

Prayers

To God

You have been gracious to us, Lord Jesus, and You have loved us even when we have not deserved it. You have blessed us by Your favour, and we appreciate this more than we can express. Do a greater work within us Lord Jesus, and break open the boundaries we so often place around ourselves, so Your Kingdom may come in power within my own life and those with whom I share fellowship in the Church. I praise Your holy Name, Lord Jesus: AMEN

For myself

Shout for joy to the Lord your God! Now you may find this quite difficult to do, and it depends on where you are and who you are with as to whether it is possible. But look for an opportunity, and let your spirit be free in praise!

For others

As you go about your daily routines and work, look around you and pray about what you see. The Lord will direct your eyes to what is right for you to bring to Him in prayer.

Meditation

Why not try? Why not turn towards a life of faith,
Why not find that Christ is setting your soul free?

Why not see if faith will hold when all else fails,
And whether 'God is love' is real when life is tough?

Why not help the poor and find you suffer for it,
Feeling pain for doing what is right, not wrong ...

Why not pray when all seems irredeemably lost,
And find out if a listening Saviour really saves?

Why not tread the impossibly narrow path of faith?
Friends will think you foolish; God will think you wise!

Why not open up your heart to feel the Spirit's wind?
To explore the riches of the life God pours on you?

Why not take the plunge, be full, immersed in Christ;
To die with Him, and in His time, be raised in glory?

Why not? ... Why not now?

Bible Passage

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

³⁵ But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they return?'

³⁶ You fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies! ³⁷ When sowing, you do not sow the physical form of what is yet to be, but a simple seed, maybe of wheat or something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a physical form as He has decided, and to each kind of seed he gives its own physical form.

³⁹ Not all physical substance is of the same kind: there is one kind for people and another for animals, for birds another and for fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly substances and there are earthly substances; but the brightness of something heavenly is like one thing, and the brightness of something earthly is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of brightness, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in brightness. ⁴² So it will be with the resurrection of the dead:

- it is sown mortal, it is raised immortal;
- ⁴³ it is sown in shame, it is raised in glory;
- it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;
- ⁴⁴ it is sown a material form of body, it is raised a spiritual form of body.

So if there is a material form of the body, there is also a spiritual form of the body.

⁴⁵ It is written, 'Adam, the first man, became a living being' but the last Adam was a life-giving Spirit! ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but rather the material and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man came from the dust of the earth, the second man comes from heaven. ⁴⁸ Those who are earthly are like the first earthy man, and those who are heavenly are like the first heavenly man. ⁴⁹ So just as we bear the likeness of the earthly man, let us bear the likeness of the man from heaven! ⁵⁰ I tell you this, fellow believers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does what is perishable inherit imperishability!

⁵¹ Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in an instant, in the blink 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 what is perishable must put on imperishability, and what is mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ Then, when what is perishable has put on imperishability, and what is mortal has put on immortality, the written word will be fulfilled:

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

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 so thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

⁵⁸ Therefore, fellow believers, stand firm, immovable, always doing more in the work of the Lord, because you know that your hard work is not in vain in the Lord.

Review

Christians have always been interested in the resurrection and Christ's return, and for centuries, people have scoured the Bible to find out more about it. Some believe God has placed clues within His Word, so if we are spiritual enough, we will find them and then possess the secrets of God's Kingdom and of Christ's return. Yet these ideas are far from the mark, for God has revealed all His secrets in Christ, that is, everything we need to know and can know. So as we study the resurrection in this passage, we should accept what is here, and be content with God's revelation.

Some background

To understand what Paul says here, it can be helpful to read it alongside other similar NT texts:

1. **Matthew 24** Jesus' description of 'the end', and His warning we must be ready, but will not know when!
2. **1 Thess. 4:13-17** which describes God's people as '*caught up in the air*' with Christ at the '*last trumpet*'.
3. **Revelation 20** John's vision of the defeat of evil, and a thousand year rule of God's people with Christ!

There is more in the O.T. e.g. Isaiah 35, Daniel 7:9-18 and Psalm 110. Our own pictures of the resurrection and of heaven are often a composite of such scriptures and Jesus' promises about going to be with the Father (see John's Gospel). But we will now see what Paul says here.

For Paul, the resurrection is essential to the Gospel of God's grace, to salvation and a relationship with God. Much of his letter to the Corinthians has been about their faults, but in chapter 15, his primary concern is the Gospel (15:1), and its bold message that Christ has been raised (15:4); the Gospel alone deals with human sin and grants access to heaven (15:26,34). But Paul is aware that some struggle to believe the resurrection; *'how are the dead raised'* they ask, and *'what sort of a body'* do we have (15:35)?

The parable of the sown seed (15:35-38)

Paul is blunt, and says, *'you fool'* to Christians who have not understand the resurrection and refers us to Jesus' parable of the sown seed which yields a crop (Matt 13). This may seem harsh, but he is using the language of 'wisdom' literature, because he wants wise Christians to accept the mystery of the resurrection. Before science, the parable of the seed well described the miracle of growth, as a seemingly dead seed turned into a living plant in a mysterious way. Paul uses this to illustrate the resurrection, showing that life comes after death, and that the seed and the grown plant are two very different things (15:36), indeed, God governs the whole process (15:38)! The God who does this is able to 'remake' people in heaven, at the resurrection!

What are we made of when in heaven? (15:39-44)

We can almost hear people thinking; *'but what sort of "stuff" will we be made of after the resurrection?'* We are now led towards an answer; not one that will satisfy the scientist or philosopher, but one that will help the earnest seeker after spiritual truth. Again, within the world of the first century, Paul explains that everything is made of different 'substance' (15:39f.), and suggests that things in heaven are made of different 'substance' as well, for example, the sun, moon and stars (15:40). We no longer see things like this, but this was how Paul thought of them; we might use 'stuff' instead of the word 'substance'.

Paul now makes a leap of faith to say that in heaven, after the resurrection, the 'stuff' of which we are made will therefore be much better than the 'stuff' of earth! Physical bodies are mortal, sinful, weak and *'material'* (15:42-44), but in the resurrection, this will be remade *'immortal ... in glory ... in power ... a spiritual form of body'*! How liberating to think that in the resurrection, in heaven, our bodies will be this perfect!

Adam for earth, and Christ for heaven! (15:45-50)

There is a powerful example at the heart of our passage, and the principle it outlines is this. We are all like Adam, the 'first' man, made from the *'dust of the earth'* (15:47 - Gen 2:7) and full of sin. But our faith allows us to be like Christ, the *'second'* man (15:47,49), who comes from heaven. Earthly 'stuff' cannot access heaven because it is perishable; but at the resurrection, Christ miraculously makes a heavenly creation of imperfect humanity!

Thank God Jesus is a man, and if we are like Him in heaven then our resurrection bodies will not be like the alien creatures with weird faces found in 'Star Wars' movies! We will be like Christ; made of new, immortal 'stuff'! We will not grow old, decay or fall to disease and sickness, for this is what *'imperishability'* means (15:50)!

Getting to heaven ... (15:51-57)

So having answered questions about what people will be 'made of' in heaven, and inspired us to believe we will be like Christ and perfect before God, one question remains. How do we get there?

One answer is by death. In the first century, Christians were gradually dying, but as yet, this was still rare. People expected Christ to come at any time, and in this spirit, Paul offers a vision of the End. In an instant, a trumpet will call (15:52) announcing what is called elsewhere in Scripture the return of Christ, and those who know Him by faith will be changed! One moment we will be mortal beings, and the next, imperishable citizens of heaven (15:53)!

This will be the great triumph, when our souls shout 'Hallelujah', because all we have believed will become real! Death, Hades and the Devil will be defeated, as it says in Revelation 20! Here, Paul concentrates on the victory over death, crafting together two O.T. quotes firstly from Isaiah 25:7,8, *'He will swallow up death in victory ...'* and secondly from Hosea 13:14, *'O Death, where are your thorns, O Sheol, where is your sting!'*

The victory of the Gospel for those who stand firm!

There is a magnificent flourish within Paul's writing here. It is as if he has discharged his responsibility, having given the Corinthians the fullest explanation of faith he can offer, and crowning it with this magnificent encouragement to *'stand firm, immovable ...'* (15:58) on the rock of the Gospel that delivers new, spiritual and bodily life in heaven forever with God! If death could destroy all semblance of humanity it would be victorious,

but it is not. Through Christ, humanity is saved for a realistic expectation of eternal life in the very presence of God!

Discipleship

Application

Resurrection - the crowning glory of faith

Paul's great explanation of the resurrection concludes his letter to the Corinthians, which tells us that it is the crowning glory of the Gospel. Christ's resurrection proves God's love for both His Son and through Him, it proves the Gospel message. The resurrection is the soul's passport to eternal life with God, beyond death. It is a truth to be grasped by faith, which gives meaning to our present and our future, and although we do not understand exactly what heaven will be like, it will be glorious and perfect!

Crucifixion and resurrection in 1 Corinthians

Paul has written to the Corinthians about many church life issues (chs. 5-11), about the spiritual gifts (ch.12), the golden rule of love (ch.13), and church life and worship (ch.14). But he began by declaring the Gospel message about Christ, '*and Him crucified*' (chs.1-4), and he now concludes by describing the triumph of His resurrection (ch.15).

We are therefore blessed with a complete message; there is no preaching of the Gospel without the preaching of both Christ crucified and Christ raised. This message covers all we do and all we are as God's people. Throughout the history of the church, some have struggled with the idea of resurrection and victory over death because it is in the future, and unknowable for the individual. Yet life cannot ever be solely about what is provable; and when we accept Christ by faith, we gain an unsurpassed hope of eternal life!

Ideas for what to do

- *Write down your thoughts about what will happen when Christ returns. Which of these are rooted here in this text, and which are found elsewhere in Scripture?*
- *Find a friend, and discuss what you have found out about the resurrection.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *Is it worth imagining what will look like in heaven?*
2. *Do you find it easy or difficult to think of yourself in Christ's presence when in heaven?*
3. *What do you think Christ's coming will be like? What does Scripture teach us, in general?*

Final Prayer

Thank You, heavenly Father, for the abiding truth of the Gospel by which we are saved and granted a complete life with You, forever in glory! How can we thank you enough! Hallelujah! **AMEN**