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“Christ, Resurrection, and Joy”

1 Cor. 15:42-43; Psalm 16:11 WSC 38

A couple of weeks ago, in an evening sermon, we looked at the benefits that accrue to the believer from Christ at death. Because of what Christ has done on our behalf, through His death and resurrection, when we as believers in Christ die our souls are made perfect in holiness. Our inner being, the immaterial and invisible part of who we are, is fully freed from the defilement of sin.

At death our souls immediately pass into glory. At the moment our heart stops beating, and we draw our last breath, we immediately, in our souls, enter into the presence of God, and into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. In conscious, living souls we experience the light and glory of the presence of Christ our Lord and our Head. Death then for the believer, because Christ died in our place and was raised, has been transformed into a gateway for further blessing from God.

We have thus been delivered from the fear of death. But the blessings we receive *at death* is only half the story. Departing the body to be with the Lord, as wonderful as this is, is not the highest and fullest blessing from God. We are considering the teaching that is given to us from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This document written in question and answer form is part of a body of writings that we as a denomination have adopted as our confession of faith. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism, were written in the 17th century by a group of church leaders, our fathers in the faith gathered at Westminster Abbey in London, to provide the church with a faithful summary of what the Bible teaches.

The questions and answers then from the Shorter Catechism are man made but they are based upon the Divinely Inspired Holy Scriptures. They have authority then in our church in so far as they agree with the church's highest and final authority, the Word of God. The supreme judge in all matters of faith and life is none other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures.

We are considering the teaching of the Shorter Catechism on the blessings that will come to the church at the resurrection on the last day. But we will look at where in the Bible the Catechism derives its answers. WSC 38: Q. “What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? A. At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity”

The last question left us with a kind of cliffhanger, and this is purposeful. Like a good book in which each chapter usually ends with something that invites you to turn to the next chapter, question 37 leaves an invitation to turn to the next question for further instruction.

At the end of the answer to question 37 we are reminded of the blessing we receive from Christ as it pertains to the bodies of believers; “...and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection”

Christ still cares for and watches over the bodies of believers after they die. We are to think of their bodies as resting in their graves, as if in a bed, until when? Until the resurrection. So then we are left wondering what will happen with those bodies *at the resurrection?*

These two questions assume at the beginning the Scriptural teaching that this entire world order, this age, is headed for an end point, and that end point is what the catechism calls “*the resurrection*”.

In Q. 37 we see that our bodies after death rest in their graves until “*the resurrection*”. The answer to question 38 refers to this day as “*the day of judgment*”. It is also referred to in Scripture as “*the Day of the Lord*” (Is. 13:6; 1 Thess. 5:2).

Every day that we wake up, we are that much closer to this Day. That this day is coming is proven by the resurrection of Christ. The apostle Paul shows us this in his address at the Areopagus in Athens recorded in Acts 17. Paul said there that God commands all people everywhere to repent because “*he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man (Christ) whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him (Christ) from the dead*”.

The history of the world therefore is determined by and centers upon the history of Jesus Christ. He has come to this world, He took on flesh, suffered and died, was buried, rose from the grave and He is coming again.

When He comes again, this age will come to a catastrophic end. Many things will happen on this day and one event that will take place is that *all* the dead will rise from the grave. The bodies of unbelievers and believers will rise from the grave and be united once again with their souls. And they will all be presented before the judgment seat of Christ.

John 5:28 “*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment*”

On that day, the wicked, whom Jesus describes as those who have done evil, will be raised unto judgment, for them it is a resurrection of judgment. But what happens to believers on that day? WSC 38 A: “*At the resurrection...*” that is, the day when Christ returns is the time frame. Christ’s second appearance on earth brings about a general resurrection of all the dead in all the world. This day is described in the Bible as coming swiftly, and at an unknown time. That day will come like a thief in the night. Like lightning that flashes from the east to the west, so immediate and filled with power the Day of the Lord’s coming will be.

It is on that day that *all the dead* will rise. The catechism refers to that day as “*the resurrection*”. At this general resurrection is the context. And then the catechism refers to one group of people out of the entire mass of resurrected people. And that group is “*believers*”. *Believers* will be raised up *in glory*.

This phrase refers to the manner in which “*believers*”, and believers only, will be raised and that is they will be raised in glory. This brings us to our first passage of Scripture. In 1 Cor. 15:42-43 Paul is talking about the kind of bodies believers will be given, when? “*At the resurrection*”. He does this by comparing and contrasting two kinds of bodies and these are the *kind* of body that is buried in the ground at death, and the *kind* of body that is reunited with the perfected soul of the believer at the resurrection.

That Paul is engaged in this type of comparison is very clear at the beginning of this teaching. Paul was talking about the resurrection of Christ and about the general resurrection of the dead and how they are related to one another. He was talking about the certain validity of both.

In the middle of this argument Paul presents a possible question that might be raised in verse 35 “*But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised?’ (i.e. in what manner are they raised) with what kind of body*

do they come?” Paul then goes on to answer this possible question. One thing that needs to be understood for us is that this is a kind of question that is asked in unbelief.

Someone might think, in other words, that after a dead body has seen corruption in the grave, after it has gone through the process of decomposition, having been separated from the living soul at death, how is it possible that that same corrupted body in the grave will come alive again?

To put it more simply, a person who asks this particular question does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Perhaps because his own human reason will not allow him to rationalize how it’s possible that a lifeless corpse 6 feet under the earth or placed in a tomb, or reduced to ashes, can be reanimated.

Now guess what Paul’s answer is to this question. Notice how he does not say something like this, “well friend, that is a valid question, let me try to show you and hopefully you will believe”. A question like this would be asked to try and trip Paul up. It would be asked in an effort to show how absurd it is to think that the dead will be raised.

And so Paul then appropriately, as his answer to this hypothetical question, says, “*you foolish person!*” He then goes on to show them their foolishness by appealing to natural revelation, the knowledge and glory of God revealed in creation. Remember Paul is talking *to the church*. He wants the church to understand this doctrine; 1 Cor. 15:12 “...*how can some of you (the Corinthian church) say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*”

This is important for us today, to help us understand what we as a church are striving toward. We are striving toward the blessings we receive from Christ *at the resurrection*. Forgetting what lies behind we press forward to this (Phil. 3). If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (1 Cor. 15:32).

And so he begins to answer the question about what *kind of body* resurrected Christians will possess by considering what we see already in creation. He refers to the way God made all things and describes them as if they had “bodies” or “flesh”, v. 39 “*not all flesh is the same, there is one kind for humans, another for animals...and there are heavenly bodies*” and then he says there are differences among the heavenly bodies as well.

One glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and then that in between stars. Paul’s focus though is on the *differences* between the kinds of bodies. Think about the “*flesh*” or “*glory*” of the sun and the significant difference between its “*flesh*” or “*body*” and the “*flesh*” or “*body*” of a human being. In fact the power that emanates from the flesh of the sun can burn the flesh of our natural bodies.

And yet our bodies need the light that issues forth from the sun’s “body”. Paul’s point here isn’t that we need the sun’s light or that it can burn our flesh but that the two “*kinds*” of bodies are very different. There are even differences in glory between the celestial bodies, v.41 “*stars differ from star in glory*”.

We see these differences plainly in creation. Well, Paul says, so it is with the resurrection of the dead. The kind of the body laid in the ground is different than the kind of body that it will become. He then goes back to the harvesting metaphor to prove his point. V.37 “*What you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel perhaps of wheat or of some other grain*”. In other words, that which is harvested has a kind of “body” very different than the kind of body the kernel that was buried in the ground had.

The bodies of believers that are buried in the ground at death then Paul says are like that seed of grain. In the same way you can contrast the kernel and the harvest it becomes (a kernel is small, compact,

undeveloped, while the grain at harvest is fully developed, fully flowered, much larger than the kernel) so too can we describe the differences between the dead body and the resurrected body.

The body that is put in the grave is perishable, it is sown in dishonor, and it is sown in weakness. These are the characteristics of the kind of bodies that have come about as a result of sin. The body at death sees perishability or corruption, decay. This is a dishonorable and humiliating thing. It is evidence of a weakness, a sickness. The body sown in death is this because of sin. Physical death is a consequence and penalty for sinning against God. It is part of the punishment for breaking the law of God. God cursed Adam saying “*you are dust and to dust you shall return*”.

Man was supposed to have dominion over the earth, in being buried and in decay, the earth has dominion over us; a truly dishonorable thing. But at the resurrection believers will be raised in glory with bodies that Paul describes as imperishable. They are raised in glory and power in sharp contrast to the dishonor and weakness of being laid in the grave, “*what is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power*”

The power and glory here refer to the type of bodies that will be fit for Heaven, the dwelling place of God, so that we might always be with the Lord. They are bodies *recreated* to be fully inhabited by the Holy Spirit, for Heaven is the realm of the power and the glory of the Spirit.

Paul describes them as “*spiritual bodies*” in v.44. That is to say they are physical bodies renewed and filled by the Holy Spirit and reunited with perfected souls. They are bodies accommodated for the New Creation and for existing in the presence of God. They cannot die anymore. They are no longer subject to weakness, brokenness, tears, anxiety, darkness, ignorance, anger, or fear. At the resurrection the soul that cannot sin anymore animates the body that cannot die anymore.

This is the body through which believers experience eternal life with Christ and in Christ. Paul says as much when he speaks of Christ becoming “*life (eternal life) giving Spirit*” in v.45. The resurrected body is the same body substantially, but it has now been *transformed*. Like Paul said about the seed, before it is sown, our bodies are not yet, in this age, what they *will be*, in the age to come, v. 37 “*what you sow is not the body that is to be*”.

But as for the principle of resurrection, the idea of this kind of powerful metamorphosis happening when Christ returns, Paul says, that principle and the differences between the two kinds of bodies is already seen in creation.

What is sown in corruption, dishonor, and weakness will be raised in imperishability, glory, and power, and this by the voice of Christ in the Last Day. Much of what that body will be like and what that state will be like *precisely* remains unknown to us, for we walk by faith and not by sight. But we do get a glimpse of it in the resurrection of Christ.

When Christ was raised His disciples touched him and saw Him. He pointed them to His scars to show them that the same body that was laid in the tomb was the same body they touched and saw after the resurrection. But His body had gone through a transformation, so that they didn’t recognize Him at first. Christ was susceptible to death in his 1st kind of body. In His resurrected body He is alive forevermore. He ate a piece of broiled fish and he cooked a shore side breakfast for His disciples in that resurrected body.

This is important for us as believers because just as Christ was raised so too will we be raised. In Romans 8 Paul says that we were “*predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom.8:29). Paul had already used the harvest analogy in 1 Corinthians when he described the resurrected Christ as the

“firstfruits” (ch.15:20), that is to say that Christ is the first flower, the first crown of a glorious resurrection harvest made up of resurrected believers from all over the world and from all generations.

At the resurrection Christ will clothe us with a body like His own, indestructible, glorious, raised in power and fit for eternal joy through communion with Christ in Heaven, or more specifically, the New Heaven and the New Earth.

And so the catechism teaches us that we will be raised in glory. In these glorified bodies we will be “*openly acknowledged and acquitted*” on this day, “*the day of judgment*”.

In this age the church is accused and reviled and persecuted by Satan and by the wicked in the world. At the resurrection, before all of Heaven and Earth, God will *openly* declare from His Heavenly throne what He had already declared us to be in this age, because of our faith in Christ. And that is that we are innocent because of Christ’s atoning death on the cross and that we are truly sons of God in Christ.

And lastly in our glorified, resurrected bodies, raised by the power of Christ, at the resurrection we will be “*made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity*”. We see this in our final passage of Scripture, Psalm 16:9-11. “*My heart is glad, my whole being rejoices, my flesh also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore*”

Two apostles, Peter and Paul, testify in the NT that this Psalm is about the resurrection of Christ. The first testimony is from Peter in Acts 2 where he quotes Psalm 16. He then says that when David wrote this Psalm he “*foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his body see corruption*”. Paul’s testimony is found in Acts 13:35-37.

Like the bodies of saints that die in the Lord, Christ’s body was laid in the tomb, in the grave, but *unlike* our bodies His body did not see corruption. His body experienced no decay or deterioration. Death could not hold Him. Christ’s body remained under the power of death for three days, but could not be held by death.

Instead He conquered death by His death and now in His glorified body His heart is glad, His whole being rejoices. In His Father’s presence, in His resurrected and glorified body, He is experiencing the fullness of joy and pleasures that last forevermore.

Beloved our age is full of pain. We want to feel pleasure in the midst of this pain. But we must remember that the pleasures of this world are fleeting, they are passing away. Christ as raised knows pleasures forevermore, communion with His Father in the realm of the Spirit. And He shares this joy with you and me now, through His Spirit and His Word; “*these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full*” (Jn. 15:11).

By faith in the gospel we have fellowship with Christ and we only partially enjoy Him now in the Spirit. But the catechism states that at the resurrection we will “*fully*” enjoy God to all eternity. This is so because we only enjoy God now indirectly through the mirror of His Word. Now we see the face of Christ dimly then, at the resurrection, we shall see Him face to face.

And of course sin, temptation, the *pleasures* of this world, they distract us from fully enjoying God, but at the resurrection in perfected souls animating glorified bodies, filled with the Spirit, we will experience joy in the fullest, because we will see Jesus Christ face to face in the New Heaven and the New Earth and be in His presence and in the presence of the Father forevermore.

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore”