

2. Resurrection – The Christian hope – Graham 15 min.

In 1 Corinthians 15, to which Allen has already referred, we find one of the first succinct statements of what the Gospel is;

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. ² It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. ¹

Let's note Paul's emphasis.

1. It is the Good News, the Gospel, that saves us
2. This Gospel was passed on to Paul and he passed it on as most important
3. Christ died for our sins
4. Just as the Scriptures say – what scriptures? This could only be the OT as the NT did not yet exist!
5. Jesus was buried but he rose from the dead on the third day, again just as the OT said would happen
6. After his resurrection he was seen by many including Paul himself.

So there are three important elements to this declaration of the Gospel.

1. It is a continuation of the story of the OT, something to which the OT looked forward.
2. The Gospel includes Jesus' death and resurrection.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:1–8.

3. The result of the resurrection is a person that can be physically seen.

Paul then gives the reason for including this discussion of the resurrection in his letter to the Corinthians;

¹² But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?²

So for some reason the Corinthian Christians were saying that there is no resurrection.

Now note Paul's next statement;

¹³ For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵ And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.³

Look at how strongly Paul says this; if Jesus did not rise from the dead then;

- Our preaching is useless
- Your faith is useless
- The apostles are lying to you
- We are still guilty of sin
- Any who are dead but believed in the resurrection are lost
- Christians are the most pitiful people in the whole world!

But Paul states emphatically that Jesus has in fact been raised!

²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.⁴

² Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:12.

³ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:13–19.

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:20.

Paul continues further in this discussion to try to explain what our resurrected bodies are going to be like. He begins this discussion by using the metaphor of seeds. We plant seeds and we then see the mature plant grow.

³⁶ When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. ³⁷ And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting.⁵

We do not plant a mature tree. We don't dig a really big hole and then put a fully grown oak tree into the hole! We take an oak seed and understand that there is within the seed the potential for the growth of a fully mature tree.

This is the same with our resurrected bodies says Paul. The body that is buried is not the same body that is raised but there is a connection.

⁴² It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. ⁴³ Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. ⁴⁴ They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies. ⁶

Look at the parallel illustrations Paul uses here;

- Brokenness becomes glory
- Weakness becomes strength
- Natural human becomes spiritual

The contrast is between the present body, corruptible, decaying and doomed to die, and the future body, incorruptible, undecaying, never to die again.⁷

As an aside the terms natural and spiritual do not refer to the material of the body, but to the way the body is powered. The term used for 'natural' is *psychikon* which refers to the way the body is made alive through the breath. The way the body is animated.

The term 'spiritual' is the word *pneumatikon* referring to the empowerment by the Holy Spirit or by Divine empowerment.

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:36–37.

⁶ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:42–44.

⁷ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 167.

The question here is not is the ship made of wood or of iron, but is the ship driven by sails or by steam.

⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!⁸

Our resurrected bodies then are transformed from physical bodies powered by natural processes that leave us susceptible to disease and dying, to physical bodies that are powered by God's divine empowerment which allows us to life forever.

Do we know anything about the resurrected body?

1 John 3:2 makes this statement:

² Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.⁹

At the moment the only model of what a resurrected body looks like is Jesus. While others have miraculously been return to life from death only Jesus has done this so as to never die again.

What does Jesus' resurrected body tell us?

- Firstly as we have already seen, our bodies will be transformed. When you transform something you take it and build something new from it but something of the old remains. As C. S. Lewis puts it 'the old field of space, time, matter and the senses is to be weeded, dug, and sown for a new crop. We may be tired of that old field: God is not.' (Miracles p153)
- Secondly they will be physical. Note that Jesus walked, talked, was touched and ate food after his resurrection.
- Thirdly it seems we will be recognizable in our transformed bodies, just as Jesus was.
- Fourthly, though I need to stress that we may now be speculating, it would seem from Jesus' experience that this new physicality can do things like enter locked rooms.

⁸ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Co 15:51.

⁹ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*, 3rd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 1 Jn 3:2.

But if the resurrection is the overwhelming emphasis of the New Testament, and it is as nearly one third of all uses of the word 'hope' in the NT refer to the resurrection, then what happens to the followers of Jesus at death?

There are 3 verses only that deal in any way with this intermediate state.

- Philippians 1:21-23

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ¹⁰

- John 14:2-3

² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ¹¹

- Luke 23:43

⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."¹²

As you can see these verses do not give to us much in the way of what this intermediate state is like, but what they do assure us of is that those who die in Christ are in some way with him and kept safe with him until the resurrection. Anything more than this description is to enter the realm of speculation.

For those who die in faith, before that final reawakening, the central promise is of being 'with Jesus' at once. 'My desire is to depart', wrote Paul, 'and be with Christ, which is far better.'¹³

The emphasis of the NT is not *life after death* BUT *'life after life after death'*.

Paul finishes this discussion of the resurrection with an unusual statement:

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Php 1:21–23.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Jn 14:2–3.

¹² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Lk 23:43.

¹³ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 163.

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.¹⁴

Whenever you see the word “therefore” in scripture take particular note of it because it says – ‘all that I have been saying to you means this...’ So for Paul all that he had been discussing with the Corinthians about resurrection meant something really important.

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord

So because of the resurrection believers are to do the work of the Lord with all their ability.

... because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Paul here says that the labor that we do in this life, with the bodies subject to decay and death, will, in some way that Paul does not explain, maybe because he did not understand it, continue into the new life in the fully restored Kingdom of God.

The deeds that we do now that show our neighbours what the Kingdom of God really looks like, all those social justice actions so often mentioned in the OT, will in some way follow us through death and the resurrection into the new Creation.

I will conclude with a short film clip from Dr. N. T. Wright –

DVD Resurrection of the Body: How Has this Belief Changed in Church – Tom Wright

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl4nNiVt2no>

¹⁴ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 15:58.