
Our New, Immortal Bodies

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 23 February 2025

1 Corinthians 15:42-50 • Revelation 21:1-7 • Luke 6:27-38



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Life never stands still. It is a long pattern of growth and change. We start out as one thing, a little baby. We begin to change as soon as we leave our mothers' wombs. Every parent seems to say at some point: "They're growing up so fast!" And it is true. The baby becomes a toddler, the toddler becomes a little boy or girl; immense changes happen through puberty, and then the adult emerges — and continues to change. All through our lives, at any point in our lives, we are different from the year before. God has designed all the stages of our lives in order to serve his purposes. At all stages of our lives we have our abilities and our responsibilities, our parts to play in the great unfolding drama of life on God's earth.

Why am I saying all this, when we all already know it? Because it helps us to understand what happens when we die. We all wonder about that. As

Christians, we know that we will come before God, and that if we have faith in Jesus Christ, we will join him in eternal life. But what does that life look like? And — what will *we* look like?

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, speaks directly to this mystery:

This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised, it will be immortal. When buried, it is ugly and weak; when raised, it will be beautiful and strong.

(1 Cor 15:42-43)

This is encouraging: we will not be old and weak, we will be beautiful and strong. We will be immortal. And note this: we will have a body. Popular opinion often posits that we will be disembodied souls, flying around the heavens. Many believe that the soul will be freed of all physical constraints, and a body will no longer be necessary. No doubt many of the Corinthians who read Paul's letter thought so. But God is not planning only for our souls, but for bodies as well — new, beautiful bodies.

The idea that we will have no bodies probably comes from the same human impulse which inspired the Gnostics, who believed that the world and everything in it was evil, and that we were all just waiting for the next life. But how can you believe that God would create an evil world? Look around you and see how beautiful it is! Heaven will certainly surpass this world in beauty, as the glorious butterfly surpasses the ugly caterpillar. But God spent time and effort to create this world for us, and it is not a throw-away world. What we see here is a foretaste of heaven, when we will gather around the throne of God to praise him, as revealed in the reading from Revelation.

Revelation paints the picture of that future city, the new Jerusalem. It will be a city, peopled by us, in our new, resurrection bodies. The city is spoken of in physical terms, as it will be a physical city, with walls and gates. This was revealed in a vision to John of Patmos. In the vision, God says, “And now I make all things new!” (Rev 21:5). All things — including us. We will be renewed. The bodies we have now only last a hundred years or so. The ones we will have will be made of different stuff, and never wear out. As Paul says, “What is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God's kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality” (1 Cor 15:50).

The model for all this is, of course, Jesus Christ. Paul goes on in his letter:

For the scripture says, “The first man, Adam, was created a living being”; but the last Adam is the life-giving Spirit. ... The first Adam, made of earth, came from the earth; the second Adam came from heaven. Those who belong to the earth are like the one who was made of earth; those who are of heaven are like the one who came from heaven. Just as we wear the likeness of the man

made of earth, so we will wear the likeness of the Man from heaven.

(1Cor 15:45,47-49)

In one of his most attractive arguments, Paul speaks of two Adams: the first is Adam from the Garden of Eden; the second Adam is Jesus. God created Adam from the dust of the ground, but Jesus is uncreated; he was always, from the very beginning. Here on earth we are like the first Adam — made of the same stuff as he was. But after we die, we take on our resurrection bodies, which will be like Jesus: “those who are of heaven are like the one who came from heaven.” God has been preparing us for this since the beginning. We spend a time on earth and of the earth before we can be made worthy of life in the eternal city. We know that we can be resurrected because Jesus was resurrected, and we know that we can have a new body because when Jesus rose and met with his disciples, he was in a physical body. The disciples (particularly doubting Thomas) touched it and knew it was real, not just a visual manifestation.

We have spoken mostly about the physical side of things. What about our spirits? Paul says that when the body is raised from the dead, it will be a spiritual body. This does not mean immaterial or invisible. Augustine says: “[The new body] will rightly be called spiritual — not because [it is] changed into spirit ..., but because it will be so subject to the spirit” that it will take on immortality.¹ So it seems that we will still be body and spirit, but our bodies will be of a perfection which our current bodies cannot approach.

We have much to thank our God for, both in this current world, and the world to come. Our life here is to be lived to the full, in the grace of God, believing in our Lord Jesus Christ. When we rise again to live in the full light of God’s grace, then may our lives, “freed from the terror and threat of death, be fully embraced and enjoyed.”² Thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, 13.20.

² Cousar, Charles B., et al, *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV — Year C* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 157.