

Introduction:

As far back **Ecclesiastes 8:10-13**, we are told the victory for God's saints is not really in this life. Throughout **Ecclesiastes** we are told life under the sun is pretty vain no matter how strong or weak you are, wise or foolish you are, even no matter how righteous or unrighteous you are (**Ecclesiastes 7:15-18**). In this life, it is not better for those who fear God, but in the end it will be. Why? Because this life is not the end. Brothers and sisters, there is a lot of victory for Christians in this life. Progressive victory over sin is phenomenal. Often, living God's way provides us great blessings physically and materially as well as spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. These victories are great. No doubt there are mini-victories through many Christians' lives as oppressors and persecutors attack, but God lifts the Christian out of the mire and gives victory. But none of this encapsulates the ultimate victory. The fact is Jesus did not die to give us our best life now. He died to give us abundant life in eternity. Even Paul recognized this as his greatest goal according to **Philippians 3:8-16**. Paul gave up everything to have the resurrection from the dead, the resurrection to life. Paul was convinced that Jesus's resurrection pointed to ours. He was convinced that his life needed to be changed by the resurrection, both Jesus's and ours. Let us look to our coming resurrection. Let us be changed by it. To truly grasp what is on the table, let's consider **I Corinthians 15:35-58**.

Discussion:

I. The fear.

- A. In **I Corinthians 15:35**, the objection many offered against resurrection is that a decayed body simply couldn't be resurrected. Rather, the dead decomposed, became soil, and other bodies derived nourishment from them. They saw the cycle of life, but they could not see resurrection. And who would want a partially decayed body resurrected anyway?
- B. In "The Monkey's Paw," W.W. Jacobs tells the tale of a couple, Mr. and Mrs. White, who had purchased a mummified monkey's paw that had reportedly been magically imbued with the power to grant three wishes to three people. Mr. White was the third, but the second had warned him that the wishes would be twisted and bring misery. They needed to cast it into the fire. Instead, their son, Herbert encouraged them to wish for £200. They did. Nothing happened. They tossed the monkey's paw aside and mostly forgot about it. The next day, Herbert was caught in the machinery at work, mangled, and killed. The company gave the Whites £200 in compensation. After 10 days, Mrs. White thought of the paw again. She demanded her husband wish her boy back to life. He did. Again, at first nothing happened. But as the moments dragged on, Mr. White became more and more petrified as he considered the state of their reanimated son, walking from the cemetery to their home, body mangled from the machinery, partially decomposed. Then a knock came at the door. Mrs. White ran to let in her son. The knock came again. She struggled with the bolt. More knocking. She couldn't quite reach the highest latch. More knocking. She begged for Mr. White to come help. She went to get a chair. As she drug it to the door and reached the latch, Mr. White made his third wish. When she opened the door, a gust of wind blew through, but no one was there. The stoop, the yard, and the lane were empty.
- C. This was the idea the Greek philosophers had of resurrection. They could only consider the body that went into the ground coming out of it. Even today, I know of some Christians who have this same mistaken notion as they speak out against cremation thinking that doing so destroys the body and hinders God's power to resurrect us. It does not. Even the sea will give up its dead (see **Revelation 20:13**). The sea where water decomposes the flesh quickly, fish and scavengers feed on the bodies, tearing it to bits. Even the sea will give up its dead in the resurrection.
- D. Paul explains the misunderstanding in **I Corinthians 15:36-41**. Our resurrection is not mere reanimation. We don't come back as Frankenstein's monster or as zombies. We won't be the undead. Resurrection is like planting a seed. It goes into the ground a bare kernel with little glory, but bursts forth a wandering vine, a beautiful rose, or a powerful oak. The body of the seed does not limit the body of the plant.
- E. Further, we recognize that God has been able to create all kinds of bodies. There is a body for humans, but different for animals. Paul is leading to the next comparison. There are earthly bodies and there are heavenly bodies. God created them all. He is making a play on words as he compares the bodies of humans and animals with the bodies of the sun, moon, and stars. What Paul is trying to get us to see is that we may be sown earthly

bodies, we will be resurrected as heavenly bodies. No, not as sun, moon, and stars, but the God who could provide those with glory in the physical heavens, can do the same for us as He resurrects us to dwell in the spiritual heavens.

## II. Our resurrection.

### A. *From perishable to imperishable:*

1. The body that goes into the grave is perishable, corruptible. It decays and rots. It is food for worms. It simply cannot last. No matter how we try to preserve it. No matter what chemicals we pump into it, it will eventually rot. The inside of the casket is a putrid space filled with the stench of death and decay.
2. But the body that is resurrected is imperishable, incorruptible. It will never decay or rot. It will not grow old or decrepit. And that is as it needs to be. Our inheritance is imperishable (cf. **I Peter 1:4**). How could the perishable inherit the imperishable? In fact, that is Paul's very point in **I Corinthians 15:50**. God has reserved an imperishable inheritance for us, and will bring us forth from the grave imperishable.

### B. *From dishonor to glory:*

1. The inside of a grave is not a place of honor. Sure, we may decorate the outside of the grave with flowers and medals. We may carve honoring words on to the stones that we place above or beside graves. But death is the great equalizer. The coward and the hero are both the same once they are planted in the ground. They have both been defeated by death. They lie there, losers to the great enemy.
2. But the resurrected body is brought forth to glory. In the resurrection, by the grace of Jesus we will no longer be losers to the great enemy, but victors over it. "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (**I Corinthians 15:54-55**). And the glory we will experience in the resurrection far outshines the suffering we face here (cf. **Romans 8:18**).

### C. *From weakness to power:*

1. The body that goes into the grave is weak. In fact, it was human weakness that caused us to have to enter the grave to begin with. The strongest among us simply cannot outwit or defeat death. Though we fight and feud with death for a hundred years, eventually he will show himself the stronger. **Ecclesiastes 12:1-8** describes our weakness. We all face it. We will all experience it. No amount of exercise will overcome it. No amount of healthy living will defeat it. We are weak. And the grave is our reminder.
2. But the resurrected body is raised in power. I don't know exactly what power will be manifest in our resurrected bodies. But I do know Paul is promising us to follow in the footsteps of our Master and Savior. According to **II Corinthians 13:4** He died in weakness, but was raised in power.

### D. *From mortal to immortality:*

1. The body that goes into the grave is mortal. That is, it is subject to death. Obviously, the body going into the grave is dead. From the moment we start to live we start to die. Though we like to think we are protected from it for a few years, the fact is we are all subject to death at any moment. Many of us here tonight like to think we have our whole lives ahead of us. We forget our whole lives may come to an end in a car wreck on our ride home tonight. Teenagers contract cancer. Infants experience SIDS. Death is not for the aged. It is for the human.
2. But the bodies that burst forth from the grave are immortal. We will not be subject to death in eternity. No accident will kill us. No disease will defeat us. No number of years will shrivel us. No power will end us. As the song says, "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." And nothing will change that.

### E. *From natural to spiritual:*

1. The body that goes into the grave is a natural body. Let's face it. There is a certain amount of constantly being at odds with God and His ways while we are in this life. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we can't serve Him in this life. I'm simply saying there is a constant struggle with it. In fact, this same word is used in **I Corinthians 2:14-15** to describe those who simply can't understand or accept the things of the Spirit of God. Yes, I realize there is a spectrum here. Paul is telling us we need to leave the natural man behind and pursue the spiritual man. But in **I Corinthians 15**, Paul demonstrates that even to our death, we are plagued with that natural man that wars against God and His things.
2. However, the body that comes forth from the grave has finally won that victory completely. There will be no more natural man to compete against God. At that point, we will be spiritual men and women. Those bodies do not compete against God at all, but cooperate with Him fully. In the resurrection, we are in bodies that bring glory to God in all things. There is no sin in eternity with God, not because our freewill is taken away, but because our resurrected bodies are different. They are spiritual, not natural.

F. *From earthly to heavenly:*

1. The body that goes into the grave is of the earth. **Genesis 2:7** explains, mankind was formed from the dust of the earth. And in the curse of **Genesis 3:19** God explained that we came from the dust and we will return to it. We are earthy.
2. But the body that bursts forth from the grave is heavenly. And here we see the other side of Paul's play on words back in **I Corinthians 15:39-41**. There is a different glory for earthly bodies and heavenly ones. No, we will not have a body that is like the sun, moon, and stars, bodies found in the natural heavens. Rather, we will have bodies prepared to dwell with glory in the spiritual heaven, the abode of God. Our inheritance is reserved in heaven according to **I Peter 1:4** and we will be given bodies that can dwell in God's heavenly plane.

G. *From Adam to Jesus:*

1. The body that goes into the grave is a body following in the footsteps of Adam. As we have already read, in **Genesis 3:19**, because of his sin, mankind was cursed. He came from the ground and he would go back to the ground. Everyone who is in Adam, that is, everyone who was born in the natural manner from Adam follows his footsteps. We cannot help it. We are destined for the grave because Adam was destined for the grave.
2. However, the body that bursts forth from the grave is following in the footsteps of Jesus. Everyone who is in Christ, that is, everyone who is reborn as Jesus taught (see **John 3:3-5**), will follow His steps in resurrection. We cannot help it. We are destined to defeat death because Jesus was destined to defeat it. And while I cannot tell you exactly what that will be like, I can be comforted as John was in knowing that when we come forth from the grave, we will be like Jesus (**I John 3:2**).

Conclusion:

What is the conclusion then? Don't become a Christian because you hope to have some kind of reward in this life. God doles out blessings in this life as He sees fit. They are not always based on righteousness or faithfulness. After all, who could be counted more faithful than the apostle Paul? But consider his life as described in **II Corinthians 11:23-29**. Rather, become a Christian because there is more to existence than this life. No matter how long your life, when you think in terms of eternity, the time you spend here is nothing more than a beginning. As I was preparing for this sermon, it occurred to me that in just 5 more years, my mother will have been dead longer than she was alive. It will only take 35 years for my father to reach the same point. Do you realize that the oldest recorded man in history, Methuselah (**Genesis 5:27**—969 years old) has been dead longer than he was alive? It occurs to me that almost certainly by the year 2215 (just two hundred years from now) every single one of us will have been dead longer than we will be alive. The fact is, as far as this earthly life is concerned, we are going to be dead much, much longer than we will be alive. Jesus didn't die to improve our earthly lives. He died because something is coming after this. According to **John 5:28-29**, an hour is coming when everyone in the tombs will hear the voice of Jesus and will come forth in resurrection. Some to a resurrection of judgment and some to a resurrection of life. Some will get to experience the bliss of eternal fellowship and togetherness with God and some will experience the terror and torment of eternal separation from Him. Jesus has saved us for that day, not for this day. According to **Romans 8:18-25**, we have been saved in hope. That is, we have been saved because we know there is more than this that is around us. This physical world has been subjected to corruption and futility. But we look forward to the freedom of the glory of God. We look forward to the adoption as sons and the redemption of our bodies. We look forward to the resurrection. And as Paul says, the glory that will be revealed to us, through us, and in us totally, completely, and in all other ways outshines any suffering we might experience here, no matter how bad. Jesus did not defeat death to end suffering in this life; He did so to provide us an imperishable, glorious, powerful, immortal eternity. That leaves us with a question. Do you really believe in the resurrection? I pray that you do. It is our greatest hope. Hang on to that hope. Hang on to the resurrection! Let it be your comfort. Let it be your victory. Remember Paul's words in **I Thessalonians 4:13-18**: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words" (ESV).