

Introduction

I'd like to begin by sharing four fascinating facts about our bodies: #1 - 50,000 cells in our bodies died and were replaced by new cells while I spoke this sentence. #2 - We use an average of 43 muscles for a frown and every two thousand frowns create one wrinkle. #3 - A sneeze zooms out of our mouth at over 100 m.p.h. And #4 - our ears and nose continue to grow throughout our entire life. Those four things are true of our "earthly bodies now." But they won't be true of our "resurrection bodies then." That's because we will all be changed. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, which teaches us just that.

I'd introduce this text with the fascinating results of a recent Harris Poll. According to it, 80% of Americans believe in heaven. By heaven, they mean a place where they will go after they die and live forever. But only 26% believe they will have bodies there. The majority of Americans, in other words, believe we will not rise from the dead and have resurrection bodies in heaven. They apparently believe we'll have some kind of disembodied existence of the soul instead.

Denying that we'll rise from the dead in bodily form isn't anything new. People don't believe it now and they didn't believe it then, when Paul wrote chapter 15. That is in fact why he wrote it. He directed its content to those who denied the resurrections of both Jesus and His followers. The theme of this celebrated chapter is Jesus as the first fruits of the resurrection. He rose from the dead in bodily form. Because He did, those who follow Him will rise from the dead in bodily form as well, and live that way forever in heaven.

I preached about the first of those, the resurrection of Jesus, on Easter Sunday. I'm preaching about the second of those, the resurrection of His followers, today. This sermon is a sequel to that one.

We Will All Be Changed

Paul begins with an astute observation in verse 50. It's that flesh

and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

The phrase "**flesh and blood**" refers to the total physical/psychological condition of human beings in this life. I have a six-inch scar across my left shin, for instance, and a small hole above my right knee, which are results of base runners spiking me on a steal and a double play. Our bodies are flawed and frail. But our psyches are too. If we were fired from our jobs, for instance, most of us would feel angry and insecure. The phrase "**flesh and blood**" refers to the total physical/psychological condition of human beings in this life.

Because that condition is so flawed and frail, Paul writes, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God in it. That kind of condition isn't suited for heaven in other words. Trying to live in heaven the way we are now physically and psychologically would be like penguins trying to live in the sands of the Sahara Desert. We are as unfit for heaven as penguins are for the desert.

For Christians to be at home in heaven, something has to happen first and it will. Paul tells us what that is in verses 51-54. What he writes in these verses is a "**mystery,**" things that were hidden but that God has revealed - to Paul and through him, to his readers and us.

The first thing, in verse 52, is that "**we shall not all sleep.**" The word "**sleep**" is a euphemism for "**die.**" The statistics on death are quite impressive. One out of one people die. But as Paul reveals here, that isn't precisely true. There will be Christians who won't die.

He tells us who those Christians are, also in verse 52. It's those alive "**at the last trumpet.**" 1 Thessalonians 4:16 makes clear to what that refers. It's the Second Coming of Jesus. Human history will end with a trumpet sounding and Jesus, in His resurrection body, descending from the sky to earth. Christians alive when He does will not die.

But according to verse 51, they and "**the dead,**" every Christian who has ever died, "**will all be changed.**" That change, in verses 52-54, is that they will be given resurrection bodies. The bodies of the live Christians will be transformed into resurrection bodies. The souls of

the dead Christians will be united with resurrection bodies.

That's the change and verse 52 shares a detail about it. It will be **"in the twinkling of an eye."** The Greek word translated **"twinkling"** is *atomos*. It means the smallest possible amount of time. **"Twinkling"** is a good translation. One scientist defines that as the time it takes for light to go from the iris of the eye to the retina, $1/6^{\text{th}}$ of a nanosecond. A nanosecond is one billionth of a second. So living and dead Christians will be given resurrection bodies in less than one billionth of a second. The point is that this change won't involve a process at all. It will be so quick we won't even be aware it's happening to us.

That then is Paul's message in verses 51-54. For Christians to be at home in heaven, something has to happen to us first. We have to be changed and we will. The Holy Spirit will give us resurrection bodies that are perfectly suited for heaven and life in it.

The Nature of Our Resurrection Bodies

All of us are curious of course about these resurrection bodies we'll have forever. We desire to know what they're going to be like. So, Paul tells us in chapter 15. He reveals five things about them.

First, in verses 53-54, they will be **"immortal,"** alive forever. I mentioned that 50,000 skin cells in our earthly bodies die and are replaced every few seconds. But the skin cells and all cells in our resurrection bodies will be immortal. Not one will ever die and be replaced.

Paul reveals a second thing about them, also in verses 53-54. They will be imperishable. They'll be impervious to decay or harm of any kind. I mentioned sneezing. Sneezing occurs when foreign particles irritate the mucosa in our nasal cavities. But the mucosa in our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, incapable of being irritated. We won't sneeze in heaven, in other words. More generally, we won't age, decline, experience discomfort or pain, or be harmed in any way.

There's a third thing Paul reveals, in verse 43. Our resurrection

bodies will be **“glorious”** - as opposed to our earthly bodies, which are **“dishonorable.”** Popular author Ray Stedman captures what both words connote: **“What is it about you and me that is dishonorable? Well, it is the body isn’t it? Let me tell you a secret about mine: It sags; it groans; it even smells . . . But it will be raised, Paul says, in glory. It will be clean, sweet, fragrant, eternally fresh and able to function in a marvelous way.”** I mentioned wrinkles before. We won’t have any in heaven. I mentioned our noses and ears growing. They won’t in heaven. They’ll be perfectly symmetrical and proportioned and will stay that way. Beauty and splendor will characterize our resurrection bodies. They will be **“glorious.”**

Paul reveals a fourth thing about them, also in verse 43. They will be powerful. Think of this in terms of our senses. Dogs can smell and hear things that you and I can’t. Or bald eagles can see things you and I can’t – like a mouse in a field a mile away. But that won’t be the case in heaven because our senses will be dramatically enhanced. I believe that our eyes, for instance, will have telescopic and microscopic capabilities. But it isn’t just our senses. It’s all of our body parts as well. They’ll be vastly more powerful, stronger, than they are now.

A final thing Paul reveals about our resurrection bodies, in verse 44, is that they will be **“spiritual.”** That doesn’t mean they won’t be made up of atoms and molecules because they will be. It does mean that the spiritual or non-material part of us, our souls, will perfectly control the material part of us, our resurrection bodies. Our bodies will be utterly obedient to our souls’ slightest wishes. The battle that goes on now between what we want our bodies to do and what they want to do will be over. We will always want them to do good and they will always do it.

So that’s the kind of body all of us who follow Jesus will someday have, one that’s immortal, imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

Implications

That’s a spectacular reality, the implications of which Paul boldly

declares in verses 54-58.

Verses 54-57 are about death. Notice what death, according to verse 55, does. It stings us. It robbed me of my father, for instance, when I was six years old and left my family and me in poverty. That's the kind of thing it has always done and still does. John MacArthur defines its sting this way: **"It still violates our dominion. It still invades us and can hit us with a tremendous blow."**

But it won't always. Verse 54 says death is **"swallowed up."** Once we're all changed at the Second Coming of Jesus, no one will ever again experience or be impacted by it. But that isn't all. Notice the two questions in verse 55. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Those are rhetorical questions, the implied answer to which is, **"Nowhere!"** Paul's point is this. Not only will death be destroyed, its work will be undone. It will be robbed of all its victories.

I think of that line in marriage vows, **"'Til death do us part."** That's more meaningful to me now as I'm getting older. Make no mistake about it. Within the next 30 years at most, death will win a victory over me. It will tragically and painfully part my wife and me. But it will be robbed of its victory. What it did will be undone. Jesus will come again and when He does, I will be reunited with my wife in bodily form forever. There will never be a last time I hug my wife, or a last time I tell her I love her, or a last time I laugh with her, or a last time I share exciting news with her. Yes, death will take all those things away from me. But I'll get them back again, forever, when Jesus comes again.

Verse 57 sums it up well. You and I who follow Jesus will have the last laugh over death. Because Jesus rose from the dead, so will we. And when we do, death will be utterly destroyed and its work undone.

"Therefore." That's the opening word of the final verse, 58, which shows us what it is. It's the **"So what?"** of our resurrection.

Because we'll be raised, we should be **"steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."** It's important to grasp how strong those words are. The word **"steadfast"** connotes being fixed,

or firm. The word "**immovable**" connotes not moving at all, not even a twitch. The word "**abounding**" connotes doing more than is required. And the word "**work**" connotes laboring to the point of exhaustion.

The message of those words together is this. Set yourself wholly on Jesus. The renowned missionary to Africa, C.T. Studd, illustrates what I mean. He began what he called "**The DCD Campaign.**" "**DCD**" stood for "**Don't care a damn.**" That meant "**Don't care a damn about anything but Jesus.**" To promote that idea, he made up a skull and crossbones insignia and imposed "**DCD**" on it. He then stuck that insignia on jackets, hats, buildings, and equipment. He intended that his missionary team and he should care for nothing *before* Jesus, not even their families and friends, not even their lives. Nothing should be allowed to detract from or conflict with pursuing His will and work. All other desires had to be put to death, which explains the skull and crossbones.

Studd's language might offend you, but the message it conveyed is the right one. The Holy Spirit will someday give you and I resurrection bodies and we need to live in the light of that. We do that by setting ourselves wholly on Jesus. We allow nothing to detract from or conflict with pursuing His will and work. We arrange all of our affairs around Him, not Him around all of our affairs. If we do that, we will be fully prepared for the resurrection of our bodies. If we don't, we won't be.

Conclusion

Years before he died, Benjamin Franklin wrote his own epitaph. Listen to his words in closing: "**The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms - but the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant addition, revised and corrected by the Author.**"

That's a lovely way of saying what Paul says in verse 51. We will all be changed. So get ready for that change. Set your self wholly on Jesus.