

Commencement Day

I Corinthians 15:35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

Introduction The embalmed body of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin has been preserved inside a glass case at his mausoleum in Moscow since his death in 1924. His eyes are closed, his hair is combed, and his mustache is neatly trimmed. He is dressed in a modest black suit, and his arms rest peacefully at his sides. In a mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square, the body of Vladimir Lenin lies on a bed of red silk, in an ornate glass sarcophagus. Even a century after his death, the corpse of this historic Soviet leader remains so lifelike that it often scares small children.

Despite being almost perfectly preserved, there are no internal organs left in Lenin's corpse. His skeleton, muscles, skin, and some connective tissues remain, but the organs were removed shortly after his death.

It is estimated that 2.5 million people visit it every year. What was even more amazing is the effort that goes into preserving that body. Every 18 months Lenin spends about 60 days immersed in a glass tub of chemicals. A team of scientists supervises as the clear solution penetrates the skin making sure that just as in a living person his body remains about 70% liquid.

They then hoist the body onto a stretcher while the liquids drip off and after a few hours they bind him up with rubber bandages to prevent leakage and they dress him. Then, they return him to the tomb where twice a week custodians will douse embalming fluids on his face and hands to keep it fresh and monitor for bacteria. It reminds me of the age-old question that Job asked thousands of years ago.

"If someone dies, will they live again?" (Job 14:14, NIV)

There was a lady that came in to see her pastor one time because she was having marital problems. He wisely wanted to know about the man's spiritual condition, so he asked, 'Does your husband believe in life after death?'" She said, "He doesn't even believe in life after supper!"

There are three days that we believe are the most important days on the calendar of any believer. There is what we call our "**birthday**", and I don't mean our physical birth. I mean our spiritual birth. There is that day where we are born again spiritually. The day you repented of your sins, placed your faith in Jesus, and surrendered to him as the Lord of your life.

The second day we can call "**moving day**." That is the day our body dies. That is the day that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

The third day is "**Commencement Day**." This is the title of today's message. On the day when we will bless Bryant Rodgers on his high school graduation, I want to talk about our commencement. That is when our physical bodies are raised from the dead and we receive a new body, not a natural body, but a supernatural body, not a physical body, but a spiritual body, not a temporal body, but an eternal body.

Let's Pray

What I just said raises a big question, "**What happens between moving day and commencement day?**"

Before we receive a new body, we live in what is called the "*intermediate state*." I'm not talking about purgatory. In II Corinthians, chapter 5, Paul says in II Corinthians 5:1, "***For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.***"(II Corinthians 5:1, NIV)

Now the earthly tent or house that Paul is referring to here is our body.

God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground (body) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (spirit), and he became "a living being" (soul: Ge. 2:7)

God intended that by eating from the tree of life and by obeying his command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, humankind would never die but would live forever. (Ge. 2:16-17; 3:22-24)

Only after death entered the world because of human sin do we read about the separation of a person into the dust of the ground and the spirit returning to God.

In other words, the separation of the body from the spirit and soul is the result of the curse on humanity because of sin and will eventually be remedied only at the resurrection of the body.

Now we have this God-given body that we moved into at birth, and it was purposely built with an expiration date which is why we read, **"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked."** (II Corinthians 5:1-3, NIV)

This house that we live in is going to decay. This house is going to cause us to groan and moan. Eventually, it is just going to wear out.

I hate to tell you this, but at the end of the day do you know what this house is made of? Dust. Your body came from dust and your house will go to dust.

What is important to understand is: you are not your house. You live in your house, but you and your house are two different things. When your body dies your spirit immediately goes to be with the Lord if you know the Lord.

I read about a man who died and his name was Solomon Peas. On his tombstone they wrote these words:

"Beneath these clouds and beneath these trees,

Lies the body of Solomon Peas.

But this ain't Peas - it is just the pod,

Peas shelled out and went to God."

That is exactly what happens. We shell out of our body, and we go to be with Jesus. It culminates with an exit from life, that leads to an experience after life.

Listen again to what Paul says in verse 4. **"For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."** (II Corinthians 5:4, NIV)

Jesus said in John 5, "***Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.***" (John 5:28-29, NIV)

Everybody is going to spend eternity somewhere. The moment you make your exit from this life your eternity is sealed forever. If Jesus is your Lord, then to be absent from the body will be to be present with the Lord.

Listen to what Paul concludes by saying in verse 5, "***Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.***"(II Corinthians 5:5, NIV)

God has not made us for earth; He made us for heaven. God has not made us for this body; he made us for a heavenly body.

Transition: (Story: My mother and recent graduations)

Whether you like to go to school or not, there is one thing that both types of students will never forget - **graduation day**. There is joy in knowing no more required reading, no more papers, no more final exams. Thank God Almighty I was free at last!

And for those who go on to higher education – to college, and graduate school, each graduation day brings more meaning, more joy, more excitement.

There is another graduation day that awaits all of us. It will mean for us no more death, no more disease, no more sin, no more sorrow and no more suffering. For others, it will be a day of dread and disappointment, discouragement and defeat that no mind can even conceive.

For the Jesus follower, the Bible not only speaks about the hope of the resurrection, but it leaves no doubt about the fact of the resurrection.

I am not going to deal with the resurrection of the Savior, but of the saint. This body that I am living in is going to die, but God is going to raise this body, because it really is "His" body and he is going to make it into a new body so I will never need another body.

What are going to be like? What will be the state of our existence? 1 Corinthians 15 is what you could call Paul's doctoral thesis about the resurrection. He talks about the resurrection of the Christian. This entire discussion of the resurrection came out of two questions that people were asking Paul in this early church. "But someone will ask, **'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?'**" (1 Corinthians 15:35, NIV)

I. The Probability of Resurrection

They were not only questioning the probability of resurrection (how can it even happen), but they were asking - "What kind of body would even be raised?"

Remember it is the body that dies, not the spirit and soul. Our bodies are going to die, but we are not. We pointed out that if you are a believer when you die you go to be in the presence of the Lord, but if you are an unbeliever and you die you will go to live in the absence of the Lord.

How is it possible that a body that is turned to dust be raised from the dead, be put back together if you will? How will someone who has been lost at sea and eaten by the sharks or someone who has been blown up in an explosion or died in a fiery plane crash and all that is left is ashes be put back together?

Paul was standing before a pagan king named Agrippa, preaching the gospel to him, hoping to convert him to Christ and he asked this question, **"Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"** (Acts 26:8, NIV)

The simple answer to why a resurrection is possible is God. With God, all things are possible. The truth is if you have a problem with a resurrection, you really have a problem with God. There are some people who reject the Bible because of the miracles in the Bible. They can't believe the Red Sea parted, or five thousand people were fed with few loaves and a few fish, or that a man walked on water, lepers healed, demons cast out, the blind receiving sight, etc.

The real problem is not with the Bible, and it is not with miracles. The real problem is with God, because if you don't have a problem with God, you shouldn't have a problem with any miracle or resurrection.

The resurrection of the body is an essential doctrine in the bible. It refers to God's raising of a body from the dead and reuniting it with the person's soul and spirit, from which it was separated during the intermediate state.

Illustration: Michael Faraday was one of England's greatest chemists and physicists and had invented the first electric motor. He was a Christian and one day a student was making fun of the idea of the resurrection, so Faraday threw a silver goblet into a jar of acid, which completely dissolved it, along with other chemicals that caused the silver to settle to the bottom of the jar. He then took that very same silver to the silversmith who made the original goblet, who made it into a goblet that was more beautiful than the first one.

One day Faraday came back into class, called that student out, held up the goblet and said, "If I just an ordinary scientist can dissolve and remake a silver goblet, why is it hard to believe that God can raise a body from the dead?" [Rowland Leavell, *Studies in Matthew* Nashville, TN.: Convention Press, 1962, 115]

If God can create a human being out of dust in the first place, he can also reconstruct it out of dust in the second place. So, the answer to the question, **"How are dead bodies raised to begin with?"** is very simple - by the power of the God who created the body to begin with.

II. The Practical Illustrations of Resurrection

Now for the next few verses, Paul is going to answer the second part of the question, "What kind of body will the resurrected body be?" Paul does something that Jesus did quite a bit, gives practical illustrations.

A. First, Paul looks at Agriculture

"How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else." (I Corinthians 15:36-37, NIV)

Paul compares a human body that is buried to a seed that is planted. If you have ever planted anything, if you have ever lived on a farm, or been on a farm, you totally understand this.

When you sow a seed into the earth that seed in a sense dies - it dissolves, it disintegrates, but over time out of the death of that seed, comes a plant and out comes life. **The life is different from the seed, but it comes from the seed.**

Our body is like a seed. It is buried and will come back to life in a different form. You think a body is buried, but in God's eyes they are sown. I read about a first-grade boy whose class was studying plants about the same time the family had attended the funeral of someone that they loved very much.

One day as they were driving past the cemetery the son was thinking about what he studied in class and thinking about that funeral. He said, "Mom, you see that graveyard over there?" She said, "Yes." He said, "That is where they plant people."

I believe the Apostle Paul would have said "Amen" to that. You see, maybe we ought to change the way we think about our loved ones in Christ that are buried.

That graveside service is not a burial - it is a planting. The grave is not just a hole in the ground - it is a seedbed waiting for a harvest.

You will never see a farmer weeping and crying when he is planting seeds in the ground. He doesn't cry over the loss of that seed. He is anticipating that seed to bear fruit, to give a crop, to be raised from that dirt. When you think about it, that burial of a believer is at the guarantee of the resurrection of that believer.

B. Second, Paul looks at the Animals.

"But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another." (I Corinthians 15:38-39, NIV)

The point that Paul is making here is that we will all have a resurrection body, and it will be the same type of body, but it won't be the same body. You can tell the difference between a human and a fish, and a bird. I don't have scaly skin. I don't have feathers on my arms.

No two birds are alike, no two fish alike and there are no two humans exactly alike - not even identical twins, because even they have fingerprints that are different.

We are not going to be carbon copies of one another in heaven. We are going to be different. We will be unique there just like we are unique here.

I will still be me and you will still be you, because God is the God of the original. God doesn't make copies! When God made you, he made an original. There is no one like you. There is nobody else like me and nobody else will ever be like me. We will all have the same type of resurrection body, but yours will be different from mine and mine will be different from yours.

C. Third, Paul looks at Astronomy.

"There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor." (I Corinthians 15:40-41, NIV)

You can tell the difference between the sun, the moon, and the stars. You know when you are looking at a sun. You know when you are looking at the moon and you know when you are looking at a planet. You can tell the difference. True stars are in themselves suns. The stars generate their own light while the planets and the moons only reflect the light produced by the sun.

Oftentimes, people will ask the question, "Are we going to know each other in heaven?" I like the way Charles Spurgeon answered that question. He said, "Well, we know each other down here, don't we?"

When Jesus was raised from the dead the disciples knew him. When Elijah and Moses came back to the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples recognized them, because we are going to recognize each other and know each other just like we did on earth or would have if we met everybody who was a part of God's family.

III. The Powerful Transformation of Resurrection

Now Paul gets into the nitty gritty of answering the second part of the question which is, **"What kind of body will the resurrection body be?"** It can really be summed up in one word - transformation.

Our aging body is going to be transformed into an ageless body. This dying body is going to be transformed into a divine body.

A. A BODY RAISED IMPERISHABLE

Paul says, "***So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.***" (I Corinthians 15:42, NIV)

I am living in a body that is perishable. It is perishable, it's going to spoil, just like milk left outside of a refrigerator. Our bodies have a terminal disease and an expiration date called "death" and it will go from being a dying body, to a decayed body. No matter how strong, how muscular, how fit your body may be now, it is perishable.

But we will be raised imperishable. Our future bodies will be indestructible. There will be no birthdays in heaven. You will look as young a hundred million years from now as you will when you first got started. There will be no need for plastic surgery. You won't need to take vitamins, medicines, diet, or even have to watch what you eat.

B. A BODY RAISED IN GLORY

Paul goes on to say, "***It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory...***" (Vs.43a, NIV)

The most precious jewel on earth is a diamond. It is made up of carbon. It began as a lump of coal. So, think about it. A diamond and coal are both made up of the exact same element, but they are far different in their looks, their substance, and their value. This body will be buried or cremated as just a lump of coal, but it will be raised one day as a diamond that will shine forever and never lose its luster.

C. A BODY RAISED IN POWER

He goes on to say, "***...it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.***"(Vs. 43b, NIV)

Your body now is limited by time and space and subject to all kinds of diseases, injuries, and pain. The new body will be free from all the shackles of humanity. You won't be limited by time, space, material substance or anything else. We will have super-human power. You will have super-natural power.

You won't need to stop and catch your breath, because you will never run out of breath. You won't need a plane to fly. You won't even need a boat to go across a body of water.

The root of the whole matter is this, ***"It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."*** (I Corinthians 15:44, NIV)

Now don't miss it! This resurrection body is not a spirit body. It is not a ghost. It is a real spiritual body. It wasn't the spirit of Jesus that was raised from the dead. It was His body that was raised from the dead. It was in that body that Jesus could walk through walls. He could eat and if need be, could be instantly transported from one place to another.

To sum it all up, Paul says, ***"So it is written: The first man Adam became a living being" the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man."*** (I Corinthians 15:45-49, NIV)

If you want to know what our resurrection bodies are going to be like? I can tell you exactly. It is going to be just like the resurrection body of Jesus. No, we are not going to be carbon copies of one another, but in one sense we are going to be carbon copies of Jesus and Paul tells us why.

"I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." (I Cor. 15:50, NIV)

The only body that can exist in the environment of heaven is a resurrected body. Earthly bodies are equipped to live on earth so you breath the oxygen of earth, drink the water of earth, eat the food of earth, but our earthly bodies aren't suitable for heaven. We must have a heavenly body. One just like Jesus.

STORY: I was reading about a man who had lived way out in the country all his life, had never been to a big city, and never seen a building over two stories tall.

He went to the big city for the first time and saw these humongous skyscrapers. He went into one of those big buildings and he saw an elevator for the first time.

He stood there with his teenage son and all of a sudden, the door opened, and this old lady walked in, the door shut behind her and he noticed the numbers going from one, to two, to three and all the way up to twenty-five light up.

Then, he began to watch as the numbers lit up going back from twenty-five all the way to one and the door opened again. This time a young beautiful woman stepped out. He couldn't believe his eyes. He looked at his son and he said, "Go get your ma."

One of these days Jesus is going to come back, and those graves are going to fly open all over the world and bodies are going to walk into a resurrection elevator.

We are going to undergo a powerful transformation.

IV. The Positive Confirmation of Resurrection

The resurrection is not just a theological truth that you ought to know in your head. It is a practical truth you can apply to your life. Paul says, ***"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'"*** (I Corinthians 15:51-55, NIV)

Because of the resurrection, we don't have to fear death and we don't have to continuously grieve over a grave. Jesus has taken the doom out of death and the gloom out of the grave. What is in the ground is not a dead body; it is a seed that has been planted that one day will be harvested in a resurrection.

The honeybee is a very interesting creature. It can only sting you once. When it stings you, it leaves behind the stinger and the honeybee will fly off and die, because even though it has stung someone it has killed itself in the process.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus took the sting of death into his own body, but rather than killing Jesus, death wound up killing itself. Jesus has defeated death, hell, and the grave.

Our bodily resurrection is guaranteed by the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

Three reasons why the resurrection of our body is necessary:

1. The body is essential to the total human personality.
2. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
3. To undo the result of sin at all levels, humanity's final enemy (death) must be conquered through the resurrection.

CONCLUSION:

Let's conclude this in the way that Paul does, ***"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*** (I Corinthians 15:56-58, NIV)

Because of the resurrection, because we are going to be raised to live with God forever, we should want to make sure that our life counts for God NOW.

We have the prospect of the resurrection before us, we have the person of the resurrection behind us, and we have the power of the resurrection within us, no wonder we should give ourselves fully to the work of God!

"And just as it is appointed for people to die once..." (Hebrews 9:27, CSB)

The word "appointed" literally means "to be laid up" or "to be laid aside." You can translate it as "reserved." Every one of us has a reservation with death. You didn't make it; God made it. You have a date, a day, a minute, a second, a moment that

has been laid aside for you to draw your last breath. You can't cancel the reservation and you will keep the appointment.

In fact, 2 people every second, 106 people every minute, 6400 people every hour, 153,000 people every day and 56 million people a year keep that appointment.

Illustration: Years ago, Winston Churchill planned his own funeral. He did so with the hope of the resurrection which he firmly believed in.

After the last prayer, a bugler positioned high in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral would play "Taps." It is the universal signal that the day is over.

People thought that was the way he was ending the funeral, but Churchill had also instructed another bugler, who was placed on the other side of that cathedral to play "Reveille." That is the universal signal that a new day has dawned, and it is time to get up.

One day if Jesus tarries, they will be playing "Taps" for you and for me, but there will also be our "Graduation Day" when we all will arise to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with the Lord. Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus.