

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Church - a Work in Progress

(Studies in 1 Corinthians)

Energized!

(1 Corinthians 15:35-58)

Study #21

Introduction: I'm so tired...

Jesus, being human, got tired. He spent His entire life serving God. And He got tired.

- Because of the relentless pressure of the crowds that followed Him, there was one time when He got tired and made time for rest for Himself and His disciples. (Mark 6:31)
- Tiredness after a long hike prompted Him to take a rest by Jacob's well near the Samaritan town of Sychar right before the arrival of a woman who needed more than a drink of H₂O.
- On a trip across the Sea of Galilee, and during a violent storm that was battering the boat that His disciples were rowing, Jesus was so tired that He fell fast asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat.

Jesus got tired just like all of us get tired.

"I'm tired" comes with the territory of parenting, a demanding job, challenging courses in school, athletics...and following Jesus.

So, if you're tired this morning, you're in good - and big! - company. There is not a thing in the world wrong with being tired.

¹ My current understanding is that Paul included this section - **[15:33] Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." [34] Sober up morally and stop sinning, for some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.** - to highlight the danger of living without these two realities front and center. When we

In the Bible passage we're exploring today, the Apostle Paul has at the front of his mind a Christian who is faithfully serving Jesus...and that Christian is tired.

She is doing any of the things that a Jesus follower might do for Jesus, and she is exhausted.

Just like Jesus was so exhausted that He fell asleep on a boat in the middle of a lake in the middle of a storm, she's tired. Again. Not a problem.

But Paul knew that while tiredness is not a problem, where there is tiredness, a problem lurks.

If that woman, or if any man isn't careful, *"I'm tired"* can become something it never did become for Jesus. *"I'm tired"* can morph into, *"I'm sick and tired of this!"*

It can happen. I've seen it happen. I've allowed it to happen to me - and we all want to avoid it. Today, Paul points the way to energetic, passionate service for Jesus - come what may.

Review...

To review, in the first half of 1 Corinthians 15 (vv. 1-34), Paul gave answers to those who were asking, *"Why should I believe in the resurrection?"* (that is, in life after this life is over)

He presented evidence (both Scriptural and eyewitness testimony) that the resurrection actually happened.

He urged us to live with our eyes fixed on two historical events: Jesus' cross and Jesus' empty tomb. (15:2) Those gospel realities will deliver us (*"save us"*) into spiritual health and vitality.¹

live without an awareness of Jesus' resurrection or without a longing for our own resurrection, we are playing with fire. Becoming *"sober"* here means that we embrace with all our being the truth of Jesus' resurrection and our own.

In what follows, Paul continues to explore the matter of our own resurrection.

And, yes, he will tell us a few things about the life that follows this life that we'll be glad to know. There is information here.

But the point of the information is to learn the secret to passionate spirituality in the midst of hardships, setbacks, and obstacles.

Yes. It is possible for you and me to be solid and energetic for Jesus in the midst of hardships, setbacks, and obstacles. Even when we're tired.

Paul imagines himself in a conversation with someone who has questions about what happens after he takes his final breath.

Here are the questions followed by Paul's answers. First, there are questions about logistics.

Who Doesn't Have Questions About Life After This Life? (15:35)

[35] But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"

Everybody knows what happens to dead bodies after death. It isn't pretty. The decomposition that happens seemed to the Greeks to be proof positive against bodily resurrection.²

We might even hear a mocking tone behind these questions. *"How can there possibly be bodily life after death when the bodies are no longer intact?"*

Paul says that logistical problems like decomposing bodies aren't really problems.

In fact, you and I are always seeing new forms of living things that come from things that look nothing like what they came from.

² We must not diminish Paul's insistence on bodily immortality. If we think of only the immortality of the soul, denying the resurrection of the body, we will imagine

A Few Answers... (15:36-57)

"Death to Life" as seen in my garden (15:36-38)

[36] You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; [37] and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. [38] But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

I want to thank Paul for giving me license to talk about gardening.

At the beginning of the Spring or the Fall gardening season, I'll take seeds - beans or okra or lettuce - that don't look anything like the crop that they will produce. I scatter those seeds in rows in my garden.

If you didn't know in advance what was going to happen when I planted those seeds, you'd never guess that in weeks or months I'd be picking food.

But it is the dead seed's burial in the ground, and its decomposition that paves the way for the emergence of new life.

God will do for us, after our physical life is over what He does all the time in my garden.

A plant that sprouts from a seed is very different from the seed, but it is directly linked to that seed.

Just so, there is a link between your earthly body, and the resurrection body God will give you after death... but they're different.

My earthly body's decomposition won't be an obstacle to receiving a new resurrection body.

the next life as nothing more than a shadowy, insipid existence. Paul wants us to know that the after-life will be infinitely more REAL and glorious than this life.

In fact, my death is a necessary preliminary to that transformation.³

Just like “*life to death*” is a part of God’s natural order, “*death to life*” is, as well. It happens all the time. It’s the way God set up the world, and it helps explain our move from this life to the next.

Paul calls attention to all of the different varieties of bodies there are.

Varieties of Bodies (15:39-42a)

Earthly and heavenly bodies (vv. 39-40a)

[39] All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of animals, another flesh of birds, and another of fish. [40a] There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies.

There is a tremendous variety of “bodies” of living things on earth, living beings in the heavenlies (think of angels), and inanimate “bodies” (think sun, moon, and stars).

And all of these different kinds of bodies have differing magnitudes of “*glory*.”

GLORIOUS and GLORIOUS bodies (vv. 40b-41)

[40b]...but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. [41] There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

Each created work of God, each living or inanimate thing possesses some measure of “*glory*” reflecting the Creator’s handiwork.

Paul then goes on to say that human bodies here in this dimension that we call “*life*” each reflect God’s glory. In a similar way, human bodies in the resurrection will reflect God’s glory.

Resurrection bodies (v. 42a)

[42a] So also is the resurrection of the dead.

I think that Paul is saying that each believer’s resurrection body will be unique and uniquely glorious.

None of us will have the same resurrection body as anybody else. And the glory of your new body will differ from the glory of other people’s resurrected bodies.⁴

Now, we have to be cautious, because the Bible offers very few specifics as to what our resurrection bodies will be like.

We could make some guesses based on what we know of Jesus’ resurrection body.

When He appeared, post-resurrection, in that upstairs room in Jerusalem (John 20), His disciples touched Him, He took food to eat, He appeared and disappeared, passed through closed doors - and still had the scars in His side, hands, and feet from the cross.

His resurrection body was recognizable, material, similar to our bodies in some ways, and in other ways very different.

But, again, we need to be careful to not say more about our resurrection bodies than the Bible allows us to say. And much of what the Bible has to say about that is found right here in today’s passage.

Listen as Paul points out the characteristics of this earthly body. He isn’t very flattering about it.

³ Note that the garden seed is neither tasty nor nutritious, yet it produces something that is both. That which comes from the seed is better than the seed. As wonderful as our earthly bodies are, our resurrected bodies will be more wonderful.

⁴ I assume that the difference in glory will relate to our faithfulness in this life.

Considering Our Future Resurrection Body (15:42a-49)

Characteristics of our current and future bodies (vv. 42a-44)⁵

[42b] It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; [43] it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; [44] it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Paul says that the bodies we now have are sown (and by this he means "buried") "**perishable...dishonorable...weak...and natural.**"

Our resurrection bodies will be everything these earthly bodies are NOT: imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

- This body, which is an integral part of who I now am, will one day die. The body that God will give to me after I die will never die.
- Here, we are all sometimes embarrassed by our bodies. They let us down when we need them to come through for us. That body won't.
- These earthly bodies tend toward weakness as the years pass. I suspect that our new body will go from strength to strength.
- These bodies are nothing but "**flesh and blood,**" limited to an earthy existence. Our future bodies will be a combination of material and spirit, maybe giving us capacities we've never imagined.

The resurrection body God will give you surpasses your current body even more than the fully developed plant surpasses the seed you sow in the garden.

Your current body is perfectly suited for your short stay on earth. But it is not fit for the new world that is coming.

For that you need a new body. That body is guaranteed by Jesus' death on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead. Paul makes that clear, by for a second time, comparing Adam and Jesus.

Earthy Adam vs. Life-Giving Jesus (vv. 45-49)

[45] So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING PERSON." The last Adam was a life-giving spirit." [46] However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. [47] The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. [48] As is the earthy one, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly One, so also are those who are heavenly. [49] Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Beginning with Adam, every person has been born with a soul. (Greek - *psyche*) "*Soul*" is the animating life principle.

The "**last Adam**" (Jesus) passes down characteristics, too, to those who belong to Him. He infuses us with an alive "**spirit**" (Greek - *pneuma*) -- that special part of US that relates to God - when we believe in Him for eternal life.

We who believe in Jesus now go through life as descendants of Adam with souls and as spiritually alive children of God through Christ.

When this earthly life is over and we die, we will look forward to God's gift of a spiritual body.

Summary...

Paul has answered a couple of questions we might have about the life after this life.

Question: How is resurrection possible after the body has decayed?

Answer: Bodily decay isn't a problem for resurrection. In fact, resurrection would be impossible without the decay of this body. Just as in the case of the garden seed, it is the decay of the shell that frees the new life within.

Question: What kind of a body can we expect to have?

⁵ The Jews held that the body that was raised will be identical to the body that died. Paul says that while there will be similarities, so will be substantial differences.

Answer: A body that is as suitable to the next world as our current, material body is to the present world. THAT body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

And there was, evidently, another question we might have about the life that comes after this life is over. I say “*evidently*” because it is the next “*What*” Paul gives us before his, “*So what?*” that ends this section.

The question is “*When?*” When will believers in Jesus receive these resurrection bodies?

Please note...

In this next section (1 Corinthians 15:50-57), I am giving you my current understanding of what Paul is saying with respect to when we will receive our new, resurrection bodies.

And, because of what Paul writes here (vv. 54-55) concerning “*the death of death*” (From Isaiah 25:8), I take his comments here to refer to the end of the millennial reign of Christ and to that time when God ushers in His own eternal rule and reign.

From THIS Body to THAT Body (vv. 50-53)

The unfitness of our earthly bodies for the eternal state (v. 50)

[50] Now I say this, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Earthly bodies aren’t fit for the eternal state. To which I say, “*Amen!*” My earthly body is getting less and less fit for this life, much less for eternity.

Our current bodies aren’t worthy to co-exist with a holy God in eternity. So, entrance into His presence requires a new body, and all who are redeemed will enter “***the kingdom of God.***” (Otherwise referred to as “***the new heavens and the new earth***” or “***The New Jerusalem.***”)

But you’ll notice that Paul is thinking about more than simply “*entering*” this kingdom. He writes here about “*inheritance.*”

And *inheritance* is a very common New Testament theme. It speaks of being rewarded in that life for faithfulness in this life.

Paul isn’t saying that all the redeemed who receive resurrection bodies will “*inherit*” the kingdom. (i.e., will be Jesus’ partners in governing “***the kingdom of God.***”)⁶

He is saying that anyone who doesn’t have a resurrection body cannot enter the eternal state, nor can they have an inheritance there.

We need to have a resurrection body, and Paul tells us when we will receive that new body.

God’s remedy to our unfit earthly bodies (vv. 51-53)

[51] Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,⁷ [52] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. [53] For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

There will be people alive on earth at the end of Christ’s one-thousand-year reign. They have not yet “***slept***” - that is, they had not yet died. They will be physically alive at the end of the Millennium.

⁶ Joseph Dillow writes in *Final Destiny*, “*A believer who persists in disobedience without repentance [in this life] will lose his right to rule with Christ in the eternal phase of the Kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth. (15:50)*” (p. 99) He and Robert Wilkin say that “*inheriting*” the “***kingdom of God***” (15:50) does not refer to simply entering the kingdom. “***Inherit***” has reference to reward.

⁷ For a long time, **[51] we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed...**, was posted on the door of our church nursery. 😊

And millions of the redeemed of all ages - including us! - will have died by this point in time.

When Christ's final enemies are defeated in the last uprising against Him (see Revelation 20:7-9), instantly,⁸ a trumpet will sound.

At the trumpet's sound, all the redeemed - living and dead - will receive their resurrection bodies.

Let's remember...
...the first resurrection was Jesus' resurrection on the third day after His crucifixion. (15:23a)

...the second resurrection will happen when Jesus returns to set up His thousand-year reign. When He returns to earth, those who are alive in Christ at that time will remain on earth and will reign with Him. And those faithful Christians who have died will be brought back to earth with Him in bodies fit for an earthly, millennial reign. (15:23b)

But this (vv. 51-53) is the third and final resurrection. (Also, see 15:24-28) This describes that moment when we will all be changed and fitted for eternity with the *"imperishable"* and with *"immortality."*

And that thought launches Paul into a triumphant song.

Summary: The final death of DEATH (vv. 54-57)

[54] But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH HAS BEEN SWALLOWED UP in victory."⁹ [55] "WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR VICTORY? WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR STING?" [56] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; [57] but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

⁸ Earlier, to illustrate resurrection, Paul used the analogy of a seed that turns into a plant, a process that takes weeks. Here, the transition from a *"flesh and blood body"* to a *"spiritual body"* happens in the smallest unit of time, a *"moment."*

This pictures the death of death. And death's death has been a long time coming.

In the Garden of Eden, it looked for all the world as if Satan had won and that death would be with us forever. Adam (and Eve with him) sinned, plunging humanity into separation from God. Death.

On that day, death reigned.¹⁰

And then on the day that we call *"Good Friday,"* it looked like any hope for God's victory was dead. Jesus died, right after crying out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

Things looked hopeless on that Friday.

But everything changed on Easter Sunday morning. That was the beginning of death's death.

And now, from the perspective of the empty tomb, we look backward and see every apparent defeat - even the cross, especially the cross! - as a part of God's unfolding drama of redemption.

From that empty tomb perspective, we look forward and see hope. Since His resurrection, every day has brought us one day closer to Satan's final defeat and to the death of death.

Here, Paul describes that finale. It comes at the end of Christ's millennial reign on earth and at the start of God's eternal reign. (15:50)

Since the very beginning, death has been the ultimate enemy of every person. Death *"stings,"* and that, because of sin.

But because sin was defeated by Jesus at the cross, death is DEAD to the Christian. Resurrection is true. This life is NOT all there is. There is a new world coming.

⁹ The expression points to the complete destruction of death, as Isaiah had predicted (Isaiah 25:8), at the end of the Messiah's millennial reign, with the ushering in of the eternal state.

¹⁰ But even on that day, God anticipated His own victory when the seed of the woman would crush Satan's head with her *"seed's"* heel. (Genesis 3:15)

And since all of that is true, we who believe in Jesus have every reason to be energized about living for Jesus now.

Therefore, We Are Energized... (v. 58)

[58] Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.¹¹

The French philosopher, Albert Camus (died in 1960), believed and taught that life is absurd, a bad joke. For him, life was all in vain.

He introduced his philosophy of the absurd. He said that it was absurd that all people seem to need to find meaning in life when the universe responds to that felt need with *“unreasonable silence.”*

In his book, The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus compared the absurdity / vanity of life to the situation of Sisyphus.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a man who, in the afterlife, was consigned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again on the other side.¹²

That’s vanity, and no one wants to do something *“in vain.”*

It’s when you think you’re doing something in vain, pointless, beating your head against a wall, that you get, not just tired, but *“sick and tired of it.”*

Laboring *“in vain”* saps energy, breeds contempt, fuels frustration, and kills motivation.

To any Christian who labors for Jesus, the truth of resurrection - Jesus’ resurrection and our own! - destroys vanity and gives birth to transcendent meaning and eternal purpose.

What we’ve seen from 1 Corinthians 15 - today and last Sunday - is critical to arriving at realistic way of looking at life with God.

It’s been critical to my own development. So, as we wrap up, a word of personal testimony.

I told you last Sunday about my teenaged atheism. I was already inclined in that direction, but reading authors like Albert Camus helped solidify my disbelief in God. It confirmed my belief that life was a bad joke. In High School, when I read Sisyphus, I saw myself.

Becoming a Christian immediately changed my eternal destiny and my status as a child of God. It started a transformation in my outlook on life.

Early on, I learned that God was inviting me to join Him in His great work on earth. He wanted me to tell others about Jesus. As I grew in Christ, I learned that He wanted me to help others grow in Christ.

Without even realizing it, I began to see purpose and meaning everywhere. Jesus had saved me.

He had saved me from eternal condemnation when I believed in Jesus. And He began saving me / delivering from that sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness that I had known before.

Conclusion:

I suspect that no one can avoid tiredness from time to time. It happens in all arenas of life. Jesus was tired and we get tired, too.

But I have learned that there is a difference between *physical exhaustion* and *weariness of spirit*.

“I’m tired” is one thing. *“What’s the use?”* is a different matter.

¹¹ Some have applied this final verse to the entirety of 1 Corinthians. There is some reason to believe Paul may have meant it to be a wrap-up of all he has written, since chapter 16 concerns more personal matters. If this is the case, we can say that the argument of the letter, proper, comes to an end at 15:58.

¹² The essay concludes, *“The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”* How tragic.

Maintaining spiritual vitality and energy - come what may! - requires more than grit and determination. It requires a resurrection mindset.

A good dose of resurrection-consciousness energizes our service muscles, energizes our passion for evangelism, energizes our prayer life, and energizes our worship.

With a glorious future in view, we can know that all time and energy spent, all money invested, every temptation resisted, and every suffering endured for Jesus will be worth it and MORE than worth it.

The final scene has already been shot. JESUS WINS, AND WE WITH HIM!