**THE MYSTERY OF THE RESURRECTION BODY**

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Key Verse: 15:51-52a

“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.”

In the previous passage (15:12-34), Apostle Paul discussed why the resurrection of Christ was necessary and even undeniable, in response to some Corinthian Christians who denied resurrection itself. Apostle Paul logically defended that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ is raised, our sins are not forgiven, our faith in Christ is useless and Christianity is nothing but an illusion. But Christ’s resurrection is a historical fact, and when he comes again, all those who belong to him will be resurrected.

In today’s passage, Apostle Paul focuses his discussion on the mystery of our resurrected body. In fact, the word “body”, which is ***‘soma’*** in Greek, is repeated 13 times (35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44) while it is not mentioned even once in the previous passage (1-34). In fact if only our spirit, not our body, is resurrected, we cannot call it a resurrection. According to Paul, the resurrection of believers is not the reincarnation or a resuscitation of our dead bodies but a powerful Re-creation of our bodies. Our resurrection body will be far better than one could ever imagine. This is something we all should know and eagerly long for. I am surely interested in it. Let us think about what kind of body each of us will receive at the resurrection.

Look at verse 35. “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’” One of the objections of those who deny resurrection has to do with the resurrection body. They might have asked, *“Okay, Paul. You said that when the dead are raised, it is not just their spirit but their body that is going to be resurrected. Then what about those whose bodies are decomposed in their graves? What about those whose bodies are cremated and their ash is spread over the ocean? They are gone. What kind of body will they have?”* They had realistic questions. I am sure that some of us have similar questions? I do.

So what kind of body is the resurrection body? Look at verse 36. “How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” Paul said that they were foolish because even though Corinthians bragged about their superior wisdom, they did not understand a basic lifecycle that is revealed in nature. He said, “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” In other words, Paul was saying that death is a necessary process in resurrection. For example, a seed of an oak tree (Pic#1), which is buried, dies and decomposes. Then from that process of death comes a huge oak tree (Pic#2). Amazing, isn’t it? This reminds us of what Jesus said in John 12:24, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Death is a necessary process for resurrection.

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, and to each kind of seed, he gives its own body.” In these verses, Paul elaborates what he just said in verse 36. Here, he compares human life to a seed, that is sown in the ground. It means that we all are seeds, Mr. Seed. Miss. Seed. Uncle Seed. Aunt Seed. We should not compare ourselves with others because we all are seeds. However, whatever seeds are sown in the ground grow into different flowers or plants in far more glorious forms the seed. Think about tulips. Have you seen tulip bulbs? (Pic#3) Are they gorgeous? No. Tulip bulbs are not so attractive. But when they are planted in the ground during the fall, then beautiful tulips grow in the Spring (Pic#4). They are gorgeous. Their beauty is stunning. What Paul was saying is that God who is full of wisdom and power also designed that our physical body, like seeds, will produce a gorgeous resurrection body in Christ Jesus. Our resurrection body will be far better than our physical body.

Look at verses 39-41. “Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.’” In these verses, Paul begins and ends his discussion by stressing the differences within these kinds of bodies. Paul also uses the term “splendor” a lot in these verses. Whenever I watch the Nature Channel, I am mesmerized by the beauty and wonder of God’s creation. Paul’s point is that no matter how numerous the creatures may be, each has its own uniqueness, different from one another.

Likewise, our glorious resurrection body will be different from one another, unlike things made by a cookie cutter. When we are resurrected, we will be different from one another with our own unique appearance and personality. Do you believe that God our Father who made the heavens and earth is wise and powerful enough to make our future resurrection ever glorious, unique, and attractive? The fact of the matter is that the resurrection of God’s children is the peak of God’s creation. We will be amazed.

Look at verses 42-44a. “So will be with the resurrection of the dead. 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” Here, Paul seems to highlight that there is clear difference between our natural body and our resurrected body. Our present body is natural, which is perishable, meaning that it slowly deteriorates and will eventually decay in the grave. It has an expiration date. But our resurrected body will be imperishable and forever young with no expiration date. When we look at newborn babies, they are delighted because they are so adorable and lovely. However, there is nothing that is more ignoble and dishonorable than dead bodies. Yet, our resurrected body will be dignified, glorious, wholesome, and adorable. Our current body is weak, gets easily tired and limited. But our resurrected body will be full of energy and power and never grow tired or limited.

One thing we should remember here is that our natural body is designed only to be suited for the time and space on this planet earth. But when it is raised, it will be transformed into a spiritual body, suited for heaven, beyond the limit of time and space. Wow! The glory of our resurrection body seems too good to be true, sounds like a science fiction movie. But this is what God our Father has prepared for his children (1 Pe. 1:3-4). He is not the God of the dead. He is the God of the living. Paul’s point is that our resurrection body will be a spiritual body, different from our natural body.

In verses 46-49, Paul explains more about the difference between the natural body and the spiritual body in a slightly different aspect. Look at verses 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 heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have born the image of earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.” In these verses, Paul returns to his analogy between Adam and Christ to highlight his argument. He was talking about the difference between the natural body and the spiritual body. Now he talks about the difference between the earthly men and heavenly men. All humankind has a human body like that of the first man, Adam. Those born only of the first man Adam, who are earthly men, live and die, just as Adam did. But those who are born of the last Adam Christ will live in heaven as heavenly men, like Christ.

As earthly men, we all have agony. Due to the image and attributes of earthly man in me, I find that I am conflicted in many ways, not being able to feel, think or act in the way I want to. I often feel stuck in my body of sin and death, just as Paul cried out “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Ro. 7:20-25) But when we are resurrected, we will not do anything that contradicts our will. We will be like Christ Jesus, bearing his beautiful and honorable attributes. We want to be resurrected not with an ugly and nasty character but with a unique personality and wonderful character. And that is what is going to happen at the resurrection. We will be heavenly men and women.

Look at verse 50. “I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” I heard several people tell their exciting experience of visiting heaven in a dream, where they saw their loved ones who died, and a beautiful mansion prepared for them. They are deeply moved. I wish I could have such experience. Some believers think that they will meet Jesus in heaven, with the nail marks in his hands. It sounds beautiful, but I am not sure if the glorified Jesus still has nail marks in his hands. What do you think? If I had birth defects or scars in my natural body, will I still carry them when I am resurrected? I do not believe so. As a matter of fact, for us to enter the kingdom of God, our natural body must be transformed into a heavenly body.

Look at verses 51-53. “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. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Here, Paul shares the mystery of our resurrection body, particularly about when and how it will happen. The phrase “at the last trumpet” refers to Jesus’ second coming. The resurrection of our body will happen when Jesus comes again. We will be changed. The transformation of our body is like putting on a new garment of immortality. It will happen not gradually but instantly, in the twinkling of an eye. That is truly a mystery.

Look at verses 54-57. “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?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, Paul, by quoting Scripture verses from the Old Testament (Is. 25:8 & Hos.13:14) declares the ultimate victory over the power of death through Jesus Christ. In fact, this victory is already given to us through Christ who rose from the dead. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself. We can say, “Good-bye Mr. Death!”

To be honest, however, I cannot say that I am completely free from the fear of death or dying because death is an unknown over which I do not have any control. It is sad that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so many people lost their lives and their loved ones. Some people say that there is overwhelming pain of death when people are about to die. It may be true. But we, as believers in Christ, do not need to be afraid of dying because we have the ultimate victory in Jesus. In fact, Apostle Paul laughed at death, saying “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” How could he? It is because he believed in the victory in Jesus. To us who belong to Christ, death is the doorway into an immortal life of glory. “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (57) **“Victory in Jesus!”**

Look at verse 58. “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, 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.” Initially, Paul decided to write a long letter to Corinthian Christians because they had a lot of internal problems. Even though they were rich in many spiritual gifts and had served the Lord’s work sacrificially at some point, they got tired of struggling with many temptations and discouragements in the world. The root of all their problems was that they slowly lost their faith in the basic gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They slacked off from the gospel faith. To them, resurrection was obscure and unrealistic. As a result, they were no longer motivated to live a godly life and engage in the work of God’s salvation.

Yet, Paul dearly loved them. After reminding them of the gospel of resurrection, he concluded it by encouraging them to stand firm, unshaken and give themselves fully to the work of the Lord. The last statement is “because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” We know that the grace of forgiveness of sin is a gift. We did not work to earn it. But Paul emphasizes that the degree of our glory in resurrection depends on our work based on faith. We are still during the pandemic. Many things are being changed. And we do not know for how long it will last. It seems that the future of our life will be uncertain. But we must be sure that we have the victory in Christ Jesus. No matter what challenges are ahead of us, we will overcome through him who gives us strength. Most of all, we have the victory in Jesus. Therefore, we should stand firm and not shaken. We should continue to serve the Lord and love one another, while supporting all those who are in the frontline of the battle. May we continue to do our best to serve the work of Lord, remembering that our labor in the Lord is not in vain and we have victory in Jesus.