

April 16, 2006
Easter Sunday

"Our Hope in a Bodily Resurrection"

1 CORINTHIANS 15:16-26

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

I am holding a basket in my hand to help us think about the women who carried linens and spices to finish wrapping the body of Jesus. The Jewish people considered it an honor to be involved in preparing a body for burial. Over 75 pounds of spices and expensive linen clothes had been gathered together for the body of Jesus.

But these dear women had a problem as they carried their linens and spices to the tomb of Jesus. Who would roll away the stone so they could get to the body of Jesus? Yet, that problem was small compared to the much larger problem of losing sight of Jesus' promise that he would bodily rise from the dead. It was Jesus who said, pointing to his body, "Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise up again." Considering how clear the words of Jesus were, they should have made their trip to the tomb holding onto baskets filled with tasty delights to celebrate a breakfast meal with their risen Lord.

Don't be too critical of these women for their lack of faith. How often don't we lose sight of the reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead? If only we could wake up every morning and live each day with the glory of Jesus bodily resurrection looming up large in back of us, and the reality of our bodily resurrection looming up large in front of us. Our problems would seem small and insignificant by comparison. In the words read to you, Paul is writing to the Christians who had lost touch with the importance of a bodily resurrection. This morning I want to speak to you about **"Our Hope in a Bodily Resurrection."**

Jesus raised his body to life again

Can a body that has been eaten by worms, or reduced to ashes, or returned to dust, or even lost at sea ever rise to life again? To that important question we offer a resounding "Yes!" and a loud "Amen!" The resurrection of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme evidence that it has happened and it will happen again. The skeptical Christians in Corinth, the people whom Paul still called saints, had their faith in the bodily resurrection undermined by the prevailing Greek philosophy that said the spirit

lives on but the body is worthless once the spirit leaves the body. To those doubters Paul writes, "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either."

If someone questions the reality of bodily resurrection in general then they will also have to raise doubt about what actually happened to the body of Jesus. Look at the body of Jesus as it was taken down from the cross. See the nail marks in the hands and feet with the gaping wound in the side. Touch the body of Jesus and feel how cold it was. Help the women wrap the body in linen clothes and spices and then carefully lay it into the tomb.

This was no illusion, or dream hallucination or virtual reality game being played on an X Box screen. This was as real as the cold lifeless body of a loved one you touched when you said your last goodbye. Now look at the body of Jesus as he suddenly appears to his disciples in the closed room. Listen with your ears to his words, "Peace be to you!" See the nail marks in his hands. Jesus restores our faith with transforming words: "Why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Greek philosophers saw the body as object to be discarded after the spirit had departed, similar to the way that you might toss aside a soda can after drinking down its contents, or a plastic milk carton. The intellectuals in Athens balked at Paul's words about a resurrection and condescendingly said, "We will hear about this another time." A number of years ago a Methodist bishop in Los Angeles made the statement in the LA Times that his faith would not be shaken if they discovered the bones of Jesus in some tomb in Palestine. Such a faith is not a resurrection faith. It is much closer to belief in reincarnation.

Without the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ our faith is empty. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." The body of Jesus is so important to me because my sin was placed on that body. The prophet Isaiah says it clearly, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." The glorious body of Jesus was "wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquity." What happened to the body of Jesus when he died, when he was buried and when he rose again is absolutely essential for my salvation. My body, created by God in a most glorious fashion, has been violently corrupted and tainted by sin. If Christ is not raised bodily from the dead, then according to Paul, "I am still in my sin." Where would I be if I had to find the resources within my own body and my inner being to make myself acceptable to God? Scripture makes this sweeping judgment on all of humanity, "There is none that does good, no not one."

The body of Jesus is the place where we can pin our hope of having peace with God. It is the place that we can find an IRA that makes our life secure, an Individual Redemption Account. The night of his resurrection Jesus said, "Peace be to you" and then "He showed them his hands and side and the disciples were overjoyed to see the Lord." The book of Colossians says, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight." My baptism connects me to the physical death, and burial and resurrection of Christ. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

The other day we received a magazine called, "Outdoors." On the cover was the picture of a young woman climbing a mountain with ropes. It showed her underneath a large ledge, hanging from underneath, working her way to go under and then over the top. How could she do this? Her life was attached to ropes that held tight anchor bolts in the rocks. I ask you this morning, how solid is the anchor that you have for your salvation, your forgiveness, your peace with God and your hope of eternal life, your individual redemption account? It is as solid as the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Someone has said, "The resurrection is God's "Amen!" to Christ's statement, "It is finished."

Jesus will raise our bodies back to life again

Because of Jesus bodily resurrection from the dead we can look forward to our bodily resurrection on the last day. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Pity the poor Christians who become so focused on this life that they lose sight of the life that is to come. We know what waits for us after we die. We have seen what happened to the body of Jesus. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." God's Old Testament people gave their first fruit to the Lord. They gave the best stalks of grain and the biggest bunches of grapes. That first fruit giving guaranteed for them that the rest of the crop would be good. Jesus bodily resurrection guarantees you will have a future bodily resurrection. Philippians 3:21 says: "He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Adam sure did a number on us when he introduced sin into the world. Along with sin came death. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection from the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Did you ever see the destruction that a tornado brings? That is nothing compared to what death can do to people. A tornado! bounces around, up and down, right and left. One home is spared and another is flattened. Death does not bounce around and pick some people and leave others to live. Ultimately death will hit every person sitting here this morning. A missionary to India compared death to cobra he once saw rearing up to attack a small chicken. The chicken never tried to fly away. It was paralyzed with fear. It never moved. It knew death would come in flurry of feathers Death has us all of us in its ugly eyes, and we cannot move to escape it.

But wait, we have Jesus. We have his bodily resurrection from the dead. Let death strike. Let it pump its venom into us. The little chicken that waits for the bite of death has power, power to swallow up death when it comes. We have Jesus and the hope of a bodily resurrection. We knew the end is coming. We also see the light at the end of the tunnel. The light that shines will be Jesus who said, "Because I live you shall live also." How beautifully the word read to you earlier speaks of this hope of Jesus being there for us. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed his death." So little chicken, when death comes, and you receive its deadly sting, you can crow like rooster welcoming the first light of dawn because you can swallow up death. As a well known preacher said when he was dying, "Earth is receding. Heaven is opening. This is my coronation day."

Resurrection. That word is used 20 times in this chapter. It means to stand up again. With Paul we can shout at death, taunt it, and do a victory dance in the end zone. "Death

has been swallowed up in victory.” That word means not taken in the mouth and slowly digested, but swallow in the sense of gulping something down in one big bite. With Jesus bodily resurrection we are able to say with Paul at the end of this chapter. “Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?” “Thanks be to God! He gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When the great statesman, Winston Churchill died, he planned his own funeral service. It was held at St. Paul’s Cathedral. He stipulated that they use hymns about the resurrection and the historic Anglican liturgy. The service ended. From high up in the dome came the sound of the trumpet playing taps signaling the close of the day. Tears were flowing. But then another trumpet sounded, not the sound of taps but the sound of reveille. The call that rouses the sleeping soldier to his post. And so we will hear the trumpet sound and the dead in Christ will rise first. “And we will all be changed-in flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” That’s our hope in a bodily resurrection because Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.