WE SHALL BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVEN MAN

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Key verse: 49

“And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.”

Today’s passage talks about the resurrection body and its glory. After rising from the dead, the risen Jesus appeared to his followers for forty days. He had a body of flesh and bones. He said to the disciples, **“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have”** (Lk 24:39). The disciples were still doubtful, but then Jesus took broiled fish and ate it in their presence. He even said to Thomas**, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe”** (Jn 20:27). The risen Jesus appeared to his people physically, yet going through the locked doors. Later he was taken up into heaven bodily before their very eyes. His resurrection body was physical yet different and glorious. Jesus came into the world in the human body fitting for this finite world. But, he ascended into heaven with his glorious resurrection body which fits for heaven. This risen Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. And in turn we Christians will be made alive with the resurrection body like Jesus.

But believers in Corinth who were influenced by Gnosticism rejected the idea of a physical resurrection because they thought that the physical body was evil and so they should get rid of it. Presumably, they sarcastically asked, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”

Paul answers, “How foolish!” People today say, “There are no stupid questions.” But Paul considers these questions foolish because the concept of a resurrection was very reasonable and conceivable. He said, **“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 has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body”** (36-38). Paul’s analogy of a plant here is so amazing and truthful. He knows that without the aid of figurative language, it is difficult for us to understand the radical transformation from the earthly body to a heavenly resurrection body. As we know well, most things that are buried in the ground decompose and do not produce some new form of life, but a seed does. When a seed is buried, it germinates and becomes a plant. So it is with the resurrection. Our physical body is like a seed that will fall and die one day. But death is not the end. After death, God transforms this seed—our physical body—into the resurrection body. Hence, the prerequisite of the resurrection body is the death of our natural body. Unless a seed dies in the ground, God cannot give a new body. Unless a person dies, God cannot give the resurrection body. In short, no death, no resurrection. And it is the resurrection principle. Christians are those who live according to this principle. For example, when we first die to sin through sincere and true repentance, God forgives us and makes us new. When we first deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Jesus, God will renew our hearts and raise us up as Jesus’ disciples. Many Christians want to grow mature inwardly but they don’t want to die to themselves. But the death of the physical body or the death of ourselves inside is the prerequisite for the resurrection body to come out of the decaying physical body. We must remember that our physical body is like a seed to die for the glorious resurrection body.

The seed which is planted dies in the dark underground, but the plant that comes from the seed lives above the ground with bright sunlight—two totally different dimensions (under the ground and above the ground). In the same way, our physical body is doomed to get old and die in this finite world, but our resurrection body that comes from our physical body will be completely different. It will fit for God’s glorious kingdom, the spiritual world.

As for physical body, everyone is different. Some people are slim; some are chubby. Some tall, some short. God made us all different. In the same way God gave animals, birds and fish different bodies which fit for their particular living environments. So birds fly with their wings and fish swim in the water with their flexing bodies, tails and fins. We all know this fact of life. Likewise, we all have different physical body. In the same way, God will give each one a different resurrection body. But Paul goes beyond that. Look at verse 40. **“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.”** Here we see that there is the splendor of the earthly bodies and there is also the splendor of the heavenly bodies. What is the splendor of the earthly human bodies? Human beings cannot run like a cheetah or fly like an eagle. But the splendor of human beings is found in their two hands and human intelligence with which they have developed the civilization amazingly, beginning from making bricks all the way to sending spaceships to different planets. The splendor of Hayley Wickenheiser is her talent for hockey playing and her Olympic gold medal, whereas the splendor of Yo-Yo Ma is his talent for beautiful cello playing. But the splendor of the earthly bodies lasts too soon. As it is written in the scripture, **“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall”** (1 Pe 1:24). Those who live only for the earthly splendor do not know the heavenly splendor. On the other hand, Christians are those who long for and struggle to live for the splendor of the heavenly body which is incomparable.

Let’s take a look at verses 42-44. **“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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.”** We who believe in Christ will shed this physical body of sin and death and receive an imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual body. These days, we realize that our earthly body is so weak and vulnerable even to tiny viruses. And we long for this resurrection body that God gives us.

Our natural body is perishable. Solomon sang in Ecclesiastes 3:20, **“All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.”** But our resurrected body will know no sin, no sickness, no decay, or no death. It will be imperishable.

Our natural body also dishonors God because of our sin and weakness. So we cry out before God, **“What a wretched man (woman) I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death.”** But from the day when God gives us the resurrection body, our dishonorable body will be transformed into heavenly, glorious body and we will live for God’s glory without fail.

Our natural body is also weak. Some people boast of their strength compared with others. They have physical endurance, good health, or strong mental capacity. But overtime, we all grow old and become weak. Our eyes become foggy, and our teeth rot out. Our hands become shaky, and our hair turns white, and our immune system fails. Our body finally gives way to weakness and dies. This kind of weak and frail body will be changed into heavenly, powerful bodies. We will have the resurrection bodies that God will give us.

How then can we receive this resurrection bodies? Verse 45 says, **“‘The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.”** We inherited our natural body from Adam. As Adam died we will also die. We cannot generate our own resurrection body. God gives us our resurrection body through the last Adam Jesus. Jesus is the last Adam. There is and there will be no more the last Adam. Through the death and resurrection of the last Adam, we will receive and inherit the resurrection body. In this resurrection body we will also bear the image of Christ which was most amazing.

Look at verse 49, **“And just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.** In our earthly bodies we disobey God as did Adam. We blame others as Adam blamed God and his wife. We suffer in shame and try to cover our weaknesses and sins as did Adam. But in our resurrection bodies, we shall bear the image of Jesus, the heavenly man. Unlike the disobedient Adam, we shall love God with all our heart and strength and obey him like the obedient Jesus. Unlike Adam, we shall love and care for others like Jesus. Unlike Adam, we shall have holiness and truthfulness like Jesus. Unlike Adam, we shall never die but have eternal fellowship with our living God. I praise God who will give us the glorious resurrection body.

When will then this glorious transformation happen? Look at verses 51-52. **“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 raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”** Our sinful flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. So to fit for the kingdom of God, our bodies should be changed into the resurrection bodies. Astronauts should wear a spacesuit as they float outside the safety of their shuttle or space station. Otherwise, they cannot survive those drastically different environments. Likewise, God has designed an imperishable, powerful, glorious, spiritual body that is tailor made for his heavenly kingdom. And the transformation will happen in the twinkling of an eye. It is known that the average person blinks every 4 seconds that is over 20,000 times a day. And each blink last about a tenth of a second. We will be changed in a tenth of a second. “Pop!” and we are changed. At the last trumpet sound, we shall have imperishable body. On that day, death will be completely defeated and we will mock death, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Verse 58 is a concluding remark. **“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”** We have such amazing glory in the resurrection which God will clothe us. Hence, we ought to stand firm. Within this certainty, we are to be always engaging in the work of the Lord. Because we know that the resurrection is a future reality, we have to work for the unbelieving to come to Christ and to have such glorious resurrection. With our perishable body, we labor and suffer for the work of the Lord unwaveringly. There are many people who need to hear this heavenly gospel news. Also many believers need the words of encouragement by hearing the gospel newly and freshly. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain. May we renew our heart and spirit through Jesus’ death and resurrection and work hard for the Lord. Amen.