

How are the dead raised?

1 Cor 15:35-50

*Tim Anderson 16/5/21*

Have you ever been in one of those conversations with a young child where they ask you some question that is completely beyond you and you would never have thought of it?

Why does the moon look bigger when it's just risen than when it's high in the sky?

Why do emus have wings?

Why can't you see electricity in a wire but you can in a light globe?

Children have a wonder about the world because they are just discovering it.

We can have that kind of wonder about the next world because we are yet to discover it.

And you might have asked the questions in today's passage yourself.

15:35 "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised?

With what kind of body will they come?'"

Some of Paul's readers might have had genuine curiosity.

What's the next life going to be like?

I mean it can't be too much like this life, can it?

This life has many problems.

Heaven is not meant to be like that.

My body has problems.

None of the bits work as well as they used to.

And you don't need to tell me,

I know it's going to get worse.

So what kind of body will I have in the next world?

No doubt Paul had some readers like that.

No doubt he also had some readers

who asked the question

as a way of demonstrating how foolish it is to believe in a resurrection.

What kind of body will they have in a resurrection?  
It's not much good giving them back their old body.  
It's not perfect.  
The resurrection is meant to be perfect!  
If it's meant to be perfect,  
we can't have bodies.  
We must be purely spiritual beings.  
It's the only way to be perfect.

Well it's the second group of questioners,  
the sneerers,  
not the first group, the genuinely curious,  
who elicit Paul's response in verse 36.

"How foolish!"

How dumb to think that God is not capable of giving us perfect bodies.  
What sensible person would put limits on what God can do?  
He made this whole universe.  
He raised Jesus from the dead.  
He can definitely do more than our feeble imaginations can come up with.

And so Paul gives two analogies  
that with a bit of thought show us  
that it's perfectly reasonable to think  
that we might have different resurrection bodies  
than what we currently experience.

The first is the analogy of the seed.

This is an analogy to show that death can be the start of something new.

15:36-37 "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 something else."

We know from gardening,  
that the seeds come from the death of the flower.

The flower looks beautiful.  
But it's not until it dies  
that you are able to harvest the seeds  
that enables you to plant a new flower.  
Paul's point is simple.  
If it happens in your garden,  
it shouldn't surprise you  
that God is able to make it happen in his kingdom.  
We can die,  
and then God can grow something new.  
Well it's about time for an application of that.  
Often Christians are worried about getting cremated.  
There's a church history reason for that.  
Hundreds of years ago,  
the church taught that if you didn't get buried in the church graveyard,  
then you couldn't be resurrected to eternal life.  
It was all a lot of nonsense.  
Your body that dies is like a seed.  
And God can grow from that seed your body in the new creation.  
He doesn't need the bones in a box to work with.  
He doesn't care what patch of dirt the box is deposited in.  
God is powerful and he will do it.

The next analogy is of different types of bodies.  
It might seem a bit strange to us  
to group people, animals, birds, fish, the sun, moon and stars  
into a catalogue of different types of bodies.  
But we do talk about heavenly bodies,  
and there's absolutely no doubt they are different from our earthly bodies.  
Paul's point here is again simple.  
God is quite capable of making different types of bodies.  
Well of that there can be absolutely no doubt.

Every single human is unique.

Even identical twins are not the same.

Do you know how many different ways there are  
of arranging the amino acids in our DNA?

1 with 108 zeros.

That's about 1 with 28 zeros times as many atoms there are in universe.

God's creativity in making bodies is limitless.

Every star is unique.

There are about 1 with 24 zeros stars in the universe.

They're all different.

And God made every single one of them.

If God is capable of doing that,

should it strike us as strange

that he can make us new different bodies in the resurrection?

Of course not.

So how are they actually going to be different?

15:42-44 "So it will be with the resurrection of the dead.

The body that is sown is perishable,

it is raised imperishable.

it is sown in dishonour,

it is raised in glory;

it is sown in weakness,

it is raised in power;

it is sown in a natural body,

it is raised in a spiritual body."

So Paul gives us four ways

our future body is different to our current body.

Currently we are perishable, dishonoured, weak and in a natural body.

Then we shall be imperishable, honoured, powerful

and in a spiritual body.

Let's look at these attributes in turn.

We are perishable.

Just like the groceries you buy from the shop,  
we have a used by date.

Only God knows what your used by date is.

But you have one.

You might be able to feel the date approaching.

The prophet Isaiah says,

"The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Surely the people are grass"

Just like grass dies in a hot dry north wind,  
so are we.

We are perishable.

We are sown in dishonour.

In the first century

honour was about your position of respect in the community.

Paul had the rights of a Roman citizen.

That was a position of honour.

And if you wanted to humiliate someone,  
you stripped them of their positions of honour.

Look it's not that much different today.

If they want to dishonour someone,  
they tear down their statues.

Or they try to rename the stadium  
that was named after your tennis achievements.

Or they take you out of the hall of fame.

And our bodies are without honour.

Lots of people as they are dying find it an undignified experience.

Bodily functions that you used to manage yourself in private

now require someone else to help you.  
You might not even be able to feed yourself.

We are sown in weakness.  
It's no secret that as you age you get weaker.  
I already need to get Elimelech to get the lids off the jam jars.  
But even the strongest of us is weak.  
Send us out to the outback for a few days without water,  
let's see who is the strong person.

We are sown in a natural body.  
The body we have is only useful for this world.  
We couldn't even take our bodies and live on Mars,  
let alone take them to heaven.  
They don't work on the bottom of the ocean.  
They only sort of work up the top of a high mountain.  
God has made our bodies for this world  
and they are not fit for purpose anywhere else.

But how about our bodies in the resurrection.  
Well they are imperishable.  
They have no used by date.  
When we've been there 10000 years bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.  
You won't need replace your body every few centuries.  
You won't need to take it in for a service.  
The body you get when you go to heaven will do you for eternity.  
It will never get old,  
never wear out,  
your hair won't go grey or fall out.  
Imperishable.

Your heavenly body will be glorious.  
Have you ever seen a Rolex watch?  
It tells the time the same as any other watch.  
But in our materialistic world,  
it conveys some glory to wearer.  
Your heavenly body will be stamped with 'child of the living God'.  
Made by God for use in his glorious kingdom.  
That's a more impressive brand name than Rolex.

Your heavenly body will be powerful.  
Why do you think superhero movies are so popular?  
Iron man, Captain America, Hulk, Thor, Black Widow, Hawkeye.  
The Avengers are incredibly popular.  
They are popular because they have super powers.  
Every kid dreams of having super powers.  
I used to dream that I could fly.  
Now I just dream of being able to keep up with Elimelech.  
The Avengers are idle fantasy.  
Your resurrection body is a future reality.

If we were to summarise the shift  
from your natural body to your spiritual body:  
you will be you.  
You won't be quite the same.  
But you will still be you.  
There's a great photo of Ash Barty as a six year old  
holding a tennis trophy.  
And it stands next to a photo of Ash holding the French Open trophy at 23.  
She not quite the same tennis player she was at six.  
But she's still Ash Barty.  
She's different but she's recognisably the same person.  
We will be different

but we will be recognisably the same person.

So one way to explain the difference from the old you to the new you, is with descriptions like perishable to imperishable, dishonour to glory.

Another way to explain the difference is moving from Adam to Christ. Our natural bodies were patterned on Adam.

Our spiritual bodies will be patterned on Christ.

15:45-49 "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 as we have borne the image of the earthly man,  
so we shall bear the image of the heavenly man."

If you read the creation account in Genesis,  
Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

And we are identifiably of the same material.

When we die, we return to the dust of the ground.

But our future is the future of Jesus' resurrection body.

He is the prototype of the spiritual man.

His body is fit for purpose in the new heavens and the new earth.

And we will be like him.

He appeared in the upper room with the doors locked.

He appeared on the road to Emmaus.

He appeared in Galilee when they were fishing.

He was identifiably Jesus.



He still had the scars in his hands and feet.  
But he wasn't the same as before the resurrection.  
His body was powerful and glorious.

This is how Paul puts it writing to the Philippians.  
Phil 3:20-21 "Our citizenship is in heaven.  
And we eagerly await a Saviour from there,  
the Lord Jesus Christ,  
who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control,  
will transform our lowly bodies  
so that they will be like his glorious body."  
He is the prototype.  
We will become like him.  
But you will still be recognisably you.  
You with the qualities of the risen Jesus.

That is our future hope.  
This is how one of the founding fathers of America,  
Benjamin Franklin, expressed that hope.  
Benjamin Franklin was a printer amongst other things.  
"The Body of B. **Franklin**, Printer;  
like the Cover of an old Book, Its Contents torn out,  
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,  
Lies here, Food for Worms.  
But the Work shall not be wholly lost;  
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more,  
In a new & more perfect Edition,  
Corrected and amended By the Author."

Why does it matter?  
It's all very well to say that this is what we look forward to.  
But how does it change tomorrow?

We live in the midst of a global pandemic.  
It's ravaging people's bodies.  
It's good to know  
that our bodies will be refashioned after the image of Jesus.  
It keeps us from anxiety.  
That's one reason why it matters today.  
Christians are people of hope.  
It's one thing that those who are not Christians remark upon.  
Our hope comes because of our secure future.

But here's another reason I think it matters.  
Some things remain from our earthly bodies,  
other things are transformed to be like Jesus.  
Well what are the things that remain?  
They have to be the things that make you, you.  
When you take a funeral like I did on Thursday  
and there are eulogies,  
they don't tell you about how she had golden curls and a gorgeous smile.  
They save that for the fashion magazines.  
At a funeral, they hone in on what makes you, you.  
You can shave off my golden curls and I'm still me.  
This is what they focus on.  
She loved her children and grandchildren.  
He was always caring, a true gentleman.  
In many ways, it's your relationships of love that make you who you are.  
I'm convinced that these will continue in the new creation.  
They will be perfected, like everything else.  
But if you put your energy into loving now,  
I don't think that will be lost in your resurrection body.  
You will love those you love now,  
but it will be with the love of Jesus.

Let's praise God that we are leaving behind the perishable,  
the dishonourable and the weak.

And that he is going to replace them with the imperishable,  
the glorious and the powerful.