

## **"I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body"**

### ***Sermon Series on the Apostles' Creed***

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**(1 Cor. 15:35-44, 50-55)**

### **Introduction.**

The question of whether or not there is life after death is one of the most persistent questions people have asked throughout the history of the world. For example, the ancient Egyptians built pyramids as tombs for their kings and wrote the *Book of the Dead* as a guide to the next life. The Babylonians buried household goods in the graves of their loved ones, and the Greeks talked about some vague existence beyond the river Styx. In addition, the Hebrew prophets and psalmists hinted of a shadowy life in an underworld they called *Sheol*. Even in our day there are competing ideas about what exactly happens to a person when they die.

Into this confusion the Apostles' Creed boldly proclaims, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." What do we mean when we affirm this phrase in the Creed? What do Christians believe happens to the followers of Christ after they die? As we study this statement today, there are three matters I want you to consider: 1) the bodies we have; 2) the death we'll die; and 3) the resurrection Christians will enjoy.

### **I. The Bodies We Have.**

You and I have somewhat of a love/hate relationship with our bodies, don't we? On the one hand, we love them because they're a part of us, and they help us function in the world. We care for our bodies. We feed and we even pamper them. We spend an inordinate amount of time cooking special foods we like to eat, and we spend lots of money on clothes to wear. We even figure out which colors we look best in. And we spend many hours in the gym or on the bike path trying to get in shape, develop abs of steel, and keep our weight down. Think about all the time and money you spend in any given day taking care of your body. By the sheer investment of time, energy, and money, we demonstrate every single day that we love our bodies.

And yet, on the other hand, we're disappointed in our bodies because of the way they look or how they let us down. For example, we feel we're too short, or too tall. We think our nose is too long, our smile is crooked, or we complain about those corns and calluses on our feet. Some of us like me are "folically challenged," and we don't have much hair on top!

It's easy to understand how a person can be unsatisfied with their body. I always wanted to be 6'6" so I could dunk a basketball, and I wish I had a full head of hair. But I'm not alone in my dissatisfaction, and I'm constantly amazed to read interviews with supermodels who complain about this or that feature of their face or body they think is unattractive.

I mentioned earlier that our bodies let us down. As we age, we experience a sense of loss, and our bodies no longer can do the things they once did. As I've gotten older, I've noticed that my sports injuries occur more frequently, and I heal more slowly. I can relate to a remark a friend of mine made when he said, "My spirit is making commitments my body can't keep!" We love our bodies, and yet we're also disappointed in them, and they let us down?

As amazing as our bodies are, and as much as our identity is wrapped up in them, that which is essentially "us" isn't just a physical body. We have spirits and a soul, and there is an interrelatedness to these things that is a mystery. I remember when my father died back in 1975, I was the one who found his body. His face was ashen gray, and he had been dead for some time. I tried to revive him, but it was to no avail. He was gone. As I looked at my father's body, it was obvious to me that my dad was no longer there. His body was merely a shell, and the real person I knew was gone, although the body remained.

The Bible clearly teaches that our bodies were created by God, and they are fearfully and wonderfully made. But the Bible also says that through the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, death and decay entered the world, and now we suffer from the effects of humanity's fall from grace. Our bodies and all of creation have been affected, and the frustration we experience over the flaws, limitations, and eventual death of our physical bodies are evidence of that Fall. This leads us to the second point I want you to consider today.

## **II. The Death We'll Face.**

When Billy Graham was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal several years ago, he addressed a gathering of dignitaries in the Rotunda of the Capital in Washington, DC. In his acceptance speech, he thanked everyone for their kindness and generosity, for their gracious words and the great honor they had bestowed upon him. But he also went on to say, "I notice as I look around the halls of this great building the statues of the amazing people who helped shape this country's history. I have even studied the lives of many of them and have read their biographies, and I have noticed that they all have one thing in common. The one thing that they all have in common is that they are all now dead. And the fact of the matter is that all of us in this room will also one day die. And the question is, 'Are you ready to meet God when that time comes?'" Even at an awards ceremony, Billy never missed an opportunity to share the Gospel.

Dr. Graham pointed to life's one certainty – death. The fact is all of us must face this reality at some point in our lives. As wonderful as our bodies are, as amazingly as they function most of the time, eventually our bodies will give out. They will cease to function, and you and I will die.

Many people aren't comfortable with the idea of death, and they try to avoid dealing with it at all costs. Steve Brown, who was a pastor and is now an author and speaker, once was on a flight from Miami where he lives to Los Angeles. He noticed that many of the people on the plane had just come from a cruise, and the party continued during the flight. But Steve also noticed that a young woman sitting right across the aisle from him was having some difficulty. Eventually it was obvious that she was experiencing a real health crisis. A flight attendant asked if there was a doctor on the plane, and three physicians came and worked with the woman. But despite their valiant efforts, she died right there on the plane. Death came suddenly in their midst.

The mood immediately changed, and they made an emergency landing in Dallas, where they took the body of the woman off the plane. When everyone boarded the aircraft and they took off again, Steve told one of the flight attendants, "I'm a pastor, and if you need me to talk to any of the people on the plane, or if you'd like me to talk to everyone about what has just happened, I'd be happy to be of help." The flight attendant replied, "Oh, that won't be necessary. We've already talked about it, and we decided to give everyone free drinks all the way to Los Angeles so they won't have to think about it." That's how many people deal with death. They live in denial, or they try to numb the pain.

But the Bible suggests a better way of dealing with death, and our faith as believers offers us hope. Scripture says that death is an enemy. This isn't the way God intended it to be in the beginning. My body is a part of me. It is the apparatus of my self-expression, and without it, my power to create, to work, and to relate to other people in this world is gone. So death, while not ending my existence, certainly affects it in a profound way. But the Bible also says that death doesn't have the last word. Paul writes, "*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?'" (15:54,55).*

As Christians we believe that this world is not all there is to our existence. It is only a prelude, or a dress rehearsal for an even greater world to come. The Bible promises that after we die God will give us new bodies fit for heaven and a new world, and that is why the Apostles' Creed says, "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

### **III. The Resurrection Christians Will Enjoy.**

The Apostles' Creed ends on a positive note, with a clear statement of hope. It opened with a statement about faith in God, and now it concludes with a statement about hope. It says that one day we will stand in the presence of that same God. Earlier the Apostles' Creed talked about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and now it affirms the common hope that all believers will one day share in His glorious resurrection.

Death is the fundamental human problem, because if death is really final, then nothing is worthwhile in this life, and we might as well eat, drink and be merry and simply pursue self-indulgence. No philosophy or religion which isn't able to come to terms with death in any real sense is of any real value. It's at this very point that the Christian faith stands out. Of all the religions of the world, Christianity alone views death as something that has been conquered and a gateway to a better world. And the promise of Scripture is that one day we'll have bodies like that of the resurrected Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:20ff.).

In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul says a number of things about this promise. **First**, he says that our resurrected body won't be the same body as the one that is laid in the grave. In verses 35-41 Paul says that the human body is ideally suited to our life in this world, but the body we will receive in the resurrection will be ideally suited for the new heaven and the new earth.

I know of a woman who went to see a friend of mine who is a pastor. Her husband had been killed during a war, and his body was obliterated by a bomb. She asked my friend, "What about the body of my husband? What will it be like in the resurrection? It was completely destroyed!"

My friend was able to share with this grieving widow that God isn't dependent on the molecules or the wholeness of a human body to do His glorious work in the resurrection. He created us out of dust, and He can recreate us by the power of His Spirit. When the Lord raises us up to be with Him in heaven for all eternity, He will give us new bodies which will serve as instruments for our spirits to accomplish all that God has in store for us as believers in the world to come.

**Second**, Paul says that the resurrected body won't be made of flesh and blood. We read in verses 50-51, "*I declare to you that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.*" What Paul says in these verses is that the biological processes of flesh and blood will be transcended when God gives us new bodies, but we're also assured that in the resurrection we will not be pure spirit. There will be structure and form somehow, but Paul admits that how this will happen is a mystery.

**Third**, Paul says that the resurrected body won't be subject to decay or corruption. We read, "*So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body*

*that is sown is perishable, [but] it will be raised imperishable" (15:42).* We're all aware of the aging process and the deterioration of our human bodies. We have seen loved ones get sick, we have watched them grow old and die, and we have buried them in the ground. But God assures us that in the resurrection our new bodies won't be subject to corruption and decay any longer.

And **finally**, Paul says that our resurrected bodies will be glorious. He writes that the physical body *"is sown in dishonor, [but] it will be raised in glory"* (15:43). The word that is translated "glory" is the Greek word *doxa* from which we get our English word "doxology." The Bible says our bodies will be raised in glory, magnificence, and splendor.

Now, does that mean that in the resurrection I will have a full head of hair and I'll be able to dunk a basketball? I don't know. But it does mean, that the most physically handsome and athletic man on earth won't have anything on me in the resurrection! I'll be quite a sight to see! In his essay *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis said that if we could see someone in their resurrected and glorified state, we would be tempted to bow down and worship them.

N.T. Wright has written, "As long as we see salvation in terms of going to heaven when we die, the main work of the church is bound to be seen in terms of saving souls for that future. But when we see salvation, as the New Testament sees it, in terms of God's promised new heavens and new earth and of our promised resurrection to share in that new and gloriously embodied reality...then the main work of the church here and now demands to be rethought in consequence."<sup>1</sup>

## **Conclusion.**

It is because Jesus rose again from the dead and gave us His promise that you and I can say, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." This is no hollow statement of hope for pie in the sky, by-and-by. This isn't just whistling in the dark. Rather, it is a conviction of the mind and heart that this world is not all there is to this life, and God has a good plan for each one of us in the future that is called eternity. It's a statement of affirmation of the goodness and yet the limitation of the bodies we have here on earth, and it encourages us not to fear death, for it won't have the final word.

I close with this. On December 22, 1899, Dwight L. Moody, the famous evangelist of the 19th century, died in Northfield, Massachusetts. It was the same small town in which he had been born. Years before, he anticipated that moment and said, "Some morning you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. But don't believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now....I was born in the flesh in 1837; I was born in the Spirit in

1856. That which is born of the flesh may die, but that which is born of the Spirit will live forever!"<sup>2</sup>

Moody was right. Death cannot touch the person who is united by faith with Christ and knows the power of His resurrection. Therefore, take comfort in this glorious affirmation in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Thanks be to God!

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Timothy George in "Why We Still Need Moody," *Christianity Today*, December 6, 1999, p. 66.