now, that's not just motivational team talk kind of stuff. The tomb is empty. Death's sting is removed. Your physical death will bring the transformation you most long for. All of that future that you long for, the worst anyone can do to you. They could kill you for the sake of Christ. All that does is usher in glory.

Why does the one who sits enthroned in heaven laugh? Psalm 2. Why does he laugh? Because when God's enemies did their worst, they were doing something really significant, they were doing something really significant, and they were. They were bringing about their own death, their own destruction, and the victory of God's Son, and therefore the victory for all of His people. Just as God accomplished His greatest victory through the death of His Son, it's just the same for you if you are in Christ. And that completely changes the way we view our weakness. So, whatever, let me say, whatever your faithfulness to Christ costs you now, whatever you go without for the sake of obedience now, oh, everybody else has it, but to have it would mean in some way to disobey Christ. You can let it go, however painful that might be.

[25 : 49] Because of the future. Whatever He keeps from you now, none of these things can touch your future wealth, because you're going to win. The resurrection reframes our weakness. It also reframes our purpose in life. This is how Paul applies this whole chapter.

So, go to verse 58. Verse 58, he said, all of this, change, difference, renewed bodies, glorious future. Death will be done away with once and for all. Verse 58, therefore, in light of all that I've just said, you should be steadfast and immovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord. He's saying you can be strong, hold your ground, keep being faithful in the work that God has given you to do, even when others don't value it, because your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Remember from last week, Christ is reigning now. He's reigning from the heavens as we gather here.

He's at the Father's right hand. He is superintending all of the details of history. He's bringing the whole earth under His rule. How is He doing that? He's doing that through the faithfulness of His church in everything that He has given us to do.

Now, this isn't just referring, the work of the Lord here is not just referring to evangelism or to Christian ministry. That's part of it. It is written, remember, to regular Christians who are tempted to feel like their faithfulness to Christ isn't worth it. Their sacrifices for Jesus are for nothing because there's no future resurrection. But Paul's whole argument is that the future resurrection imbues everything that the Christian does with meaning. There is continuity, so like the Lord Jesus, our earthly experience is shaping the person we will be in glory. So what has He given you to do? At home, in the office, in your street, with your wider family, with that difficult person, with that need that He has brought across your path that you can meet?

When we take the name of Christ, we do what He has put in front of us in His name. And however small and insignificant, however hard and unpleasant, Paul reminds you here that your faithfulness in those things is not in vain. Your labors as a Christian, in obedience to Christ, those are not going to burn up at the end. The wood and hay and stubble of unfaithful ministries will burn, chapter 3, but your work that is done in the Lord, in the name of Christ, it will last forever.

[28 : 37] Can you see how that changes your purpose? Can you see how that future reality that we look forward to, the change, the difference, the fact that death is going to be done away with, the fact that in Christ our future is absolutely secure, can you see how that reaches back and transforms your purpose?

Whatever the Lord has put in front of you to do, you can do it in the name of Christ and know that it is significant. Well, if the mystery of this, the change and the difference, if that continues to perplex you, hold on to that reality. The future is glorious, it's promised to you, and so today is worthwhile. Let's pray.