

You may be familiar with Shakespeare's 7 ages of man. (PPT).

What next? (ppt)

Today we conclude our sermon series from the final chapters of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Last week in 1 Corinthians 15 we were reminded of the centrality of the resurrection to Paul's calling, to the gospel that he has preached, and to their faith.

Paul insists that Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. (ppt)

When Christ comes again all will be raised, and the living will be transformed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

This week's section of text bluntly raises the question that the Corinthians must have been thinking: "What might a resurrected corpse look like?" Some of the Corinthians may not have believed in an afterlife at all, while others may have hoped for their souls' peaceful existence apart from the body. The Corinthians' objections to the belief in the resurrection seem to stem, at least in part, from their repulsion of corpses. If this God insists on raising corpses (and God does), what will those bodies be like?

The concerns of the Corinthians are understandable. In an age without access to healthcare, life in "normal" bodies was not necessarily a healthy existence. Life for the majority in the Roman Empire was hard. Food was scarce for many. With a lack of nutrition, disabilities or conditions that are still common, like poor eyesight, were abundant. Life expectancy was low. Less than fifty percent of children lived to see the age of ten. Death was simply part of everyday life. Hoping to escape a physical body that was less than healthy is not an unreasonable hope.

It is of little wonder that the moral philosophy of the day tended to denigrate flesh and blood.

In reality, the predominant philosophies of Paul's day placed no hope in the body. It must have been appealing to think that the essence of who one is need not be tied to an imperfect casing. But Paul is convinced that God made that casing and longs to redeem it.

In affirming a bodily resurrection, Paul is not advocating a zombie apocalypse. (ppt) The good news is not the resuscitation of decayed corpses. It is the transformation of the body into a body that has not been corrupted by the powers of sin and death.

For Paul, sin is a superpower that has taken dominion over the goodness of God's creation.¹ It is not limited to human transgression. We might refer to this concept of sin more broadly as systemic evil or injustice. The whole created order has suffered under sin's superpower. All creation -- human and nonhuman -- longs for redemption (Romans 8:18-25). That means that none of God's creation has remained untouched -- uncorrupted -- by sin's reign -- including our bodies.

Paul dares to imagine the transformation of the body -- remade and renewed. The language that he uses to describe the transformation forms a stark contrast to bodily existence as we currently experience it -- perishable versus imperishable, weakness versus power, dishonor versus glory, natural versus spiritual (verses 42-44). Far from the image of decaying corpses, the resurrected body sounds glorious. It is not the epitome of disease or weakness, but the epitome of strength and power.

Paul makes an analogy between the first Adam and the last. Quoting Genesis 2:7, Paul notes that the first Adam was a living soul or a living being. The second Adam exceeds that by becoming a life-giving spirit. The analogy here is similar to Romans 5:12-21. The first Adam brought death, but the last Adam brought life for all.

Paul is convinced that the believers will be transformed as Christ has been transformed. Paul can make this bold claim *because he has seen the resurrected Christ* (15:8-11). That one revelation changed the course of Paul's whole life. That revelation caused him to see God's transformative resurrection power invading life as he knew it. If Christ has not been raised, then that revelation is a lie. If Christ has not been raised, then this gospel offers no more hope than any other religion or philosophy.

"The image of the man of heaven" is the image that Paul is attempting to portray (1 Corinthians 15:49). He has seen the body transformed in his revelation of Christ, and he is struggling to describe the glory of it. He appeals to celestial bodies -- the glory of the sun, the moon, and the star -- to contrast that with the terrestrial bodies of flesh and blood (15:40-41).

It is not surprising that he makes use of the imagery of celestial bodies in an attempt to describe the splendour of the transformation. Some believed that upon death, the soul dwelt among the stars. The ethereal stuff that made up the heavens was thought to be the same substance that comprised the soul.²Paul's language here echoes the glory of that celestial substance but adapts the expectation. Paul does not believe that we go live in the sky as celestial bodies when we die. Rather, the body will be transformed into this glorious state. (ppt)

His main image is one familiar to any gardener (the seed) – have a look at the one in your hand – anyone any idea what this might become? How do you know - how do we know – Christ's resurrection.... The seed will undergo an amazing transformation, but the transformation will come from the original seed; it is not replaced. It has to be buried, to die, and then rises to this new life – the seed is transformed into the plant. The heavenly body is linked to the earthly body, just as the risen Christ was recognised by his disciples. How might the resurrection shape our everyday thinking – does the fact we will know and be known when we die change our present reality?

Paul insists that this resurrected body will be a body. It may be a fiery substance, like a star, or somehow exude the glow of celestial bodies, but it will be recognizable as a body. The flesh and blood that had been corrupted under Sin's power will be

transformed to reflect the blessing of abundant life that God always wanted for God's creation.

This section of text does not answer all our questions about resurrection. How is it scientifically possible for a body to become imperishable, for instance? What might a body look like that has been untouched by the corrupting and destructive power of sin? None of this matters, no, What this section of the text does do is affirm the bodily resurrection as central to the faith. Paul's language and experience are limited -- as is ours. Look to Jesus... Remember Christ has died, Christ is Risen – Christ will come again (ppt)

(seed meditation)