

1 Cor. 15:42-58 - Preparing for the New World

This morning we are finishing out Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, the resurrection chapter. And here we are going to see that the doctrine of the future resurrection has implications for our understanding of the New Heavens and New Earth.

We've already seen how this doctrine impacts other doctrines.

Why does the future resurrection matter? Well, it matters because our resurrection is tied to Jesus's resurrection. If you deny one of those resurrections, you deny the other. If you deny that we will rise, you are functionally denying that Jesus rose. If you deny Jesus rose, you've denied the gospel.

Why does that matter? It matters because, like we saw last week, God in his grace is going to redeem not only our souls but our bodies as well. These broken, pain-ridden bodies that are destined to break down and die will be replaced with bodies that are imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual.

Why does that matter? It matters because what God has prepared for us is the NHNE. And the NHNE is so unbelievably fantastic, so over the top amazing, that we can't even experience it in these mortal bodies. Our bodies can't take in the awesome glory of God in the New Earth and so what he is going to do for us in order to enjoy his visible presence and the riches of his grace for all eternity is actually give us bodies that can endure and enjoy heaven.

That's where this whole discussion of resurrection has been heading. We believe that Jesus died for sins and rose again. We believe that when we die our souls will go to be with the Lord in heaven. Heaven is often called the "Intermediate state" by theologians because heaven as we know it now is temporary.

The saints are in heaven right now experiencing the glory of God but at the coming of Jesus when they come with him - our bodies will be raised glorious in order to enjoy the triune God in the New Earth forever and ever. Theologians call the New Heavens and New Earth the eternal state because that's what we experience for all eternity.

So the saints in heaven now are in the intermediate state. But when Christ returns and creates the NHNE that will be the eternal state, where we enjoy the presence of the triune God forever and ever.

And Paul's making these connections for us to help us understand the necessity of the resurrection body.

So let's dive in here. Last week we ended looking at a description of our resurrected bodies. They will be imperishable - they will never break down. They will be glorious - they will be untainted by sin and radiate the glory of God. They will be powerful, we will not grow weak or weary or old or break down. And they will be spiritual. **Read 44**

Again when we hear spiritual we usually think ghost. Non-corporeal. No flesh. But actually that's not true even by virtue of the phrase that Paul uses. He contrasts a natural **body** with a spiritual **body**. Both our current state and our resurrected state are in **bodies**. He uses the Greek word soma - "body" - twice. So whatever body refers to now, is also what it refers to in the future.

So what's Paul's point in this? Basically what he's saying is that our bodies right now are not able to endure heaven. They were never designed to do that.

He's going to make an argument that goes all the way back to creation. God formed Adam out of dust, breathed into him the breath of life. Adam became a living being at that point. And Adam could interact with God on this earth, in this creation. God built his body on purpose for this creation. And we inherit his same human nature.

The problem is that the New Heavens and New Earth are so fundamentally different and glorious than this earth that our bodies are not designed for it.

So how Paul distinguishes our bodies now and our bodies in the future is natural versus spiritual. **Read 44-49**

So now we have Adam's earthly-human nature, but in the resurrection we'll have Jesus's heavenly-human nature. We'll always be human, but in the resurrection we be remade in the image of Jesus, who is the glorified God-Man.

The analogy I mentioned last week is that our bodies work fine here on earth, but if we were to go to Mars or Venus these bodies would not work there without a space suit. We'd need different bodies to endure those conditions.

That's what Paul's talking about. We work fine here, but we'd never endure the NHNE.

Now, here's where Paul makes the connection. Here's why our resurrection body is important. **Read 50**

So this is why this all matters: the bodies that we currently have cannot exist in the New Heavens and New Earth.

Now, we didn't actually see the phrase "New Heavens and New Earth" in this passage. Paul calls it "the Kingdom of God." But it seems pretty clear he's talking about the NHNE because whatever the Kingdom of God is here, flesh and blood can't be in it.

This is talking about a place where flesh and blood are not able to dwell. He actually says flesh and blood - our natural bodies - are not able to inherit the Kingdom of God. They do not have the capacity.

Whenever we see humans enter into the presence of God - Isaiah in **Isaiah 6**, John in **Revelation 1**, **Ezekiel 1** - they all fall down as though they are dead. Even in just a vision, without actually being there, the display of the glory of God is so powerful they can't take it in and their physical bodies fail them. They all fall down as though they are dead.

The other interesting thing here about the description of the Kingdom of God is that it is something that we will inherit. **Read 50**

So when someone asks "what is the Kingdom of God?" they are asking a very loaded question. There's a sense in which God's Kingdom is over all creation because God is the sovereign king of all he has made.

There's another sense in which the Kingdom of heaven is specifically heaven from where God reigns.

All who believe in Jesus are part of God's Kingdom. We are his ambassadors of the Kingdom here on earth.

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God has come upon us, and is in our midst. The message of the Kingdom is that God's Son reigns supreme and we know that because he rose again from the dead.

All who believe that message are part of God's Kingdom, yet we also wait for God's Kingdom.

We wait for Jesus to come in glory and power with his Kingdom. That's what we inherit. That's what God has promised to us.

Jesus says: Unless you are born again you will not see the Kingdom of God...you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. (**John 3**)

But when we're talking about something we will inherit as the children of God, that indicates a future reality. A future Kingdom that in the New Heavens and New Earth.

How will this all happen? Well, I'm glad you asked. Paul tells us. **Read 50-55**

So Paul says this is a mystery. A mystery in the Bible isn't some sort of weird creepy thing. Where we don't understand. A mystery in the Bible is something that God previously didn't tell people about but now has.

In **Eph. 5:32**: There's the mystery that marriage is a picture of the covenant love between Christ and the Church.

It's not shadowy or creepy. God just didn't tell us that connection until after Jesus.

There's the mystery of God's divine predestining in **Eph. 1:9** - God chose people before the world began to trust in Christ. That wasn't revealed to us in the OT, but it is now.

There's the mystery that believing Gentiles are fellow heirs with believing Jews. The whole OT is very Israelite focused. But there are hints all thought out the OT that God would bless the Gentiles through faith as well.

So in the Bible "mystery" isn't creepy or strange, it's an amazing truth that God only revealed to us after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Here the mystery - the amazing truth that God has revealed to us - is that not everyone is going to die. We have this doctrine of the resurrection. Resurrection assumes that people will die. Jesus died and rose. Every saint for the past 6,000 years has died and will rise. We will most likely die and rise.

But there will be a generation of Christians who never see death. **Read 51**

As we've seen before, Paul often uses sleep as a metaphor for death. The Bible does not teach soul sleep. Soul sleep is the unbiblical idea that when someone dies their body goes into the ground and their soul is basically in a state of sleeping rest. It's not conscious. Seventh Day Adventists typically teach soul sleep.

We reject that. When a Christian dies their body goes into the ground, but their soul goes home to be with Jesus. We enter immediately into his presence and enjoy him forever and ever. The bodies of unbelievers go into the ground but their soul experiences eternal conscious punishment in hell forever and ever.

So what he's saying is that not every believer will die. But every believer will be changed. Transformed, glorified. So whether someone has died and gone to be with Jesus or whether they are alive when he comes again, their bodies will be transformed.

Which means that the key issue here is not that we die and rise. Death is not required to enter the Kingdom of heaven. What is required to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? What is required to enter the NHNE? A transformed, glorified body. **Read 51-52**

The change he is talking about is the change he mentioned earlier. **Read 42-43**

So the key issue here is that when Jesus comes back, the dead are raised and glorified, and those who are alive are changed.

Side: Because this very much about eschatology, I think most of you guys know I don't hold to a pre-tribulation rapture view. The pre-Trib view is probably the most popular eschatology view in America. That view was invented about 180 years ago and it's nowhere to be found in the Bible or even church history until the 1800s by John Nelson Darby. It was popularized by CI Scofield's study Bible, and pushed into the lime light in the Late-Great Planet Earth and the Left Behind Series. But it is only fiction.

I say that because Pre Trib folks will often say that Paul goes from talking about the NHNE to talking about the secret rapture here. The tinkling of an eye. You guys know that I love John MacArthur but passage doesn't teach anything about a pre-tribulation rapture.

What it does teach is that the instant that Jesus comes back, believers who have died are resurrected and glorified; and believers who are alive are changed as well.

Both the dead and the alive are given transformed, glorified bodies. And it happens in a moment - in the twinkling of an eye. We might say in the blink of an eye. The point is that the physical resurrection and glorification of believers is not a process. We're not going to be these weird zombie-like creatures as God slowly pieces us back together.

It's an instantaneous event.

And it happens, Paul says, at the last trumpet. That twinkling of an eye is also the last trumpet. What is the last trumpet? The last trumpet.

Trumpets and God have an interesting relationship in the Bible.

We see trumpets blasting when Israel is gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai when God is bursting forth in glory from the mountain.

You remember that trumpets were blast outside of Jericho on the last day of the last march and the walls came tumbling down as God annihilated the enemies of the Jews.

Why is there a last trumpet? Because this is the final glorious victory of God over all his enemies.

Look at 1 Thess. 4. We've looked at this before, but take a look again. **Read 13-18**

The Corinthians seemed to be concerned with what would happen to those alive at the coming of Jesus, the Thessalonians seem to be concerned with Christians who had died when Jesus returns. Paul says it's glory for both.

Those who are dead are raised and glorified. Those who are alive are taken up and glorified. It all happens at the trumpet of God.

Look at 2 Thess. 1:5-10. This is the coming of Jesus from the perspective of unbelievers. **Read**

No mention of trumpet here, but it's the same event: the return of Jesus.

And at the return of Jesus we will all hear - the entire cosmos will hear - the blistering, deafening sound of King Jesus and all of heaven coming down in power and in glory to finally and forever destroy every last enemy of God.

For the saints who are alive, it is the trumpet blast that brings relief. The Calvary has come, the fight is over.

For unbelievers it is the shocking realization that all their rebellion is going to be laid waste in a moment. In the same moment that believers are glorified, unbelievers are met with the heavenly fire of judgment from Jesus and his angels.

Now, that's the hope. We've talked about it before. But why do we need glorification? Why does that need to happen the moment that Jesus comes back? **Look back at 1 Cor. 15. Read 50-53**

What is unveiled at the coming of Jesus flesh and blood cannot endure. When Jesus comes back, the NHNE begins. It can't be the millennium because if it were then glorification wouldn't be needed. But Paul says in 2 ways that it is mandatory for glorification to happen.

In **50** he says we are not capable of inheriting the Kingdom, which comes the moment Jesus comes.

And in **53** he says says this perishable body **must put on** the imperishable. And the mortal body **must put on** immortality. Why?

Because what we experience the moment Jesus comes back is instant glory. Instant NHNE. Peter says the universe is dissolved, broken down to the atoms and recreated in glory.

We can't experience that in these bodies. Our bodies would be blown to bits. Only in glorified bodies can we endure such a thing.

And then, check this promise out. **Read 54-55**

When Jesus comes back and we're all glorified, and unbelievers are all cast into the lake of fire, there's no more death. No more dying. No more decay. Paul quotes this from **Isaiah 25:8-9**:

Isaiah 25:8-9 (ESV): He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

When Jesus returns, and our bodies are glorified, there is no more death forever. Adam's sin in the Garden that started a cascade of death is gone.

And more than death, sin is gone. **Read 56-57**

Death, as bad as it is, isn't the worst part of the fall. It's the sin that's the real sting.

It's like getting bit by a poisonous spider. The bite itself isn't the worst part, it's venom.

That's what Paul is saying here. The real sting of death is sin, because it's sin that truly condemns us. And the power of the sin is the Law because it's Law that shows us just how guilty we are before a holy God.

And then Paul brings the argument full circle: **Read 57**

We will all likely pass through death. Unless the Lord comes back in our lifetime we will all face that reality. But without the sting of sin and without the guilt of the Law.

How does Jesus give us victory? Because death is no longer something a Christian fears. It's the point at which we go home.

Heb. 2 - Jesus has destroyed the power of death.

Conclusion: **Verse 58**