



“Dust to Glory”

Kevin Presley

One of the grandest and most powerful chapters ever penned by the apostle Paul is **I Corinthians 15**. After affirming the bodily resurrection of Jesus and showing that it was essential to their salvation, he then turns their attention to the resurrection of their **OWN** bodies. When you study this chapter, you find that the resurrection of the body is not a peripheral or optional doctrine, but rather is a fundamental and foundational part of the gospel message. In fact, God’s program of human redemption is simply not complete until one day when the dead are raised.

But what is the Bible talking about when it speaks of *the resurrection of the dead*? That may sound simple enough, but there are those who deny that our bodies will one day be raised from the grave. Perhaps it’s a spiritual resurrection, or maybe we will merely be raised to be spirit beings; but will our bodies actually be raised?

I Corinthians 15:19-20 “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

Paul is speaking of Old Testament times when the priest, at the beginning of the harvest, would wave the firstfruits of the harvest before the Lord as it were, as a pledge of the full harvest that was to come, which was a *type* or *picture* of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, as it was to be the firstfruits of the resurrection of ALL of mankind. Let’s continue reading:

I Corinthians 15:21-22, 50-54 “For since by man (speaking of Adam) came death, by man (speaking of Jesus) came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive...Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we

shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

Christ is in the process of putting all enemies under His feet, and every time a soul comes to Him in gospel obedience, every time that the fetters of sin are broken in our lives, that is a victory for Jesus Christ. But the FINAL victory that King Jesus will win is the victory over physical death in the resurrection. Paul explains that in very plain and even poetic terms in this passage. We're going to study what he says about the bodily resurrection.

Nearly all Christians believe in immortality; that we will live after death. But how will we live? In what form will we exist? In eternity, will we simply transition to an invisible spirit world, or will we actually have a body? Will it be the same body we have now? Will it even be a literal body?

Those aren't new questions. The atheist says that death is the end; the believer says that there is life after death. But throughout the ages, those believers have struggled to understand exactly what *life after death* means. The ancient Greeks did not believe in the possibility of the resurrection of the dead, and the Corinthians came from that background. On one hand, they had accepted the testimony of the apostles: that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But then they turned around and denied that a resurrection of the human body was possible. So, Paul addressed that in his letter to them.

I Corinthians 15:12-14 "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

In other words, *if Christ is risen from the dead, which you believe, then why can't WE rise from the dead, too? And if there can be no resurrection from the dead, if it's impossible, then Jesus could not have been raised. And if Jesus wasn't raised, that means the gospel is a lie altogether.* Paul shows them that the resurrection of the dead is not only possible, it is a PROMISED CERTAINTY. Let's notice some things about the bodily resurrection as noticed by Paul, that will help us to understand it as much as we can, and to appreciate one of the greatest promises given to the believer in Christ Jesus.

I Corinthians 15:35 "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?"

This isn't an honest question; it's a skeptical question. Here is a person who is not really wanting to understand the resurrection. He isn't looking for a good explanation. Rather, he is making fun of it, as if to say, *how can this be? Do you really believe that a dead person can be raised? How can God possibly raise the dead, and if they were raised, what would they even look like? What kind of body would they have?* Admittedly, it's not an easy thing to believe, and it's certainly not an easy thing to comprehend. That's why Paul takes some 58 verses to explain it to them.

You see, the resurrection is not a *natural* process. You can't explain it using science. It is a *supernatural* event. If you're going to believe in God, you have to accept the supernatural. God created the natural universe, so He is by definition a supernatural being. If you can get past **Genesis 1:1**, you can believe the rest of the Bible.

Someone says, *it's not that I don't believe the Bible, but I think all of that talk about resurrections in the Bible refers to a spiritual resurrection.* What they're saying is that when we die, our spirits go down into the grave with our bodies, so that the resurrection just refers to the raising of the spirits of mankind; or that it refers to the fact that we're made spiritually alive in Christ, without considering the actual resurrection of the physical body. Well, the skeptics at Corinth knew that Paul wasn't talking about some spiritual resurrection. They understood that he was proposing that the body itself would be raised. Throughout the Old Testament, we catch passing glimpses of the doctrine of the resurrection. This is not a doctrine that Paul came up with. It was not merely a New Testament concept or promise. We certainly see enough to know that the saints of God believed in a resurrection. Nearly 2,000 years before Christ, Abraham's faith led him to the slopes of Mt. Moriah, where he was willing to obey God's instruction to offer up his son, Isaac. The Bible tells us how he was able and willing to do that.

Hebrews 11:19 "Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

The patriarch, Job, in the very twilight of human history, comforted himself with the same glorious hope in his time of sorrow and trouble.

Job 19:25-27 "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

But what was referred to only occasionally in the Old Testament became a prominent doctrine in the New Testament church. The word *resurrection* occurs more than forty times in the New Testament. Immortality was a vague promise and a mystery to the saints of the Old Testament, but Paul would later say to Timothy that *Christ, by His appearing hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel (II Timothy 1:10)*. Now, we see in Jesus the reality and the promise of the resurrection of the dead.

Believers have always believed in a resurrection of the body; it's only a problem for doubters, for materialists, for those who don't want to believe in God or the supernatural. Paul said that some would say *How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?* Paul answers this question of the skeptic first of all with the picture of a seed.

I Corinthians 15:36-38 "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body."

In other words, someone may say that there's no science to back up the idea of the resurrection of the dead, but Paul basically says *if you want science, here's some science. We plant seeds in the ground, and look at what happens. That seed doesn't come forth in a new life until it first dies.* We are somewhat familiar with what he's saying, but we may not fully comprehend it. I have a hard time really understanding what happens to a seed when you put it in the ground; how a plant life, a beautiful flower emerges from that. But we DO know that it is a reality, of course. We know that it is a fact. Paul begins to unlock the mystery with this comparison of how the bodily resurrection will occur by showing that if a seed can produce a plant, then in like manner, the human body can live again.

It is remarkable how a seed works. Let's say you take a kernel of grain, maybe a cotton seed, put it in the ground and cover it up. Something amazing happens to it. In a sense, that seed dies; it dissolves, disintegrates, rots in the ground. But what happens? We know that out of that death eventually comes new life. That new life is much more beautiful, more worthwhile and more magnificent than that ugly seed you put into the ground.

There aren't many more unsightly things than a tulip bulb. It looks not only ugly, but utterly useless. It's hard to look at that and imagine a beautiful flower like a tulip. But what happens? That seed goes into the ground, is subjected to the elements, and new life emerges. Paul says that every time we watch seeds grow, we've seen the resurrection demonstrated right before our eyes.

Some might think there's a problem with that illustration because there's a germ of life within that seed, but when a person dies, they are just dead, with no life there. That's not true, because the Bible teaches that man is a triune being. He's not merely flesh and bones and a mass of molecules; he is body, soul and spirit. The Bible teaches that when a man dies, that marks the separation of the spirit from the body. The spirit goes back to God who gave it.

There is an unseen world of departed spirits that the Bible calls *Hades* in the Greek language. The body becomes inanimate at that time, but the Bible teaches that in the resurrection, the spirit will once again bring life to that body. God made the body of dust, but He put the breath of life within it. And when we die, the spirit departs from the body; it doesn't die, rather it shuffles off that old body for a while and leaves it cold and lifeless to decay and go back to the dust. But, you see, that's the germ of life that God will one day infuse into that seed.

That creates a problem for someone who wants to know how God is going to do all of that. What about a man who dies and goes back to the dust and the particles are spread about and absorbed into other forms of life; what becomes of that man? What about a man who is blown to bits on the battlefield? Or a man who dies at sea and whose body is cast overboard and is consumed by the fishes? Or a man who is cremated? How could such as these possibly be resurrected? You see, people misunderstand what it means to be resurrected. It DOES NOT mean that our old bodies will merely be re-animated. Rather, the resurrection means that the old body which was buried as a seed is going to come forth as a new body. That's the change that the Bible speaks of in **I Corinthians 15**. That seed hold the 'blueprints' for the new organism that will spring from it. The same is true for our bodies. Our bodies are just a mass of molecules arranged into cells. Did you know that those cells—of which you have about a hundred trillion in your body, scientists tell us—are constantly dying and being replaced? In fact, scientists tell us that every cell in a body is replaced about every 7-7 ½ years. If you don't like your body now, just wait about seven years and you'll have a new one. Our cells are continually being replaced.

If you can think back about ten years, you're literally not the same person you were. Now, you look like you did. People recognize you. It's not that your physical features change, other than we grow older and so forth. But that's because those cells are replaced and the form that our bodies take as all of this happens is determined by something that scientists discovered several years ago called *DNA*. Our DNA is an incredible natural information system. Did you know that one human DNA molecule contains enough information to fill 1,000 books or 1,000,000 pages? One DNA molecule! That information determines everything from the color of your hair to the shape of your body. The color of your eyes to the sound of your voice. The length and shape of your nose, your ears and everything else. It is literally a complex blueprint of your body containing every single detail of your physical form from the day you are born.

With that in mind, read what David wrote three thousand years ago.

Psalm 139: 13-14,16 “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well...Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”

And people believe that the Bible is not inspired of God when David—three thousand years ago—wrote what we’ve now discovered as DNA?! If God could create a world out of nothing, why can’t He recreate you out of something? That is the secret to the resurrection. A person may be cremated, but he won’t escape the resurrection. The body may completely decay and go back to dust and the particles disperse and become repurposed in God’s creation, but that doesn’t mean there can’t be a resurrection. The resurrection is not the old body in its old form; it will be a new body, and here’s the catch: it’ll still be YOU. It will be your body, but it will be NEW. CHANGED. If your DNA can recreate your body every seven years, why can’t God recreate your body in the resurrection?

That raises another question. This body isn’t perfect. It has limitations. This body has been sick at times, it’s getting older and weaker. It has aches and pains, deformities and deficiencies. Some have severe handicaps that create great challenges in living life on this earth. What does Paul say happens in the resurrection of the body?

I Corinthians 15:38 “But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.”

God gives that old seed not only new life, but a new body *as pleases Him*. The body of one will differ from another. In other words, we’ll be who we are. You will still be you. Every single human who has ever lived is unique and when we rise in that day, we will still be unique. God will give us each a new body, but there is a continuity between what we were and what we will be. Yes, I believe that we will know and recognize one another in eternity. But our bodies will be changed in the sense that corruption puts on incorruption.

I Corinthians 15:42-44 “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; 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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

He didn’t say it is raised a spirit body; there is no such thing as that. That is a contradiction in terms. He said *a spiritual body*. Look at the next verse to see what he means.

I Corinthians 15:45 “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam (referring to Jesus) was made a quickening spirit.”

Paul takes us from the problem of the skeptic and the picture of the seed to what we might call the pattern of the Savior. We know that God made Adam’s body from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. He was made of dust. Adam, our representative, the federal head of the human family, was made a living being. But God made Christ, the second Adam, who came from glory, not a living being—He was already that. He was alive in glory and

merely took on flesh. Glory became dust—rather, He made Him a life-giving spirit. In other words, in Adam, we're just dust. Adam passed down to you and me a natural body. That's the body Paul is talking about here. A body that is fitted to live on this earth. But this earth is cursed by sin and therefore is subject to pain, disease, sickness and death.

Romans 5:12 “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

Adam was a living soul, and so are we. But Christ—the second Adam—is a life-giving spirit. He countered the curse and reversed the ruin that the first Adam brought to you and me. The first Adam brought the sentence that God passed down in **Genesis 3**: *From dust you came, to dust you will return*. But Jesus, in His resurrection, destroyed death. That doesn't mean that we won't physically die; it means death won't hold us. One day we will be raised as Jesus was, to be immortal. What we take to our graves is a natural body, like Adam's. What Christ will give us at His coming is not a natural body like Adam's, but a spiritual body, like Christ's. Fitted for eternity. A spiritual body that is incorruptible and fit for eternity.

You see, the bodily resurrection is not a superfluous doctrine. It is one of the most fundamental and foundational tenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ and it is a serious thing to challenge it and for Christians to deny it. I don't claim to fully comprehend it; I didn't say that I can wrap my mind around all of that, but it's what the Bible teaches, and by faith, I believe it.

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.”

Let me ask you: did Jesus have a body when He left the tomb of Joseph? When He met His disciples in the days following before He ascended back to heaven, did He have a body or was He just a spirit floating around? Yes, He had a body. He ate fish with the disciples. Could they see Him? Yes, not only see Him, but touch Him. Thomas touched Him. Was it that same body that was nailed to the cross? Not exactly. It was a body glorified, but it was a body. A body prepared to ascend to His Father in heaven, but recognizable to the old body because the disciples saw the nail prints in His hands. What He was and what He is, John affirms that the saints of God will one day be like Him.

There is coming a resurrection for the just and the unjust. For those in Christ, that will be a happy, happy day. But for those who have never obeyed the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who are not living their lives for Him, it will be a terrible day. Thank God for what the faithful Christian gains in death. We will have something in that day that death can no longer touch. When this earthly body is raised, all of the present imperfections will be gone forever. No more pain or sorrow, no disease or handicaps, no more disabilities --from dust unto glory.

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