

The Future of Our Bodies

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, good morning, everyone. Lovely to see you today. This is just the best day ever.! Here's the deal. Really simply, either Christianity, sorry, either the tomb is empty or Christianity is empty.

It really is as simple as that. So let me welcome you to the day of all days as it centers on the man above all men.

Now, if you've got a Bible, you might want to turn to 1 Corinthians 15. If you didn't bring a Bible, you can grab one on the pews roundabout or on your phone. We're going to read it in about five minutes time and the words will be on the screen.

But my aim over the next 20 minutes or so is to help us see that this is the day when everything changed. Particularly as it concerns the future. And particularly as it concerns the future of our bodies.

Friends, there are contours to what Jesus achieved as he walked out of that tomb. There are contours, there are dimensions, there are glories, there are colours, there are splendours that we will never stop seeing.

[1 : 2 2] And it's been true in my life. The more that I've been a Christian, every single time Easter Sunday rolls around, it really is the best day of the year. But also there's just things that I see that I've never seen before. So come and see these.

Now, let me try and get us into this. One of my favourite actors is a man called Eddie Redmayne. Now you might disagree with me here, but for me his finest acting performance was when he played Stephen Hawking in the film A Theory of Everything.

And that's why Eddie Redmayne wrote the foreword to Stephen Hawking's last published book before he died. And it's called Brief Answers to the Big Questions, which is a bold title, I think you'll agree.

The title piqued my interest in being a sucker for the buy now with one click feature on Amazon. I bought it. And here's what Eddie Redmayne writes at the end of his foreword.

And I put it on the screen so that you can see it. And I'm pretty delighted with how this picture's turned out. Here's what he writes. I hope you enjoy his, talking to Stephen Hawking, I hope you enjoy his writings.

[2 : 3 6] And to quote Barack Obama, I hope Stephen is having fun up there among the stars. Love, Eddie. Now you've heard that line before, I'm pretty confident.

The sentiment is lovely. The sentiment is lovely coming from a man like Eddie Redmayne about a man like Stephen Hawking. That is until you realise the irony of what he's written there. Because Stephen Hawking actually believed this about what happens to our bodies after we die.

He says this, there is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers. That is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.

Now do you see the disconnect between those two things? Here's the point. When it comes to beliefs about what happens to our bodies after we die, opinions abound.

And that's not just a modern day thing. Human beings have always wondered what happens to us after we die. It has happened down the generations.

[3 : 47] It has happened across the civilisations. And this passage that we're going to briefly look at from the Bible, and we're going to hear it read in a minute, is written to a people who are living in an age and living in a city that is absolutely no different to that.

This letter written by a man called Paul some 2,000 years ago to a group of Christians living their lives in the city of Corinth, which is just a little west of Athens.

Now if you're up in your Greek mythology, you'll know that many Greeks of this day believed in Hades. Now if you're struggling to picture that, think Disney's Hercules. That's where my mind always goes.

Hades, the god of the underworld. And as for the Romans, well many believed that humans were transformed into special empowered beings after death, and they kind of floated over family members, they watched over them.

Again friends, many, many opinions about what happens to us after we die. But the Christian idea, the one that was birthed, given substance to in the first century friends, is so radically different.

[5 : 04] It is so radically different today. It is so radically different then. There is nothing like this, if I could put it like this, there is nothing like this out there on the market. So different in fact that when Paul initially told the Christians in Corinth about it, I reckon some of them were a little confused.

Did we hear them right? Maybe they were a little embarrassed. And so Paul writes these verses to give both them and us clarity in a world of ambiguity.

This is what happens to us after death. This is what Christians believe. Down to generations all across the world. What happens to us after we die.

This is all about where the story of our lives is going. In fact it is way bigger than that. It is where the story of the whole cosmos is going. And the foundation of it all is Jesus' empty tomb.

Now Jamie and Hazel are going to come and read this for us. And I just want to listen, want us to listen out for the three ideas that Paul uses here to help them and us understand it.

[6 : 22] Now just to help us as we track through this, here's the three of them. Paul is going to draw three similes. He's going to use three ideas to help them think about what it is like. The first one is like a seed.

The second one is like an image. And the third one is a bit more subtle, but it's in there if you look hard enough. It's like a sheet.

And if you get lost at any point, here's the big idea. That what happened to Jesus is going to one day happen to us and is going to one day happen to all of creation.

So Jamie and Hazel, why don't you guys come up and we'll read this together. And let's get into it, see what God has to say to us on this Easter Sunday. Hi there, I'm Hazel.

I'm Jamie. And we're going to do our reading this morning. And Graeme's already said it's from 1 Corinthians 15. So if you've not got it, if you could find it now. And if anyone needs to get the church Bibles, you'll find it on page 1157.

[7 : 28] Okay, I'm reading the first part. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he is determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

Not all flesh is the same. People have one kind of flesh. Animals have another. Birds another. And fish another. There are also heavenly bodies.

And there are earthly bodies. But the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind. And the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor. The moon another.

And the star is another. And star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable. It is raised imperishable.

[8 : 30] It is sown in dishonor. 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written, The first man Adam became a living being.

The last Adam, a living, giving spirit. A life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural. And after that, the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth.

The second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth. And as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven.

And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[9 : 39] Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be risen, imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm.

[10 : 57] Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Amen. So Paul envisages that some of these Corinthians are struggling to get their head around this. The resurrection?

And so Paul anticipates a question that they're going to be asking. It's verse 35, if you've got it there. How are the dead raised? In other words, how is this going to work?

And see how he logically leads them through all of this. What will it be like, Paul? Well, says Paul, here's your first idea.

Did you see it? It's like a seed. And here's the logic at verse 37. When you sow a seed into the ground, you're not planting what will be the final product.

[12 : 09] Do you see it? In other words, you don't plant a tiny acorn and in time it grows to be a giant acorn. Right? Like something out of James and the Giant Peach.

Nor do you plant an acorn and it produces lots of little acorns just like it. No, the logic that God has woven into nature is that one day you plant an acorn but in time, oak tree.

In one sense, it's the same. The DNA is all there in the seed but in another truer sense, it's been transformed into something radically and gloriously different.

Now, Kate just told my thunder a little bit at the start. She was bang on. God has woven clues about the future into nature that are whispers of the resurrection, dear friends, all around us.

every seed is telling us a story. Every tree is proclaiming to us a truth. The resurrection is all around us.

[13 : 25] The transformation concept is all around us. Just like that, Paul says, there are earthly bodies and there are spiritual bodies. Our earthly bodies are the seed and our spiritual bodies are the tree.

It's why so many churches have you ever thought about this, have graveyards. It's what people in the past in churches believed that they were doing. They were planting the bodies of believers in anticipation that one day they will rise to this future.

Now, what day is that? Well, see Paul say verse 32. He says, which is his way of saying, here's the point, this is what it will be like at the resurrection of the dead.

Now, that phrase indicates that we're not talking about heaven here. Okay? Heaven being the place that Christians believe that we go if we die before Jesus comes back.

Heaven is the place where we are with Jesus spiritually. But that's not, friends, our forever home. In the words of Tom Wright, I love this, no, Christians believe in life after life after death.

[14 : 48] This is talking about what will happen when Jesus comes back and when he raises the dead, every human being who's ever lived and to those who have rejected him, who have spurned the opportunity to receive him, Jesus will say, away from me.

As he judges evil, he will consign them to a place of eternal punishment. But to all those who have trusted him, who have thrown themselves upon his grace, he will say, come, as he ushers in this new creation where he rules and where he reigns visibly as king.

And there and then, friends, we will have transformed bodies. Verse 42, bodies that are imperishable.

Now, that word should remind us of the fridge. And those foods in our fridge that have a best before date, right? Things that decay. And that's what our bodies do, right?

It's why footballers don't get long contracts beyond the age of 30. It's why Ronaldo is a freak of nature, still playing and banging in the goals at 40. It's why we plan on retiring at 65, because we realise that our bodies wither and fade.

[16 : 09] But then, when Christ returns, when he ushers this new creation in, in our new resurrection bodies, that will not be a thing, because they will have been raised our bodies in glory and power.

Friends, what happened to Jesus will one day happen to us and will one day happen to all of creation. And you can imagine the Corinthians thinking, well, we can just about get our heads around that whole acorn to oak tree thing.

We kind of get that. But what will we look like? Well, says Paul, and here's the second idea, it's like an image.

What will the spiritual body look like? Well, the minute our bodies are patterned after, see him spell this out, verse 47, the man of the dust of the earth. It's always good to be reminded, isn't it, now and again, that our bodies are our dust.

I heard a comedian talk about the fact that we are just really walking bottles of water. Right now, all of us, in terms of our bodies, we look like, we look like Adam, the first human being that God made.

[17 : 30] God breathed life into him as after he formed him from the dust of the earth. We bear his resemblance, every single one of us.

But then, we will look like the heavenly man. Now, who is this heavenly man? Well, it's Jesus.

But if I can put it like this, which Jesus? It's not the Jesus who walked the earth, was crucified and put in the tomb, Jesus.

We won't look like him. Friends, we will look like the walked out of the tomb in his resurrection body, never to die again, Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. When he walked out of that tomb, he was the same and yet he was wonderfully different.

And you get that impression as you read the gospels. His disciples, they don't recognize him. As he's talking with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus at the end of Luke's gospel, what do they say to him as he's walking and talking?

[18 : 34] They don't recognize him. Are you the only one who doesn't know what's happened in the last few days? They don't instantly recognize him. But John 21, when the disciples are eating on the beach, they do recognize him.

It's the Lord. Jesus comes to Thomas and says, would you touch the marks in my hands? So Paul writes, verse 49, just as we now bear the image of the earthly man, so then, so then, we will bear the image of the heavenly man.

our bodies then, will be transformed to look like his. When will it happen?

It will happen instantly, in a flash. See that verse 52, when Jesus returns, when he raises the dead, his people, those who have trusted in him, will be changed. And it's like we're given a new wardrobe.

See the clothing language at verse 53, we will take off. the old clothes on which the label read perishable and mortal. And we will put on the clothes which read imperishable and immortal.

[19 : 50] That's what we will look like. We will look like him. Friends, what happened to Jesus on that day will one day happen to us and will one day happen to all of creation.

okay, you hear them say, we've kind of got a better idea now of what it might look like, but what will it feel like? And this is where Paul gives them the third idea.

He's saying it's like a sheet. It will feel like a sheet that was once hanging over us has now completely been lifted.

Verse 54, when we're clothed with our new bodies, then the saying will come true, death has been swallowed up in victory.

That will be the chant on the terraces of heaven. As I've heard somebody once put it, you're not stinging anymore. And he's quoting there from Isaiah 25, God there is talking about how one day he will destroy the sheet that currently hangs over all of humanity, the sheet of death and all its children, grief, pain, suffering, loss.

[21 : 20] Friends, we are currently living under the sheet. We are like hedgehogs. We've got so used to living underground it. We've got no categories really to describe what life is like up there in the light because we're so used to the dark.

We cannot fathom a world without sin. We cannot imagine a world that is free of crime and of sickness and of pain and of death.

Friends, some of us, I know we are right there right now. We are feeling the sting of death and let this come as a wonderful balm for your soul. There is going to be a place where there are no more police stations and where doctors everywhere will have been made redundant.

Our God is telling us that one day he will fully and finally act to take away the sheet that covers us at the minute.

And like some kind of giant Pac-Man, he's going to swallow it up forever. And with it gone, he will wipe away tears.

[22 : 37] You ever thought about the fact that there's coming a day when you will have cried your last tear? And he will remove our disgrace and our shame. Fully and finally, friends, we will be rid of the sin that plagues us so often.

And it's not just our bodies that will go through this transformation. The entire cosmos will go through it as well. And then God will sing over us, where, oh, death is your victory?

Where, oh, death is your sting? And we've got to understand that Christ Jesus, on that day, if our faith is in him, that was our resurrection day too in a sense.

All that he achieved there, because our faith is in him, friends, that victory is now our victory. On that day will be our victory. Friends, right now, know today that you are free from the penalty of sin, because Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sin.

And that can be yours this morning if you put your trust in him. We are free from the penalty of it. When he walked out that tomb, he showed the price has been paid.

[23 : 50] And we are free now from the power of sin. Because his spirit lives in us, helping us to say no to sin and yes to sin, the things that used to dominate and direct us.

We are free from the power of sin. And one day we will be free from the presence of sin and death because we will be in the very presence of the God who redeemed us and saved us and brought him to himself.

Do you see that what happened to Jesus on that day will one day when he returns gloriously happen to us and it will happen to all of creation.

Friends, there are contours, there are dimensions, there are colours, there are glories, there are splendours to this day that we should never stop breathing in and living in.

This is your future. If your trust is in him today, no matter how you're feeling, no matter how weak you think your faith is, no matter how painful it might feel right now, this is your future.

[25 : 05] And so as we begin to draw this to a close, can I just leave you with one question? And it is brought to you by a band called Keen. And they had a song, I remember when I was at uni this came out, it was called Somewhere Only We Know and it kind of made a comeback last summer and that's why it's on my Spotify playlist now.

But this is the song, oh simple thing, where have you gone? I'm getting old and I need something to rely on. And so here's the question friends, what are you relying on?

You know, there's a man in the States, his name is Don Carson. He's one of the greatest Christian thinkers I think of the last couple of decades.

He's now aged 78. He's from Canada and he's been suffering in the last few years of his life from Parkinson's disease. We know how horrendous a thing that is.

And he wrote an open letter recently to his friends about his decision to retire from public ministry. He just feels like he hasn't got the energy to do it. And in the letter he talked about how the limitations of that disease are beginning to take its toll on his body.

[26 : 24] Physically it's slowing him down. But by far the hardest part of it is the impact that it's having on his mind. He recalls in this letter trying to convince his neurologist that they were in fact living in 2008.

And he was unable to remember the name of the first president of the United States. And you can hear in this letter his heartbreak that cognitively he's beginning to lose it a little bit.

But here's what he said despite the heartbreak of that update here's how he ended that letter. He said this. He said I am not suffering from anything that a good resurrection can't fix.

Do you hear the faith in those words? As horrible as that is that is not where his story ends. Friends there is a new great day in our diaries.

Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the remaking of all things. His glorious new life his total defeat of death he will powerfully share with all those who come to him today.

[27 : 34] This world is not all that there is. This life is not how it will remain. God has stepped into the world to redeem it. And if you know him know that this is your future.

Verse 58 this is why he can write this. Stand firm. You see it in the text verse 58 stand firm. Let nothing move you.

Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord knowing that your labor your work for him. Do you ever think this to yourself? Does it making any difference? What's the point? Here's what Paul says. Know that your labor for him your trust in him is not in vain.

And so that's why Isaiah 25 God's people declare in that day this is our God. We waited for him and he came if I can paraphrase that he came and he triumphed for us.

Friends our labor for him and our trust in him is not in vain. Let me pray and maybe let's just take a moment just before we sing and close our time together.

[28 : 49] Friends why don't we take a moment just to be silent. For some of us this will be maybe the first time we've heard this stuff.

Maybe we've never thought about Jesus before. For all of us as others of us. Friends I know that we're going through some serious stuff and maybe I pray that God's spirit will be bringing a fresh knowledge knowledge of what he has achieved through his son for us on the cross to our hearts right now.

And so glorious God on this wonderful Easter Sunday we celebrate the resurrection of your son.

And in the same way that the sun rises may the light of his victory over death shine into our hearts.

Would you fill us this morning with joy and gratitude gratitude and may we leave here today buoyed by the hope and the new life that is found in him who walked out of that tomb having declared on the cross that it is finished.

[30 : 15] Father we thank you for your love for us this day. We thank you that we have a saviour who is not dead but is alive. Lord would you lift the eyes of our hearts to him today and this is our prayer in his wonderful and in his strong name we pray.

Amen.