

CONQUERING DEATH



FOCUS VERSE

Philippians 3:21

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

LESSON TEXT

I Corinthians 15:42-44; 48-55

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

.....

48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?



FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus' resurrection proved His victory over sin and death and gives hope to the believer to conquer sin and death through Him.



CULTURE CONNECTION

I'll Have a New Body; I'll Have a New Life!

A popular southern-gospel quartet song from the 1970s era was titled "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)." Some websites have attributed authorship to Hank Williams; others attribute the work to Traditional, which *www.allmusic.com* defines as songs that "have no established author, usually because they date from the pre-publishing era, when composers were unlikely to realize any profits from songs they'd written."

Regardless of who authored the song, that Hank Williams would record the song is interesting (released in 1998 posthumously). Although many artists performed both country-western and gospel songs, Williams lived a particularly tormented life in spite of his

fame. He suffered severe back pain, which may have contributed to alcoholism and addiction to prescription drugs, ultimately dying at the young age of twenty-nine on January 1, 1953. It is interesting, but not surprising, that he would become attracted to a song celebrating a future day when the suffering human frame would be set aside in exchange for a brand new body absent disease and pain.

While the promise and hope of a new body is inviting, particularly to those who suffer weakness and pain, the greater promise is that of a new life. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to enjoy a new life now and also in eternity.

OUTLINE

- I. JESUS CONQUERED SIN IN HIS DEATH
- II. JESUS CONQUERED DEATH IN HIS RESURRECTION
- III. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION
 - A. Transformation
 - B. Justification and Vindication
- IV. THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Death. For many, the word conjures up frightening, foreboding images. This may be one reason there is an increasing tendency to rely on the ability of technological advancements in medicine to prolong human life, including "artificial life-support systems: respirators, feeding tubes, artificial nutrition, hydration and even artificial organs" (John A. Pridonoff, "Fear of Suffering Outweighs Death," *Insight on the News*, Vol. 10, No. 35).

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14–15).

Jesus' victory over death, Satan's ultimate weapon, provides release to those who suffer under bondage through fear of death. Since Jesus is the "firstfruits" from the dead (I Corinthians 15:20) and the "captain" who will lead "many sons unto glory" (Hebrews 2:10), He has removed death's sting. (See I Corinthians 15:54–57.)

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the Christian faith. Paul identified this as part of the gospel:

"Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:1, 3–4).

When asked for a sign by scribes and Pharisees who did not believe on Him, Jesus answered, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39–40; see also Matthew 16:1–4).

Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples. They were terrified, thinking they had seen a spirit. Jesus said, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). When Thomas, who had not yet seen Jesus, heard of His resurrection, he said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). Eight days later, Thomas was with the rest of the disciples when Jesus appeared to them again. Jesus said to Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). Upon being confronted with the evidence of Jesus’ bodily resurrection, Thomas said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8–11 to demonstrate that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the fulfillment of prophecy:

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. . . . Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing

that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:24–27, 29–32).

As Peter pointed out, the Messiah, not David, was the subject of the prophecy in Psalm 16. The Old Testament prophecies concerning the resurrection of Christ, as well as those in the Gospels, the priority Peter gave to Jesus’ resurrection in the first Pentecostal message, and the continuing emphasis on this subject throughout the New Testament demonstrate the critical importance of this event. Without the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, there would be no good news, that is, the gospel, and no hope for us. But because of His resurrection, our hope is firm. Death is not the end for us.

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (I Corinthians 15:17–20).

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. JESUS CONQUERED SIN IN HIS DEATH

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

For Jesus to conquer sin, it was necessary for Him to fully participate in the human experience. Although He did not sin, He was fully human. As Paul proclaimed, Jesus was “God . . . manifest in the flesh” (I Timothy 3:16). This does not mean He was merely God manifest in skin; it means He was God manifest in human existence.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

Since human beings are flesh and blood, the Messiah “took part of the same.” His was not some new, unique, or different flesh and blood. The Incarnation provided the basis for the atonement and the destruction of Satan. (See Colossians 2:15; I John 3:8.)

In response to the notion Jesus’ humanity was somehow incomplete, Gregory of Nazianzus (330–389) wrote, “The unassumed is the unhealed.” The idea here is that if there were any aspect of human existence Jesus did not assume in the Incarnation, that aspect would not have been covered by His atoning work. Gregory’s brief statement accurately sums up the teaching of Scripture on this matter.

Jesus, like any human being, had a human body, soul, spirit, mind, heart, and everything else required to be a real human being. Only by becoming fully human could He redeem us. Jesus received His human nature from Mary; otherwise He could not truly be called the “seed of David.” Mary was no mere surrogate mother, no incubator into whose womb God placed a new human nature that never existed anywhere before. Jesus stands in solidarity with the human race because He was “made of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). The word translated “of” (Greek, *ek*) means Jesus received His humanity from Mary.

The only way Jesus differed from us is that He did not possess the sin nature. By the miracle of the virgin birth and by the fact that He was begotten by the Holy Spirit, He was spared the sin nature. But this did not make Him any less human than we are, for the sin nature is not inherent to human nature. Both Adam and Eve were complete human beings before they sinned, and thus before they possessed the sin nature. Jesus is the last Adam (I Corinthians 15:45). Like the first Adam, He had no sin. But unlike the first Adam, Jesus never did sin, and thus He avoided being contaminated by the sin nature. (See Hebrews 2:17; 4:15; II Corinthians 5:21.)

Some may question how Jesus could have possessed a genuine human nature if He had no human father. But Adam had no human father, and he was a genuine human being. For that matter, neither did Eve have a human father. Jesus had a human mother and therefore must be a genuine and complete human being. The Holy Spirit contributed His deity. How this could be is a mystery because it is a miracle. The human mind cannot explain any miracle, much less the greatest miracle ever to occur. We accept by faith what Scripture says about Jesus: He is God, and He is man. When we have exhausted everything we can say about Him, we leave the rest with God. It is the privilege of the sovereign Lord to do what He wishes to do without consulting with or explaining it to human beings.

By means of the Incarnation, Jesus identified so completely with human beings that He and they “are all of one” (Hebrews 2:11). Thus there can be no difference between Jesus’ humanity and that of the human race at large, except His exemption from the sin nature. Because He stands in absolute solidarity with the human race, “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). The marvel of the redemptive plan is that in order to bring “many sons unto glory” (Hebrews 2:10), God was willing to stoop to become one of us. (See Philippians 2:5–8.) Since we could not come to Him, He came to us.

According to Hebrews 2:17, the Messiah’s identification with human beings is complete: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” He was made like us “in all things.” The Incarnation was necessary so Jesus could function as “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Hebrews 2:17). The “high priest” concept requires complete identification of the priest with those he represents. A priest could represent only those with whom he stood in solidarity. (See Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:15; 5:7–10.) Like the high priest under the levitical system, the Messiah was like His brethren as to His humanity; but unlike the levitical high priest, the Messiah brought God and man together.

In the Incarnation, the deity of Jesus did not override, obscure, or overwhelm His humanity. It did not prevent Him from sympathizing with our weaknesses or from being tempted as we are: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

II. JESUS CONQUERED DEATH IN HIS RESURRECTION

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. . . . As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (I Corinthians 15:42–44, 48–55).

I Corinthians 15 discusses the resurrection from the dead and the fact that it will be a bodily resurrection. In the resurrection, the corruptible human body will be made incorruptible. The natural body a believer now possesses will, in the resurrection, be made a spiritual body. This does not mean it will be a spirit body; it will be a spiritual body. That is, it will be a real body that includes flesh and

bones (Luke 24:39), but it will be uniquely adapted to life in the realm of the spirit, just as our present body is adapted to life in the physical realm. Prior to the resurrection, human beings have “earthy” bodies; after the resurrection, they will have “heavenly” bodies. The earthy bodies are natural, weak, corruptible bodies; the heavenly bodies are spiritual, powerful, incorruptible bodies.

We do not yet bear the image of the heavenly. We shall bear it, but we do not now. Paul’s point is that prior to the resurrection, “we have borne the image of the earthy,” but in the resurrection, “we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (I Corinthians 15:49).

The full force of the questions “O death, where is thy sting?” and “O grave, where is thy victory?” (I Corinthians 15:55) becomes clearer when considered in their original context, Hosea 13:14: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”

In this prophesied ransom, the power of the grave would be destroyed. Jesus’ resurrection means the grave was not the victor. The redemption Christ provided was a plague to death because death was not final. God would not repent, that is, change His mind, about His promise to deal a final blow to death and the grave. In His resurrection, Jesus fulfilled this promise and conquered death.

III. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is not optional. Some in the first-century Corinthian church denied this doctrine, and Paul had sharp words for them.

“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise

not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (I Corinthians 15:12–19).

According to Jesus, resurrection will be universal.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28–29).

For those who have “done good,” that is, they have believed on Jesus and obeyed the gospel (II Thessalonians 1:7–9), the resurrection will result in transformation, justification/vindication, and sanctification.

A. Transformation

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:20–21).

At the resurrection, our bodies will be changed. Because of this transformation, they will no longer be corruptible. (See I Corinthians 15:53–54.) The word *vile* in Philippians 3:21 refers to the “lowliness” of our present bodies in comparison to what they shall be.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2).

B. Justification and Vindication

As used here, the words *justification* and *vindication* are virtual synonyms. The idea is

that at the moment of Christ’s resurrection, all of His claims, actions, and words were proven to be true. This was demonstrated in a personal way for His disciples and in a representative way for all people as Jesus appeared to His disciples following His resurrection. He had foretold His death, burial, and resurrection, an idea that seemed opaque and even unbelievable to His disciples.

“Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:18–22).

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:21–22).

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?” (John 12:32–34).

“And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:21–22).

“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to

enter into his glory? . . . And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:25–26, 44–46).

The immediate response of Jesus' disciples, even after His resurrection, was to be so overcome with joy that they "believed not" (Luke 24:41). But the resurrection of Jesus Christ so convincingly vindicated the claims He had previously made that "they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Luke 24:52–53).

IV. THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Peter 1:3).

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead creates within us the certainty of our own resurrection. Biblically, hope is not mere

wishful thinking. It is assurance that arises from the promises of God. Life is inherent in this hope, in contrast to the spiritual death inherent in the vain hope of those who have no faith in Christ.

The resurrection of many saints from their graves following the resurrection of Jesus was a portent of the resurrection of all saints at His second coming. (Compare Matthew 27:50–53 with I Thessalonians 4:13–18.) The comfort that comes from the anticipation of the resurrection springs from this blessed hope.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

We are overwhelmed by the daily barrage of bad news that repeatedly confirms the fall-
enness of humanity. There is little in the news that encourages us to hope for better things. But there is one historical event—the resurrection of Jesus Christ—that assures us of a bright future regardless of the darkness of our present day. Although our faith tells us this is true, we will not fully enjoy the anticipation of Christ's second coming unless we look for that blessed hope. It is relatively easy for believers to get caught up in the same mindset as those around them who do not believe. But we are not of this world. (See John 18:36.)

Meditation on Jesus' resurrection and the assurance it gives us of our resurrection as well as the resurrection of our believing loved ones will lift us above the bleak prognosis of a fallen world. Since we already enjoy fellowship with the Prince of Peace, our hearts can leap for joy as we anticipate our even closer communion with Him that will follow our "gathering together unto him" (II Thessalonians 2:1). ■

REFLECTIONS

- What are your thoughts about the tendency to seek to prolong life at any cost?
- How does Christ's victory over death help us reevaluate death?
- Discuss the importance of Jesus' humanity as it relates to His ability to conquer sin.
- Compare and contrast Hosea 13:14 with I Corinthians 15:55.
- What specific steps can you take to enable you to better respond to the barrage of bad news that is broadcast daily?