

Sermon Subject: THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:12-22

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

Since death first came into the world, man has been struggling with the question propounded later by Job: "If a man die, shall he live again?" All the great world religions have some sort of belief -- varying in kind and degree -- of an after-life. Immortality and the after-life have always been a favorite subject for speculation and conjecture and fanciful imagery in many of these religions. Even the Old Testament, with its rather clearly stated beliefs in immortality, contains many indications that Israel adopted some of the speculations on immortality originated by its idolatrous neighbors.

Yet through all these speculations there shines a clearly developed belief in a resurrection of the body. The Psalmist David wrote, "I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. My soul shall rest in hope; thou wilt not leave my soul in hell. God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave." Job asked the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" and answered it with the words: "Thou shalt call and I will answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." Then two chapters later he writes the lines immortalized in the music of Handel's MESSIAH: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Isaiah promises, "Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they rise;" and Daniel asserts that some shall awake to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame and contempt.

For those who will accept the clear evidence of it, the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ forever took the subject of the resurrection and immortality out of the realm of speculation. After Christ rose, the resurrection was no longer a possible but improbable uncertainty, but an accomplished, proven fact!

The resurrection of Christ might in all truthfulness be said to be the central fact of Christianity, the basic fundamental, all-important fact upon which all the other teachings of Christianity rest. Paul recognized the importance of this doctrine when he wrote this clear and logical argument: "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised

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We hope for a resurrection because we believe that Christ died, was buried, and rose again in a glorified, immortal, but physical, tangible body, which was as real, as easily discerned by the physical senses as the one he laid down in death. This resurrected Christ walked and talked with his disciples as he had done before his death; on one occasion he shared their meal; he exhibited to the doubting Thomas the wounds in his hands and feet and side. The disciples felt him, heard him, saw him. Paul lists a number of witnesses who saw him alive after his death, and then adds that he was seen of above five hundred of the brethren at once. His resurrection was well attested by personal witnesses, who believed the testimony of their physical senses. Is there any other evidence?

Since we have already covered this field in a previous sermon, we give only a brief summary here. The death of Jesus was professionally administered, made doubly sure by a spear thrust, certified by professional Roman executioners who knew their business. His body was placed in a tomb, and the tomb sealed and guarded. After his death the disciples were beaten, disappointed, discouraged, frustrated men. On the third day, the tomb was empty, the grave clothes folded and left behind. The guards had not been attacked; there was no sign of a violent capture of the dead body. The guards reported that the body had been stolen while they slept, but if they were asleep, they were in no position to tell what had happened to it. Why should the disciples or anyone else have stolen the body? The absence of a dead body could not prove a resurrection -- only the presence of that body again vitalized with life. The disciples were expecting Jesus to declare himself a king, but a dead body is no King. There is something suspicious about the fact that the guards, who under Roman law should have suffered death for falling asleep on watch and allowing the tomb to be violated, never received any punishment. There is great significance in the change from despair to boldness and a flaming evangelism which took place in the apostles after the resurrection. All these things point to the factuality and historicity of Christ's resurrection.

Because Jesus lives, we have hope of eternal life. Our resurrection depends upon the factuality of his, for the same power which raised him from the dead will raise us from the dead. Our resurrection will be according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ. It is through Christ's redemption, made for us, that the resurrection from the dead is brought to pass. "He which raiseth up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus"

Are there any logical reasons why we should believe in a resurrection of the body? Yes! Nature teaches us that nothing can be lost or destroyed, that there is a natural conservation of energy and matter. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Matter can be changed into energy, but matter can never be completely destroyed, no matter how it is changed in form. Is it not reasonable to assume by faith, even if we cannot prove it scientifically, that the life of man, which all these material things are made to serve, which gives worthy and meaning to all material things, is precious in the sight of a wise Creator, and that he will not suffer it to be ruthlessly destroyed forever just as we are beginning to learn to live? A Nature that conserves matter must in reason and in fairness conserve life as well.

Another argument for a resurrection is the continuity of personality in a constantly changing stream of body cells. Old body cells are constantly dying and being replaced by new materials, and yet the real life and personality which reside in and find expression through the body remain unchanged through three score years and ten! Is it not reasonable to suppose that the life and personality that called

together, organized, enlivened, and for many years directed and governed all this constantly changing stream of material will have power through Christ and his resurrection to call together, organize, and govern the material of a perfected, glorified body in the resurrection?

The deeds of this life are done by body and spirit in union and in cooperation with each other. If there is to be a judgment, it is necessary to justice that spirit and body be judged together for the deeds done together in this life. This then runs through all of scripture. The rewards and punishments meted out by the righteous judge at the great day of final judgment will be meted out in accordance with the deeds done in the body, and will be received by the redeemed soul, which consists of body and spirit inseparably united to receive a fullness of joy. It is just and right that reward or punishment should be received by the same personality, the same entity, which performed the deeds which are the basis of judgment.

Much of what lies before us after death remains a mystery. The Bible plainly teaches that man is a dual creature, formed of spirit and body. Spirit was created first, as will be indicated by a careful reading of the first chapter of Genesis. That spirit had consciousness; it could hear and understand the command of God to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and to have dominion over it. But spirit alone was handicapped, helpless. On earth it needed implementation; it needed the mechanism of a body to perform its will and to obey God's commands on the earthly plane. That is why verse five of the second chapter of Genesis says -- after the creation of chapter one is completed and pronounced good -- that there was "not yet a man to till the ground." Then it was that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Spirit, joined with and implemented by body, becomes soul. Death separates body and spirit, and temporarily destroys the soul. Resurrection will restore the physical implementation of the spirit, will re-unite body and spirit. This is the redemption of the soul from the separation of death -- the redemption which will be brought to pass upon all men, whether righteous or wicked, that they may stand in the flesh before the judgment bar of God to be judged according to their works done in the flesh.

We need not speculate as to what kind of body we shall have in the resurrection, or where we shall find the materials for it. Paul in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians makes it plain that there are many kinds or qualities of bodies, each one adapted to the proper implementation of the spirit on the plane to which it is assigned in the judgment. Will the identical substance of the body which was laid down in the grave be raised again? Not necessarily, for that is only a fractional part of the constantly changing stream of materials which have housed the spirit during its earthly life. If it is the literal body laid in the grave which is to come forth in the resurrection, what of the martyrs who were eaten by the wild beasts of the Roman area, or of those bodies destroyed by fire? We need not worry about this point. The intelligence which gathered material and organized it into a body in the beginning can gather material and organize a new, resurrected body through the power of Christ. One is no more miraculous than the other; one is just as natural and credible as the other.

One thing we know, that the resurrection will be literal, physical, actual. Whether the materials will be the same or not, the structure of the new body will be perfect and complete. Alma, a Book of Mormon writer says: "The soul shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost, but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame ... And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God." (Alma 19:58,59)

The resurrection will not change personality. You will be the same person on the resurrection morning as you were before; -- only your body will be different.

You will still have the same memories of your guilt or your righteousness. If you have been vindictive, quarrelsome, profane, unholy, unrighteous in this life, you will still be after the resurrection, and the judgment will assign you to the place or condition reserved for that kind of people, away from the presence of a perfect God. If you have received of a celestial spirit in this life, if the life of Christ has lived in you through new birth and regeneration, that life will live in you in the resurrection in its fullness, and you will be welcomed into the presence of the eternal God.

At Christ's coming in glory, all his saints, those who have named his name and lived by his Spirit will be raised. In this first resurrection all little children who died in their innocence, and all the heathen nations who died in ignorance of Christ, but lived righteously according to the best light they had, will be raised, having accepted Christ and his atonement in the spirit world. This first resurrection will begin the millennial reign, when Christ will dwell on earth with men a thousand years. The second resurrection, at the end of the thousand years, will bring forth all the wicked and rebellious spirits of men for judgment. Some will be raised to endless happiness, some to endless misery -- not in a literal lake of burning fire, but in perpetual memory and sorrowful realization of what they have eternally missed by their separation from God.

If a man die shall he live again? The answer of Christian faith is "Yes." Through the power of the resurrection of Christ every man who ever lived will be restored to a body compatible with the nature of his personality and of the state which he has proved himself worthy to receive, and will be brought before God to receive the recompense for the deeds done in the body. It will be a literal, physical resurrection. Life, as well as matter, will be conserved. Whether we can tolerate the glory of God's presence, whether we are worthy to dwell with God or not depends on our nature, upon the works done in the flesh. But of this every man may be sure: "Though my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." May we all be worthy to come forth in the first resurrection, and to dwell in God's presence eternally.