

## ***Will We Have a Body in Heaven?***

John 21:1-14; 1 Cor. 15:1-23

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**ALL: I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.**

That is quite a bold statement that we are making. If we had said the whole Creed we would have already said that *Christ* was raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the central point of the Christian faith. In this last part, however, we are talking about the *church* – the holy catholic church – that is Christ’s Body of believers in all places and in all time. The church catholic includes the believers who have gone before us and it includes those who will come after us. It also includes all who are living on this earth now who believe.

Because of God’s amazing grace shown to us through Christ, we now can say we believe in the forgiveness of sins. That’s the love and mercy of God, given at a high cost for God’s own Son.

And most of us have a faith in the life everlasting, believing that there is a life with God in a place we can only imagine, which was the sermon two weeks ago. (If you didn’t hear the sermon on heaven, I invite you to pick up a copy in the entryway or go to our website and read it.)

But when we say I believe in the resurrection of the body ... do you realize what a bold statement you are making? We are talking about *our* bodies ... that our bodies will be resurrected!

So ... does this mean we will have a body in heaven? Will we look like we look right now? Frankly, I’m hoping my new body will be slimmer ... that I can start over.

Some have said when we die we become angels. So ... do we suddenly have wings and fly? Do we have a constant halo over our head? We talked about angels last week and the Scriptures indicate that we will not be angels. (You can read that sermon on our website as well.)

Probably the most disturbing thing for me when I first began reading about all this in my early 20’s, was this passage in 1 Corinthians 15: 23 where Paul says, *“But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.”*

Does that mean we just sleep in the grave until Christ returns? Is what we have been saying about those loved ones who die being immediately with the Lord, not true?

Jesus said to the criminal on the cross next to him, *“On this day ... **this day** ... you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Here are some statements of faith from the Presbyterian Book of Confessions that believers before us have boldly stated:

From the Heidelberg Catechism, completed in 1562 at the time of the Reformation:

*Q.57 What comfort does the “resurrection of the body” give you?*

*A. That after this life my soul shall be immediately taken up to Christ, it’s Head, and that this flesh of mine, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and be conformed to the glorious body of Christ.  
(4.057)*

Then, from the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in England in 1649, which the Larger and Shorter Catechism came from that have been instrumental in Confirmation classes and other forms of Christian Education. It affirms this:

1. The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.<sup>i</sup> (That statement is based on the Scripture I quoted with Jesus and the criminal on the cross in Luke 23:43. And it’s also based on 2 Corinthians 5 where Paul says we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.)

It goes on to say “The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory,<sup>ii</sup> waiting for the full redemption of their bodies ...

At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed and all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.<sup>iii</sup>”

Paul says further in Chapter 15: 42 *“It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. 43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.”*

And finally, out of the Book of Confessions, in the Larger Catechism:

*Q. 87. What are we to believe concerning the resurrection?*

A. We are to believe that, at the last day, there shall be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust;<sup>iv</sup> when they that are then found alive shall in a moment be changed; and the selfsame bodies of the dead which are laid in the grave, being then again united to their souls forever, shall be raised up by the power of Christ.<sup>v</sup> The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of his resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, and incorruptible, and made like to his glorious body ...”

I find it very affirming to my own faith to read what believers before us confessed to be true. And all this is based on Scripture. I looked up each reference, and shared much of it with you.

The hymn “How Firm a Foundation” that we sang as our opening hymn is a good, solid reformation hymn that affirms our trust in God’s Word.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in God’s excellent Word!  
What more can be said than to you God hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?<sup>vi</sup>*

It is certainly evident that Reformed Christians throughout our history believed in both a life with God immediately after death and a bodily resurrection at Jesus second coming. They believed that the soul is immediately taken to Christ and dwells in the glory of God until the day of that great resurrection of the body when the soul is reunited with the body. They believed that those who are still living will immediately be changed from our earthly, physical body to the spiritual body that will be like the body we have ... only different. Not earthly but spiritual, made for eternal life.

Paul says *“What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.*

*But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.”*

Paul also says that we are like Adam, the first human, and in these earthly bodies, being like Adam, we will return to dust. But, when Jesus returns, we will be like Him with heavenly bodies.

In our Gospel reading today, the disciples at first did not recognize Jesus, but then they did. Jesus was the same ... yet different. He ate with them. At other times when Jesus appeared after his resurrection, he did just that ... appeared!

Doors were no barrier. In fact, the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost! But Jesus said “a ghost does not have flesh and bones.”

On the evening of his resurrection he joined the two on the road to Emmaus, two grieving, frightened followers. Although Jesus talked to them and reminded them of all that the Scriptures had said about this very event happening, they did not recognize him ... not until he was in their home and he broke the bread with them. Then they suddenly saw who he was, and just as suddenly he disappeared.

If Jesus resurrection story and the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection are to be believed, then if we are someday to be like him, why would we not believe that God has the power to resurrect and to change us?

Paul puts it this way: *“For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can’t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”*

The resurrection of Christ is the pivot of history. It is our assurance that we too will be resurrected.

Will we have a body in heaven? We don’t know what a soul or a spirit looks like. It is one of those great mysteries!

But Christians ... Presbyterians and those of the reformed tradition have believed that our souls will be immediately with Christ when we die. And isn’t that what is most comforting?

Will our bodies be resurrected someday? All we have to go by is a book ... it proclaims that there is a powerful God at work among us. It tells of the Son of God who died for us and was resurrected from the dead. It tells us we too shall be resurrected when Christ returns someday.

All we have to go by is the powerful gift of faith that the Holy Spirit implants in us, showing us the wonderful truths in his Word.

Will we look like angels? It’s not likely. Not if Paul and all the saints before us are right in their confession of faith that we will look much like our selves as Jesus did.

If we believe what Paul so firmly says and if we stand with those saints who confessed this faith before us ... we will continue to proclaim "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

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<sup>i</sup> Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 11 Cor. 5:6-8

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 16:23; Rom. 8:23

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 15: 42-44

<sup>iv</sup> Acts 24:15;

<sup>v</sup> 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; John 5:28,29

<sup>vi</sup> Presbyterian Hymnal, p. 361

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