

THE PROMISE OF PERMANENT PERFECTION

If I were to have you turn your outlines over and list reasons **why** the resurrection of Jesus is important, **how many** reasons do you think **you** could come up with? I did a “Duck-duck-go” search and the number of answers found in on-line articles ranged from 3...to 5...to as many as 10.

My guess is that **very few of us** could come up with 10! Some of you might be thinking, ‘Pastor, I’m not sure I can even come up with **three** so let’s start with just **one**!’ So, I’m going to **give you one**—even though you probably already know it.

Here goes: If Jesus did not rise from the dead, He would be **a liar**. **Why** would He be a liar? Because **He said**—on multiple occasions—that He would rise from the dead! So **if He didn’t rise** from the dead, He would be a liar—which would **make Him a sinner**! And **a sinner** can’t die as a **sinless substitute**—He would have to die for **His own sins**! So salvation from the **penalty of our sins** is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead!

Please take your Bibles and turn to I Corinthians 15. I Corinthians 15 is commonly referred to as the **resurrection** chapter. Why? Because that is what pretty much the entire chapter is about! In fact, if you want to know **why** the resurrection of Jesus is important, this chapter alone gives **at least five** reasons.

We are not going to look at **multiple** reasons, though, this morning. Instead, I want to focus on **the wonderful promise** God through Paul gives us that is found in vs 49. Notice what it says. Isn’t that great? We have a promise—from God—that just as sure as we **have borne** the image of the earthy, we **shall also bear** the image of the heavenly.

--But what does it mean to bear the image **of the earthy**?

--And what does it mean to bear the image **of the heavenly**?

--And **who is this promise** made to? **Will everyone** bear the image of the heavenly—or just **some of us**? Paul gives us the answers to those questions here in our text and that is what we will be looking at this morning.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of this chapter is about **the resurrection**. In the way of a little background and context, notice vs 35. Whether someone **actually asked** Paul these questions—or **he anticipated** someone would have these thoughts—isn’t overly important. What is important is the answers that he gives to the two questions found in vs 35: 1) How are the dead raised up? 2) With what body are they raised up?

As is often the case, Paul’s answer here **is long**—it goes from verse 36 to at least verse 49, if not to the end of the chapter! And, as is also often the case, Paul’s reasoning—his flow of thought—**isn’t always easy** to follow! But his answer does **start out** with an illustration that pretty much all of us can relate to—**a seed**!

Verse 36. “Thou fool”—you senseless, doubting, non-thinking person—“that which thou sowest is not quickened” [does not come to life], “except it die:”

Simply put, that bean...or beet...or carrot...or corn seed does not “release” the life that is in it unless **the shell** of that seed—the outward part of it—falls off (or disintegrates). If it remains as it is—and refuses to **get out of the way** and “die”—the life **within that** seed will die! We’re following his point so far, right?

Now verse 37. We can understand this, too, right? A bean seed—which most of us can visualize—after it is planted in the ground, does not remain **the same shape** as the seed and simply **grow larger**! Instead, even though it is a bean **plant**, it takes on a very different body than the bean **seed** you planted in the ground!

Now jump ahead to verse 42. Will expand on this more in a little bit, but keep in mind the “Big Picture.” Just as a **sown seed** becomes a plant with a different kind of body than was put into the ground; a “**sown**” **body**—when it is put **into the ground**—comes out of the ground in a different kind of body than was put in!

Before we look at the **contrasts** between what goes **in the ground**—and what will **come out of it**—I want to point out a few things that I believe are important.

1) Paul's use of the word "sown." **Four times** in these three verses we see the phrase "it is sown." We sow **seeds** when we bury them—but we don't say we've "sown" **our cat** after burying it in the backyard!

And we **expect life** to come from **the seeds** we sow, but we don't expect **our cat to come back to life!** So Paul—by using the word "sown"—reminds us that there is an **expected resurrection** that takes place after we die. In other words, our bodies being placed in the ground is only temporary!

2) Although **there are differences** between the body **sown** and the body that is **resurrected**, there has to be **some similarities**. Why do I say that? Because the body that is **sown** is the body that is **raised**—only in a different form! It **doesn't say**, "**This** is sown; **that** is raised." It says, "**It** is sown—and **it** is raised!"

And let's not forget that although Jesus was **different** after He rose from the dead, He was still recognizable!

3) Lastly, it is important to notice the **consistency in order**. In all the comparisons that are made, **the inferior**—the lesser and worse state—is given **first**; followed by **the superior**—the greater and better state. We'll see that as we go through the passage...

Let's notice first... **1. The contrast between the body sown and the body raised (vss 42-44)**

A. Corruption vs incorruption (vs 42)

At the end of our lives, our bodies are placed in the ground. What happens to them? Without trying to be offensive—but at the same time wanting to see the picture Paul is painting—these bodies **don't last** after they are put into the ground. They corrupt...they decay...they decompose.

What was **Martha's concern** when Jesus asked that the stone be rolled away from Lazarus' grave? **John 11:39** "...Lord, by this time he [what?]**—stinketh!**—for he hath been dead four days." These bodies are corruptible; they are subject to decay.

But...they will be **raised in incorruption!** Our future resurrected body will be incorruptible. Our new body will show **no signs of decay**. It will be exempt from decay; it will be immune to it! It will not degenerate; it will not deteriorate, and it will remain in this **incorruptible** state...**forever!**

B. Dishonor vs glory (vs 43a)

Again, at the end of our lives, our bodies are **sown in dishonor**. We try to bring dignity to funerals and make them an **honorable** event, but there is really **nothing pleasant** about dead bodies. We take a lot of pictures at **weddings**—but that's not true of funerals, is it? Matthew Poole writes "there is nothing more uncomely, unlovely, and loathsome than a dead body..."

But, **being sown in dishonor** is not the **end state** for the believer! Our bodies will **be raised in glory!** The word **glory** is found over 160 times in the NT and has a few different meanings, but the idea here is it is that of **magnificence and excellence**—that which brings **awe and admiration**.

--In **Mt 13:43**, Jesus says "Then shall the **righteous shine forth as the sun** in the kingdom of their Father."

--**Phil 3:21** "Who shall **change our vile body**, that it may be fashioned like unto **His glorious body...**"

--**I John 3:2** "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him**; for we shall see Him as He is."

C. Weakness vs power (vs 43b)

This body, when it is "planted" into the ground, will be sown **in weakness**. We do not evolve, with time, and gain a **stronger, healthier body** than the one we have now. Instead, our strength goes, our eyesight goes, our hearing and memory goes, the back hunches, the step slows, our joints make funny noises and our flexibility decreases. And that's the **normal** process!

If disease sets in, the process often accelerates. This natural body gets sick, hurt, and tired. It is sown **in weakness, not in strength**. **But**—praise God—this body will be **raised in power!**

It will be transformed from a body that is so **wore out** it can't muster up enough strength for **one more breath**—or one more **heart-beat**—to a miraculous power that brings it **out of a casket** that is 6 feet under!

Let's not forget that **just as the angels** didn't roll the stone away to **let Jesus out**—we will not need grave diggers to **dig us out!** We will be raised in **power!**

D. Natural body vs spiritual body (vs 44)

What is a **natural** body? The word “natural” refers to the characteristics that we **have in common** with animal life. Like animals, we have a body that **requires certain things** to survive. We have a body that needs **air to breathe**...and food to eat...and water to drink...and some kind of shelter when it gets too cold or hot. We are like animals in that respect.

But—once again—the **end state** for the believer's body is not the **permanent** state! We will be raised **a spiritual body!** **What** does that mean? It does **not mean** that we will have a ghost-like body that looks like a mist or cloud—and we **will not have** a body that is dependent on “nature” to survive!

Matthew Poole suggests these bodies “shall be more like angels and other spirits, than human bodies, beautiful, incorruptible, free from infirmities, not subject to hunger, or thirst, or injuries from heat or cold; not using meat, drink, clothes, or marriage; free, active and nimble as spirits.”

--**John 20:19** “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, **came Jesus and stood** in the midst.”

Now vs 45. As mentioned earlier, Paul's flow of thought—his line of reasoning— isn't always **easy to follow**. As I was wrestling with what Paul was saying in these next few verses, it dawned on me that in vss 42-44, Paul started with the **end state**—what our bodies will be like when they are laid to rest—to how it **all began**—with Adam—in vss 45-48!

But... as I thought about it a little more, the emphasis seems to be more on making a comparison between our **natural, physical** state and our **spiritual life** in Christ than **who/where** we came from!

2. The contrast between our natural state and spiritual state

Notice again the middle of verse 44: “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

Needless to say, **if** there is a **natural body**—a body that has to do with the **physical** world—there is **physical** life. We know that because **we live in it!**

The same holds true in the **spiritual** realm. If there is such a thing as a **spiritual body**, there is obviously **spiritual life**. And that is the contrast that Paul paints for us here in these next four verses. Rather than try to explain each verse in detail, I'm going to give you what I believe is the main truth from each verse.

A. Adam represents physical life; Christ gives spiritual life (vs 45)

Look at the 1st part of vs 45. God made Adam. He formed him from the dust—then breathed into him physical life. The word “soul”—“The first man Adam was made a **living soul**”—is closely related to the word “natural” in verses 44 and 46. The emphasis, then, is not on the **immaterial**, invisible part of Adam—it is on **his physical body** that is suited for **physical life** here on earth. That is the first Adam.

Notice the rest of the verse: “...the **last Adam** was made a quickening spirit.” Who is the **last** Adam? Who is the “quickenings”—meaning **life-giving**—spirit? **It's Jesus**, right? Jesus is the one who **gives spiritual life**—everlasting life—by His death on the cross for our sins and rising again.

John 20:31 “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye **might have life** through His name.

B. Physical life is first; spiritual life is second (vs 46)

We see that in vs 46. Why is that important? Because it emphasizes that life starts in the natural, **physical** realm—not the **spiritual!** Our **first** birth puts us in the **physical** realm—and that is where we stay unless we have a **second, spiritual** birth. What is the second birth? Let's turn to John 3 and see how Jesus explains it to Nicodemus.

Look at vs 3. Pretty specific, isn't it? The **only way** you can get into heaven is to be born again!

Was Jesus referring to a **literal, physical** birth? No, He wasn't—but that is what Nicodemus thought! We see that in his response in vs.

Jesus then explains to Nicodemus what He means by the **second birth** in verses 5 and 6.

What does Jesus mean by being “born of water and of the Spirit?” Is He saying you **have to be baptized**? No, He's not—and here are two reasons why:

1) First, it would contradict numerous NT passages that plainly state we are **not saved by works**—meaning things that we **do** (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:20,28; Romans 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5).

And let's not forget what **Jesus said to the thief** on the cross. “Today you will be with me in paradise”—**not** ‘hurry up and have someone sprinkle water on you to wash away your sins before you die!’

2) Second, I believe **the context** suggests that being “born of water” refers to **physical** birth. Why? How?

Nicodemus is thinking **physical** birth—how can a man be born a **second** time—but Jesus is talking **spiritual** birth. But in vs 5, I believe Jesus is talking **about both** physical birth and spiritual birth based on what He says in John 3:6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Two births—two lives. “Born of water” equates to the being born of the **flesh**, meaning **physical** life; “born of the spirit” is the spiritual life that God gives when we receive Jesus as our Savior and are born again.

Back to I Cor 15; look at vs 47. Here we see... C. Adam is from the dust; Christ is from heaven (vs 47)

Adam, of course, was made out of dust—but he is also “attached” to the **world**. “The Lord,” on the other hand—an obvious reference to Jesus—is from **heaven**. I couldn't help but think of John 8:23 when I was looking at this verse: “And He [Jesus] said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.”

D. We bear the likeness of our leader (vs 48)

We see that truth in vs 48 “As is the **earthy**, such are they also that are **earthy**.”

We are like Adam in that we have a **physical life** that is dependent on **physical things** in order to live. But—unfortunately—that is **not our only similarity** to Adam.

--We doubt God's **Word** like Adam did. “Ye shall not surely die” Satan told Adam and Eve...and they believed him instead of God!

--We doubt God's **love** like Adam did. Remember what Satan said to Adam and Eve to plant doubts in their minds? Genesis 3:5 “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” In other words, **Satan was saying**: ‘God doesn't love you—and is holding back something good from you. That is why He doesn't want you to eat from that tree!’

--And, like Adam and Eve, we are **willing to do wrong**—to sin against God—and **indulge in** what satisfies our **eyes...and taste... and touch!** Genesis 3:6 “And when the woman saw that the tree was **good for food**, and that it was **pleasant to the eyes**, and a tree to be **desired to make one wise**, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

Thankfully, the **second half** of the verse is also true: “...and as is **the heavenly**, such are they also **that are heavenly**.” The **first** heavenly, of course, refers to **Jesus**; the second “heavenly” is a reference to **believers**. Stated another way, “as **is Jesus**, such are they also that are **of Jesus**.”

How is it that we are “**of Jesus**?” Because when we **possess** Jesus—when we **have the Son** as our Savior—God counts us as being **in Christ**.

II Cor 5:17 “Therefore if any man be **in Christ**, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” We are a new creature—a new creation—**in Christ**.

Ephesians 2:5 “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together **with Christ**, (by grace ye are saved;)” We are quickened—we are made alive together—with Christ!

Colossians 3:3 “For ye are dead, and **your life is hid with Christ** in God.”

Again, God counts us as being hid **with** Christ and **in** Christ!

And because we are **in Christ**—because we are a child of God—we have this wonderful promise found in verse 49 “And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

3. The characteristics of the promise that we will bear the image of the heavenly

A. The worst is first; the best is yet to come

--Yes, we will be sown in corruption—but raised in incorruption!

--Yes, we will be sown in dishonor—but raised in glory!

--Yes, we will be sown in weakness—but raised in power!

--Yes, we will be sown in this natural body—but we will be raised in a spiritual one!

--And yes—sadly—we are still like Adam and have a **nature that resists us**—but some day we **will be free from it**—FOREVER!

B. The second—and best—is just as certain as the first!

Look again at verse 49: “And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will **hopefully... maybe...possibly** “bear the image of the heavenly.” **Is that** what it says? **No**; that’s **not** what it says!

Just as certain as we have borne the image of the earthy, **we shall bear** the image of the heavenly! Amen!

Lastly... C. The conditions of the promise

It is important for us to understand that this promise is **not for everyone**. It is **only for believers**; it is only for those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus’ death on the cross to wash away their sins.

Paul mentions that throughout this chapter.

--Vs 23 refers to “they that are Christ’s at His coming.”

--We noted from vs 47 that **spiritual life** is not the condition—the state—that we are born into. We need to **be born again**—we need to be born of the Spirit—to have **spiritual life**.

--Vs 50 refers to **brethren**—born again children of God.

--Vs 58 also refers to **brethren**.

So this promise is not for you if you **don’t have** Christ!

But if you do have Christ—if your life is indeed “hid with Christ in God”—this promise is yours!

--Won’t it be great to bear the image of the heavenly—and have a body like unto the glorious body of Christ?

--And this only true because of what we are celebrating today—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

Vs 20 “But **now is Christ risen** from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

What would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. First, God wants you to be born again! **Jesus wants to save you** from the penalty of your sins—that is why He left heaven, came to earth, **paid the debt you owed by dying** as your substitute, and rising again from the dead. **He did all of that for each of us**—but eternal life and forgiveness of sins is **a gift that must be received**.

Each one of us—as individuals—need to **receive Jesus** for ourselves.

Romans 10:9 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

Romans 10:13 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.”

2. For those of us that are born again—for those of us that are children of God—are you humbled by—and thankful for—the wonderful future God has for you? **Feeling your own body** fall apart—and **watching the bodies of those around** us fall apart—can be kind of discouraging.

Dwell on—and rejoice in—our **glory-filled future** because just as surely as we have borne—and are bearing—the image of the earthy, we **SHALL BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY!**