

# Raised in Glory

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Preacher: Donald Smith

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, there are three characteristics that define every single Christian on this planet.
- No matter where they are in the world, no matter what period of history they lived in, no matter whether they live in comfort or in austerity, whether they are poor or rich, no matter if they are young or old, healthy or played by illness, whether they've been a Christian five minutes or 50 years.
- Because every Christian, whatever their circumstance, is a person of faith, hope, and love. Faith, hope, and love.
- That is how to spot a Christian. Not socks and sandals. Well, that's usually quite a good indicator, but faith, hope, and love. And it is to each of those characteristics that much of the New Testament devotes its teaching.
- How are believers to grow in their faith, to grow in their love, and grow in their hope? It's exactly what Paul has focused on through much of this first letter to the Corinthians.
- [ 1 : 2 0 ] He's had to challenge them to live lives of faith in a world that did not know God, because faithful living meant distinct living.
- He had to challenge them for their lack of love to one another, and encourage them to grow in love towards each other and to the world by speaking the truth in love and considering the needs of others more important than their own.
- And here, at the end of the letter, he reminds them of the hope they have as Christians.
- And it, brothers and sisters, is a hope dearly worth holding on to. We're going to spend this morning and evening looking at the second half of this chapter.
- And in each section, I hope we will see why we can and should be, as believers in Jesus, filled with hope, filled to the very brim with hope in an often hopeless world.
- [ 2 : 2 9 ] And part of the reason that hope is so worth holding on to is because it is a certain hope. When the Bible speaks of hope, it does not mean to kind of hope for the best, as we often use the words, we might hope for a good weather tomorrow, please, hopefully, finally.
- We might hope for a certain result in the football this evening. We hope for those things, don't we? Not knowing what is going to happen. That is not how the Bible speaks about hope.
- When the Bible speaks of hope, it means waiting for what we know is coming. Not wishing for what we want to happen.
- Let me just say that again. When the Bible speaks of hope, it means waiting for what we know is coming. Not wishing for what we want to happen.
- The Christian hope is sure and certain. And our hope is sure and certain because of what Paul has explained already in the first half of this chapter.
- [ 3 : 4 5 ] We have a certain hope because our faith is in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins according to the Scriptures, who was buried and raised again according to the Scriptures.
- And because our faith unites us to Him, we have the hope, the sure and certain hope, that we too will one day rise again.

For Jesus, we saw, did we not, was just the first fruits, just the beginning of this resurrection story. That is the Christian hope.

And without it, I don't know if you remember Paul's remarkably strong words back in verse 19. Without it, without that hope, the Christian faith is pointless.

But Christ was raised from the grave. That was Paul's triumphant declaration in verse 20. And so we will be too.

[ 5 : 0 0 ] That is 1 Corinthians 15 so far. But now in verse 35, Paul expects a retort. That is kind of a counterpoint from a certain contingency of the Corinthian congregation.

If someone's going to ask me, he says, and the expected retort goes something like this. Right, you say there's a resurrection because Jesus was resurrected.

But Jesus was only dead for three days, wasn't he? He still had flesh in his bones. But what about everyone else? Most of us will waste away into the earth.

What hope do we have of a resurrection body? How is that going to happen? And what on earth will that look like? A clattering pile of bones wandering the streets.

Doesn't sound like a particularly hopeful prospect really, does it? That is the two questions Paul is expecting someone is going to raise in verse 35.

[ 6 : 0 6 ] How is that going to happen? And what will they look like? And although he does offer a rebuke to a rather faithless audience at the start of verse 36, Paul primarily responds by giving them an ever clearer picture of the great hope they can hold on to.

And that is what we're going to spend our time this morning unpacking before coming to the crescendo of this chapter in the evening. How will the dead be raised?

And with what kind of body will they come? So let us begin with the first of those questions. How will the dead be raised? And we see Paul responds with what is our first point this morning.

We might be so imperishable, but we will be raised imperishable. Sown perishable, raised imperishable.

And that is our point because Paul responds, doesn't he, by immediately bringing us to the world of the gardener. And it is a very straightforward but very helpful image.

[ 7 : 2 0 ] What has to happen in order for a garden or a field to abound with life? The answer is, isn't it, in order for a field to abound with life, seeds must first be buried.

That was Paul's very simple point in verse 36. And when you bury a seed, it doesn't exactly kind of shoot up out of the ground immediately, does it?

We had a bit of a gardening faux pas earlier this year. We've actually had lots, but there's one worth mentioning here. We bought some bulbs of garlic to plant.

And stuck them in the ground. It seemed fairly straightforward. Until a few days later, I was mulling over the potential return or investment, and something didn't quite seem to add up.

We had planted one bulb of garlic in the hope of getting one bulb of garlic. Sure enough, Mary checked the packets. This is probably plainly obvious to everyone, so I say it to our shame.

[ 8 : 3 2 ] You're supposed to plant each clove individually. There's a gardening top tip for you this morning. Who knew? But it had only been a few days, so we went to dig up the garlic, roughly, where it was, because our son had helpfully moved around all the labels.

And eventually, when we found it, it was too late. It had only been a few days. But within just a few days of being in the ground, the whole bulb had started to basically decompose.

And there was no chance of splitting one clove from another. So we've just left it in the ground. We'll see what happens. Maybe we'll have invented a new way of farming garlic.

I'm not particularly optimistic. Two points from that story. First, get your garlic from Asda. It's much easier. Secondly, seeds look like they die a very quick death when you put them in the soil.

But a very dead-looking seed does not leave us hopeless, does it? Because we know what is going to happen in the future.

[ 9 : 50 ] And so we bury them knowing something better is coming, not bemoaning the weakness of the seeds in front of us, thinking no good can ever come from this.

When we sow seeds in spring, we do not measure our hope of what is to come by the impressiveness of the seed that has been put into the ground.

Because we know, don't we, we know that actually there's no real bearing on the life that is going to come from it. If you were to measure your hope in a mustard tree based on the size of its seeds, your hope would be virtually non-existent, wouldn't it?

If you measure your hope in a rose bush by the beauty of its seeds, you're not going to have very much hope at all. If you were to put your hope in the strength of an oak by stamping on an acorn, you're not going to hope for much.

But a mustard tree is vast compared to a mustard seed. A rose bush is immeasurably more beautiful than a rose seed.

[ 11 : 03 ] An oak tree is far stronger than an acorn. And we know that, don't we? We do not doubt it for a second.

Whenever those things are planted, we know that what will come will be far greater, far more glorious, far stronger and healthier than what is sown.

Paul very simply teaches us to think of our bodies in the same way. Think of them as seeds.

Because to Paul, it is obvious. God brings life from what we bury. That is true for seeds and it is true for people.

And so he says to the doubting Corinthians, when you see a graveyard, instead of seeing something lifeless, rather see a garden in early spring, above the ground there is nothing home to write home about, but beneath our seeds may be decaying, but nonetheless waiting to be called into life by the sovereign Lord who gives life to all things.

[ 12 : 24 ] Now, to be clear, that does not mean we should not lament those we lose. Death is an awful and tragic thing.

It is a cruel intruder in God's good creation. And it is right that we weep, just as Jesus did, at the loss of friends and family.

But we weep for what happened in the past. We weep for what we have lost in the present. But we do not weep. We do not weep for the future.

Rather, for those in Christ, we hope, expectantly waiting for the day when God will put flesh on the bones and breathe new life into those bodies, just as he did in that vision that Gregor read for us in Ezekiel 37, where the Word of God brings together lifeless bones and clothes them in flesh.

And the Spirit of God puts life in their beings. He is the Creator God. Nothing can stop him from bringing life where he wishes to do so.

[ 13 : 48 ] And he has promised he will do just that for each and every person who puts their trust and hope in him. God can and will bring bones back to life, even if that body is scattered across the ocean.

God will bring life from where we see only death. So, Paul says, instead of a grave, see a garden where death is temporary and where God brings about greater life.

And as he brings about greater life, God brings each piece of his creation to life according to its kind.

What we see in verse 39 to 41 there, it's all the language of Genesis 1. Everything being created according to its kind, each with its own distinctive character, each with their own splendor.

So, God will bring life to the kind of seed that is buried. And that is Paul's point here. Right? Not only will he bring life from what appears to be dead, but that life that he does bring back will be according to the kind of seed that is buried.

[ 15 : 10 ] That means what will be raised is you. It is your DNA that will be part of the new creation because God will raise you according to who you are.

We mentioned this last week, but I think it's so worth seeing again because we can so quick to forget it. The hope of future and everlasting life that awaits us as Christians is a hope for you and for me that we, we will be raised, body and soul, according to our kind.

We are not, brothers and sisters, we are not waiting to be reincarnated as a kind of purely spiritual being that has no resemblance to our current selves. Yes, we will change.

We will need to be changed. We will see that this evening. But we are waiting to be resurrected. Us, to eternal life. Is that not a glorious thought?

Not only for us, but for those we have lost. For those whose graves we do visit, we will see them again, raised from the dead according to their kind, according to their splendor.

[ 16 : 38 ] It will be them. And they will be glorious. Look at the contrasts Paul highlights between what is sown and what is raised in verse 42 to 44.

So it will be, he writes, with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown perishable will be 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. The seed grows into something that looks far more glorious.

It is full of far more splendor than the original. The DNA is the same. It comes from its seeds. It is the same person, but as opposed to having a body that fails in weakness, that is painfully perishable, that comes from nothing but dust and to dust will return.

[ 17 : 51 ] Rather, your life in Christ will be raised imperishable. It will never spoil or fade. It will be glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

Think of what it would mean to live in light of that glorious truth every single day. Both for how we use our lives now, knowing that we are but sowing a tiny little seed for something far better to come, but also holding so lightly onto the things of this world.

It is no wonder, is it, given this is how he saw his future, that Paul was so willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel, because he understood that compared to what was coming, compared to the splendor of what awaited him, his worldly suffering was the most fleeting of trials, knowing he too will one day be raised imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

And it is on that last point, so natural, and raised spiritual, that Paul just wants us to linger on for a moment longer in the last few verses of this section, where we see briefly, just our second and final point this morning, that we are born in Adam and raised in Christ.

If you look there in verse 44, he finishes his point on the glory of the resurrection body, and then immediately, doesn't he, picks up on his last point about the natural and the spiritual.

[ 19 : 49 ] We've seen how we will be raised, raised by the creator God who breathes life even into buried bodies, raising imperishable what is so perishable.

Now we turn just for a moment to think with what kind of body they will come. We've seen already a little of that picture in verses 42 to 44, but here is what Paul wants us to know with certainty in these last verses.

Not only will God raise us as he raised Christ, not only will we be raised with Christ, but when we are raised, we will be raised, we will be raised to be like Christ.

Because the natural, Paul says, will put on the spiritual. And like what we said so far, I think it's probably worth clarifying what Paul means by spiritual here.

What he means by spiritual, I think, is of heaven. And we know that just from a careful reading of the text. He's not talking about something non-physical. He calls Jesus a life-giving spirit.

[ 21 : 07 ] But we know, don't we, that Jesus' resurrection body was a physical one. He invited the disciples to touch him. And so he was a life-giving spirit with a body.

But we understand what the spiritual means, I think, when we get to verse 47. The first man was of the dust of the earth. That is natural.

The second man is of heaven. That is spiritual. Of the dust of the earth and of heaven. That is the key distinction here.

Of earth and of heaven. We bear earthly bodies. One day we will bear heavenly bodies too. And those bodies then, with the natural having put on the spiritual, will be in a measure like Jesus Christ himself.

Just look there at verse 49 with me. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

[ 22 : 20 ] We are born from Adam in our natural bodies and they are goods and they always have been goods, but since the fall they are not enough. And so we must be clothed in something more and that something more is the spiritual body made ours.

We are and always will bear Adam's image in that we are made of the dust of the earth, but to bear Christ's image is something altogether more glorious. Because to bear Christ's image is to be made perfect, perfect in righteousness and holiness.

One of the great battles of the Christian life is that we constantly find ourselves doing what we know to be wrong. Doing what we do not want to do, but one day, one day no more, for we will be righteous just as Jesus Christ is righteous.

We will never set a foot wrong, we will never raise our voice in anger, we will never give in to temptation, we will always do what is right and kind and loving and good and we will know the joy that comes with such living.

we will be perfectly holy, devoted to God as we were created to be, we will reign with Christ for all eternity and it will happen as surely, as certainly, as you have a natural body now.

[ 23 : 58 ] So surely, Paul says, so certainly will you have a spiritual, heavenly, Christ-like body too. Paul has no doubt about it because he has seen it with his own eyes.

The body of Christ, which was weak and dishonored as it hung on the cross, raised in glory, splendor, and power. That was not a Jesus-only resurrection.

It was a forerunning, the first fruits of our resurrection, the perishable, put on immortality, the natural, adorned with the spiritual.

What was raised was undoubtedly Christ. Those who saw him knew him, but he was not the same. So too with us.

We saw last week Paul's certainty in Christ's resurrection. We see now that we will follow in those footsteps. What a wonderful promise.

[ 25 : 04 ] What a great hope that is for us to hold on to in the midst of life's trials. We will not only be raised with Christ, we will be raised to bear his image.

So to the two questions Paul found himself having to answer, how will we be raised?

We will be raised by the Creator God who breathes life even into buried bodies, raising imperishable what is sown perishable. With what kind of body?

With a body in the image of Christ himself, natural and spiritual, of earth and of heaven. As we are now, yet made perfect, adorned with righteousness and holiness, made to reign as he does.

That is our hope as Christians. And it is a great one, is it not? that what we saw last week was true of Christ will be true of us too.

[ 26 : 20 ] That he who was raised was but the firstfruits of many. His resurrection was just the beginning. And one day soon we too will take part in it.

Let us come before God in prayer together before we sing our final hymn. Father, we thank you and praise you that you bring life from where we see only death.

That just as you raise the seeds of the ground, so you will raise our bodies to life everlasting. We praise you for your grace and mercy.

We thank you for our brother Jesus Christ who rose from the dead and so long as we are found in him can be assured that we will do so too.

Lord, help us to hold fast to that hope throughout the short days of this life. knowing that what is to come is of interpassable glory and power and beauty.

[ 27 : 45 ] We pray that you would help us to live in light of this. Knowing that the things of this world are fleeting and temporary and so give ourselves wholly to the work of Christ in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen.