**THE GLORY OF THE RESURRECTION**

(We Shall be Like Jesus)

April 20, 2014

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Key Verse 15:49 “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."

Many ask, “Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ necessary?” They attend church and enjoy Christian fellowship. Their main purpose in going to church is to have fellowship with others and obtain comfort and peace after hard work. Their faith in Jesus was more concerned with their present situation than with man’s salvation from sin and eternal life through the death and resurrection of Christ. So whenever they hear the words “the resurrection of Christ,” they draw the line in their minds and think, “No way. That is not necessary.” They think the resurrection is not practical, and that resurrection faith does not add any practical benefits to their welfare. We have more pressing issues such as finding a job, finding a marriage partner or getting out of debt. But the future hope of resurrection actually has an impact on how we deal with the stresses and the crises that confront us now. It helps us to set our priority straight.

Look at verse 35. “But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’” It was inconceivable for the Corinthians to accept resurrection faith. It was even more inconceivable for them to think of the bodily resurrection. To many, it was horrible that the dead would be raised and walk around. They thought that the resurrection body was like a corpse walking around. Nobody wants to die. But nobody wants to be raised as they are, with their wretched body and bad habits. Moreover, the attachment to life in this world may be the strongest attachment any person can have. But no one wants to repeat the miseries and agonies of life over again. So some Corinthians asked rebelliously, “How are the dead raised?” and “With what kind of body will they come?” These two questions are basically the same.

In some Asian countries, they don’t burn the dead bodies because they believe that they need the dead bodies for next life. Even in serious disease epidemic, they refuse to do that and it contributes to the spread of the disease. Many people believe in reincarnation after death. They believe that they will be born as snakes or roaches if they do bad stuff. All these questions and beliefs come from their fear of death. Even if they had to suffer endlessly living in this world, they wanted to live in this world. For example, in this country many terminally ill patients stay in a hospital in order to stay alive one more minute. Sometimes I don’t understand what they are thinking. They might think that they can overcome death with the medical technology. So when Paul mentioned about the glory of the resurrection they rejected his teaching in their hearts. But they did not say, “We reject the glory of the resurrection.” Instead, they turned what they had in their minds around into a theological argument, like many worldly Christians who do not put what they know into practice.

Look at verse 36. “How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” Here Paul teaches us the resurrection principle. The resurrection principle is that death is prerequisite to resurrection: unless someone or something dies there is no resurrection. Without death there is no resurrection. Paul, who grasped the glorious resurrection principle, said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, “I die every day.” It didn’t mean physical death, but it meant that he did not despair in all situations, but worked hard for Jesus as a matter of life and death. There is no thought of death to those who accepted the principle of the resurrection. Instead, their hearts are filled with the glory of God. On the other hand, those who reject the resurrection principle are under the shadow of death.

Look at verses 37,38. “When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, to each kind of seed he gives his own body.” Here Paul likens man’s body to a seed that has been planted. No seed is pretty enough to look at with wonder. But the bodies that come from seeds have fascinating beauty beyond imagination, like the beautiful flowers and all kinds of plants which came from their seeds. In this country people pay huge amount of money to funeral homes to make the dead look beautiful, thinking that it will be preserved. But it will perish. Because we have a physical body from Adam, we have many weaknesses and bad habits.

Look at verses 42b-44. “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” Paul explained that the physical body is the seed of the spiritual body and that the resurrection body is splendorous and glorious. Most importantly, Paul makes it clear that the physical body is the seed of the glorious spiritual body. What a glorious hope it is to be clothed with the resurrection body! In this world, we must suffer. We have sorrow and pain. In the course of living in this world, all men become old and look wretched. Some people have been eaten by cancer. We have to struggle with Calculus and Economics. As we study, our heads seem to explode and we cannot take it more. We cannot sing as well as we would like. We struggle with our pimples. We are very frustrated at times because of our sinful habits. It is because we inherited a physical body from Adam. This is why superman movies are so popular. Each person wants to be a superman.

It is funny that each person thinks, even if he or she does not really believe so, that he or she is the most handsome man or the most beautiful woman. People think so to forget about their hidden human agonies. One of the human agonies is that each person loses his or her beauty when he or she gets old. So, to old people we flatter them, “Oh, you look very young.” It is a white lie. Still, it works remarkably. Man wants to be a poetic teenager and live in the world forever and ever. But he gets old and dies. Not only that we have to worry about getting fat, high cholesterol, and arthritis. We all bear the likeness of the earthly man. If there is no resurrection body, man’s life is too sorrowful to think about. Those who have no resurrection faith are all too sorrowful, thinking they will be ornamented by funeral service men when they die.

But when we have resurrection faith, we do not suffer from the thought of death. Rather, we live

in the world with glorious hope. Look at verse 49. “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” When we keep the faith, and fight the good fight, and run the race to the end and die, we will be clothed with the resurrection body by the Risen Christ. What will we look like? We will not look as we were. We will all look like beautiful Jesus. It is totally unbelievable. But it will be so. Look at verse 49 again. “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” During our lifetime we Christians all suffer endlessly to keep the faith and run the race of faith. We suffer endlessly because of false accusations of God-haters. Most of all, we suffer because of fallen man’s tendencies in us, though we struggle hard to be like Jesus. But when we die, not only are we clothed with the likeness of Jesus, but also the Risen Christ makes our inner man to be like beautiful Jesus. We will be as humble as Jesus. We will be as gentle as Jesus. We will be as obedient as Jesus. We will be as glorious as Jesus. The man from heaven is Jesus Christ. We die in an ugly and weak body; but when we believe in Jesus the man from heaven, we will be raised up in a glorious resurrection body. We will bear the likeness of Jesus. We shall be like him.

How glorious is our hope of salvation and our hope to be restored in the image of Jesus! With this glorious hope of heaven in our hearts, we can live every day as holy children of God. But our greatest and most glorious hope is far bigger than just our own personal salvation and glorification. Paul says in verse 50, “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” What we Christians hold in our hearts with joy is the sure fact of Jesus’ coming again. What happens to us when he comes again? Look at verses 51,52. “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.” At the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ there will be the bodily resurrection of all people. Bodily resurrection has deep meaning in it. Those who thought death is the end of everything will find that they were wrong. Those who lived in the world as the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practiced magic arts, the idolaters and all liars cannot hide anymore in their graves. They will be resurrected to be judged according to what they had done. On the other hand, Jesus’ people will all be changed to be like him and will inherit the kingdom of God and live forever with the Risen Christ in peace and love.

The coming of Christ means joy and salvation to believers. But the time of his second coming is the time of condemnation and suffering for the enemies of our God. They crucified Jesus and thought they would see him no more. But they will see his coming with their own eyes. They were the ones who persecuted God’s people ruthlessly. But they will not be able to persecute them anymore, because they will be thrown into the lake of eternal destruction. Finally, the last enemy, the power of sin and death, is destroyed by the second coming of Jesus Christ. Actually, at the time of the resurrection of Jesus, the power of sin and death was destroyed. But Satan has been wagging his tail because the vestige of last breathing remained in the end of Satan’s tail. This wagging tail of Satan has frightened mankind until now. But at the time of the second coming of Jesus, sin and death, that is, Satan, will be completely destroyed and there will be no more Satan--the liars and murderers. So Paul taunt the power of death which has been rendered helpless, “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’” (55-56).

Look at verse 58. “Therefore, my dear brothers, 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.” Paul strongly encourages Christians to work hard for the Risen Christ, for only work done in the Lord is not in vain. We work hard to invite students on campus, but no one responds to our invitation. Or they make appointments, but they don’t show up. Then we become discouraged, thinking that all our efforts were in vain. But nothing done for God goes to waste. We may not see how it all fits or works – but we know that there is a future – a future renewed body – and everything we do here, regardless of results, leads us on into that future. All our struggles and sufferings will be part of our glorious resurrection body. So take heart. Move forward to what is ultimately ours through the work of Christ Jesus.  
  
In the 4th Century there was a lovely young woman named Macrina. She was the sister of two of the greatest Bible scholars– Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. She was, at the age of 13, engaged to be married to a wonderful man – not an uncommon age at that time. But before the marriage could take place, her fiancé died. Macrina decided that God must have something else for her to do and she established one of the earliest Christian communities just for women – kind of convent. Macrina was very studious and a great woman of prayer and wisdom. On her death bed she said a prayer that was so profound, one of her brothers, who was attending to her, wrote it down. It is the prayer of a person who clearly understands and grasps what the Apostle Paul has been saying in 1 Corinthians 15.

“O Lord, you have freed us from the fear of death. You have made the end of life here the beginning of a true life for us. For a time, you give rest to our bodies in sleep and you awaken us again at the last trumpet.

The dust from which you fashioned us with your hands you give back to the dust of the earth for safekeeping, and you who have relinquished it will recall it after reshaping with incorruptibility and grace our mortal and graceless substance.

You have delivered us from the curse of the law and from sin, by being made both on our behalf.

You crushed the heads of the serpent who had seized us with his jaws in the abyss of disobedience. You have opened for us the way of resurrection, after breaking the gates of hell, and have destroyed him that had the power of death.

You who broke the flaming sword and compassionately gave Paradise back to the man crucified with you, remember me also in your kingdom, for I, too, have been crucified with you, having nailed my flesh through fear of you and having feared your judgments.

May you who have power on earth to forgive sins, forgive me, that I may draw breath and that I be found in your presence, “having shed my body and without spot or wrinkle” in the form of my soul, and that my soul may be innocent and spotless and may be received into your hands like incense in your presence.”