



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Translation of the Church”

TRANSCRIPT

We are continuing our series of studies concerning the future the doctrine of Eschatology, and our topic is the translation of the church or the transformation of the church. We really could call this topic the same thing that we called the last topic the resurrection of the church but I had already made a little note the translation of the church and frankly it's not too appropriate, but that's what it is. We are talking about the transformation of the living primarily.

You'll remember in our last study last week we looked at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 13 through verse 18, and there we looked primarily at the things that have to do with those who have died in Christ. When we turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 we will notice of course that the thrust of this particular chapter is not upon the things that happen to the dead in Christ at the coming of our Lord, but rather the things that happen to the living. And these two passages compliment one another of course. So then we want to talk about the transformation of the church.

As you know from your reading perhaps outside the Scriptures as well as in the Scriptures there are different views concerning the future and the relationship of the body and the soul. For example, one theory of men, and I think this theory is found in the Bible also, expressed in books such as Ecclesiastes, is that death is the end of the line for

human beings as for other organisms. In other words we are just like an animal or like a plant when we die. We die and that is all there is to it. There is no such thing as an imperishable soul, and if we were to look upon the plants and look upon the animals we have a figure of the things that happen to us.

Then there is the view of great iniquity that a man has a soul which is imperishable by its very nature, and that when death occurs, the soul is released from the body. The body is often regarded by ancients as being a sinful type of body. The Greeks had a proverb: the body is a tomb; I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse. So the body is looked at as a kind of corpse and when a man dies, his soul is released from the body and therefore that is good.

Consequently, when the Apostle Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection of body to the Corinthians and others who were followers or at least exposed to this particular doctrine of the soul and the body and the relationship of them, they didn’t always welcome the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, because they had wrong ideas about the nature of the relationship of the two. This view that the soul is imperishable and that upon death it is released permanently from the body is therefore Greek in origin. Plato, in the *Phaedo*, especially popularized it and gave it eloquent expression, but it nevertheless is still a heathen viewpoint.

A third hypothesis which we often come into contact with today because in the Western world we have a great deal of eastern religions is that a soul may inhabit a succession of bodies. In other words, when you and I die our souls may leave this particular body but then we may become reincarnate in another body, and so this may go on for a considerable number of bodies. I would imagine as I look out over this audience that the souls of some of you would be delighted to pass into another body, [laughter] as I’m sure you would say with reference to me as you notice the affects of age upon my countenance. I can imagine that you would think that my soul would be bursting with anticipation to leave this old corpse that it is associated with at the present time.

This view is associated with the Oriental religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Now of course in both of these religions it should be said in fairness to them that reincarnation is a kind of fate to be avoided if possible, and the best thing that can happen to the soul is to be released from this cycle of rebirth, to cease to exist as a separate entity, and to be absorbed into the over-soul of infinite being like a drop of water disappearing into the sea.

The fourth view, and of course the view of Christians, is that the body is to experience a resurrection and is to be rejoined by the spirit which is released from the body at death to go to be with the Lord, which in turn returns with the Lord, re-enters a body resurrected made like our Lord’s own glorious body, and so live forever in the presence of the Lord. So the idea of the resurrection of the body is a distinctive Christian idea, and that is why in the Apostle’s Creed, one of the earliest creeds of the church, you’ll find the statement, we believe in the resurrection of the body -- not simply resurrection -- the resurrection of the body. That’s the distinctive Christian doctrine. In fact, if we are not able to speak about a resurrection of the body, we shouldn’t speak about a resurrection at all, biblically speaking.

Now there are many things of course that we do not understand about the resurrection and many incidental detail concerning which most of us are ignorant. For example will those who died in infancy be infants still when the resurrection takes place? I think that probably everyone in this audience would surely say no, that would not be a pleasant thing to think about, that an infant should always be an infant, and so you probably believe as I believe that an infant shall by the grace of God reach it’s maturity and have a resurrection body that is like our Lord’s own glorious body. Will parents still bear the marks of age? Well the Bible doesn’t really say anything about this, but most of us would like to believe that our bodies that we have resurrected do not still bear the marks of age. That you cannot really tell who is a parent and who is not a parent so far as the resurrection body is concerned.

Now what the resurrection body looks like not a single one of us really has an adequate conception. We know lots of things that the resurrection body is not. Paul gives us some incidental descriptions of aspects of it in this particular chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 15, but what it really is we just do not know. And it is like heaven I think we do not know a great deal about heaven most of us want to go to heaven and most of us would like to go now; some would not. But most of us would like to go now, but we don’t know what it’s really like. We know it’s not like things down here on the earth, and it is good to maintain a kind of agnosticism about some of the things concerning which the Bible does not speak.

Now you remember the famous statement of Luther which I think I quoted here two or three weeks ago, “If any one of you consider your doctrine and theology to be completely true and right, then you have only to reach your hands up and to feel your ears and discover that they are the furry ears of an ass.” [Laughter] Now that is a great statement that Martin Luther made, and I think one of his greatest statements. And it is a warning to us particularly when we are dealing with things that have to do with Eschatology to not presume that we know everything about the future. That will help us, I think, and it will help some of us particularly.

Now I want to talk about the believer’s resurrection body and the transformation of the church. The denial then of the bodily resurrection is a heathen doctrine. You will remember when the Apostle Paul preached in the city of Athens he affirmed the resurrection of the body, and he said also that God was going to judge men, and he had given us assurance that he was going to judge men by the fact that he had raised our Lord Jesus from the dead.

Paul’s message was greeted with the same kind of reaction that most of his messages obtained. There was some mockery. There was some who said they would reconsider their views and then there were some who believed. It is not true of course that if we present doctrine as clearly as it possibly can be presented that everybody is

going to respond. Now there are some people who think that. They think if we just give the message plainly and clearly everybody will respond. I’m not against giving the message unclearly, but I want always to remember and I want you to remember that no matter how clearly we express the truth of the word of God, we are dealing with men who are affected by sin in their minds, in their wills, in their emotions and consequently, it is only by an operation of the Holy Spirit that they are enabled to receive the purest of truth contained in the word of God.

So Paul received mockery, some reconsideration and some belief. An old teacher of mine from the land of Scotland said, “Twenty centuries have echoed the laughter of the Areopagus, and down through the centuries men have mocked the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.” Paul condemns certain forms of denial of this doctrine such as 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 18 where he speaks about Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have said that the resurrection has occurred already, and by that denial of the resurrection as a future event, they are overthrowing the faith of some.

There are really three states of man according to Paul’s teaching. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 he says, men are clothed. Now, when he says men are clothed using the figure of clothes, he means men are here in a body. That is one way in which we appear in our human existence, clothed. That of course is the way we appear now. I am not speaking about the clothes you are wearing. You have actually a double set of clothes, according to Paul. He means by that we are clothed, he means our spirits have a body; our body is our clothing, and we put some other things on top of our body so we have a double set of clothes. So Paul speaks about men as being clothed in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 4.

Then he also speaks in the 4th verse and the 3rd verse of that 5th chapter of 2 Corinthians of men as being unclothed, and when he speaks of men being unclothed he speaks of men who have died. Their bodies are placed in the grave. Their spirits have gone to be with the Lord, but their spirits do not have a body, so therefore if the body is the clothing they are unclothed.

Now there are some Bible teachers that teach that there is such a thing as an intermediate body; that is, a body which is given us when we die so we won’t be naked in Paul’s terms, a naked spirit in the presence of the Lord. As far as I can tell, there is no biblical support for that idea. If it is found at all, it is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and I don’t think it is found there, but there are some good Bible teachers that we think do have an intermediate body. Dr. Chafer used to believe that, that when we die, we are given an intermediate body until the resurrection. I don’t think, I say, that is Scriptural teaching. That is, it is not positively stated in the Bible. Now it may be that the Lord will give us such, but so far as I can tell, it’s not in the Bible.

The third state of man is the state also described in that 2 Corinthians 5th chapter in the 4th verse and the 2nd verse is the state of being “clothed upon.” Now that is a most interesting word that the apostle uses, clothed upon, and what he means by that it seems from the context is that those individuals who are alive when the Lord Jesus returns at the rapture, they have clothing, the clothing of their present body, every one of you in this room has the clothing of your present body, but since the Lord is going to give us a new body at the resurrection, when the Lord comes in the air this new body is a body that is in the sense put on over the one that we have. To use Paul’s expression, we are clothed upon; that is, we have a body over this body.

So those three states are the three states of believing men. They are clothed in their present state. If they die before the Lord Jesus comes, they are unclothed, to use Paul’s term, or naked -- he uses that term too. And then we look forward to being clothed upon when we receive our resurrection bodies.

Why must there be a bodily resurrection for the saints? Why should we have a bodily resurrection? Why not live as eternal spirits? Well now God created Adam with a body. He was created, as far as I can tell, a trichotimus being: body, soul and spirit. Now since Adam had a body, he sinned in his body. Man fell. Man has lived in a body ever since. The Lord Jesus came he took upon himself, took to himself a human nature. He

also took a human body; he possessed a body. In his body he accomplished redemption upon the cross when he said, it is finished, he said that in a body, and then of course our Lord Jesus received at his resurrection on Sunday morning a resurrection body. He is the only person that has ever been resurrected at the present time.

Men have been restored to life, but only our Lord has been resurrected, given a glorified body. Now Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he was given his old body again so far as we know, because he lived on and died later. He had the experience of two deaths, but our Lord was resurrected so that he has a resurrection body. Now it is fitting evidently in the thought of God, since the sin of men occurred when man possessed a body, since redemption occurred through the redeemer who possessed a body, and who now has been resurrected in mind of God, it is in effect the completion of the redemption of the cross the redemption of the whole man, that at the second coming or the rapture of the church we who have already received the redemption of our spirits may at that time receive the redemption of our bodies.

Now the Apostle Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians here and he also speaks about it in Romans chapter 8 in verse 23 where he writes, “And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption that is the redemption of our body.” So we look forward then to the completion of redemption.

It evidently is true and theologically correct to say that our redemption is not complete until it affects the whole man -- not just his Spirit, but his body as well, and that’s why we must have the resurrection of the body; it is the completion of the program of God. That is also why we must have the completion of this work of redemption in the redemption of the whole creation, because it was in the human seed that sin occurred and therefore in the finished work of the Lord Jesus we have the basis of the redemption of the spirits, the bodies of the redeemed, and of the whole of the creation -- all related to the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus.

The question that we face in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is what sort of body shall we have? Are the dead raised up and what sort of body are they rose up with? So I want you now to look with me at the character of the resurrection body, verses 35 through 49, and will you listen now as I read these verses beginning with 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 35,

“But some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not made alive except it die, and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or some other grain, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another of the moon and another glory of the stars, for one star different from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. (You see, the apostle is using a number of figures of speech and illustration to describe things that pertain to the resurrection) 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 (a body that is the habitation of the soul, natural body, soulish body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body). And so it is written the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam.”

Notice by the way Paul does not say, the second Adam. There are only two Adams: Adam the first, Adam the last, because there are only two respective men. Now we do find our Lord called the second man, for there are other men. I happen to be one, you happen to be one, too, and also you ladies, you happen to be men, too, in spite of what you may be being told today, biblically, of course. I was delighted this week when I got a letter from a young lady. She wrote a note to me and signed it, “miss.” I liked her immediately. Well Paul continues,

“The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last man Adam.”

Incidentally, if this last Adam had failed, then there would be no other Adam. So God has dealt with two men: Adam the first and Adam the last; this is why we call the Lord Jesus the representative man. So the things that he did he did for those whom he represents -- that’s a great truth.

Because, you see, all Christians are represented by him. That’s a tremendous thing to realize that you are represented by the Lord Jesus. I look out in the audience and I see a lawyer, and I think, my, if I were entering a case that was important to me I would want to have the finest legal representative I can have. But now in spiritual things to think of our Lord Jesus as our representative is to realize that everything that is needed for us will be done by the person who can perfectly represent us. That’s why he is called the last Adam, and of course, he has perfectly represented us too. We are really in good condition. Now verse 46,

“However that was not first which is spiritual but that which is natural and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man (now notice he does not follow through with the same kind of analogy; he says the second man is the Lord from heaven) 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 bear the image of the heavenly.”

Now a brief exposition of these verses that we have just read. The two questions of verse 35 form the theme verse, and the theme idea of this section is, how are the dead raised up? Now that does not question the method of the resurrection. It is obvious that in the passage that follows Paul doesn’t tell us anything about the method of resurrection. He doesn’t tell us how God did it. Nothing, nothing about that. He doesn’t even say God exercises his great power and raises those, that corrupt body up by his mighty power. He doesn’t say a thing about the method. So it is evident that the question questions the possibility of the resurrection, not the method. How are dead men raised up in other words. So the question is, are dead men raised up?

And then the second question, the second part of that 35th verse is, what’s the nature of the body that they possess if they are raised up? The answer to the how is given immediately and quickly in verse 36, “You fool (to ask such a thing as that, I guess particularly after I have already written all this about the resurrection in the preceding verses of the chapter) that which sowest is not made alive except it die.” And so he speaks about death and resurrection under the analogy of something that is dead and then comes to life. So that is dealt with immediately, and Paul passes it by, and he devotes the remainder of these verses to the second question, with what kind of body do we come? And that of course is our concern when we are dealing with the translation of the church.

There are two errors that we must avoid when we think about the resurrection of the body. One is that we have the same body that we have now, exactly like this body that we have. Now it is true that there is an identity between the body that we have as a resurrected saint and the body that we have now, but it is not the same body, not the

identical body. I won’t have a body with all of the failings and you won’t have a body with all of the failings that you have now. You will have a completed body. It is entirely possible that someone shall lose a limb from a body; you will have a full and complete body. So do not think of the resurrection as a great doctrine by which you get the same body that you have now. As I alluded to a minute ago, that would be very disappointing for most of us I’m sure. We are going to have a great body like our Lord’s own glorious body.

The other error is to go to the other extreme and to believe that the body is totally unrelated to the body that we have now. It is not totally unrelated. Generally, it will be like Christ’s own glorious body. Specifically, Paul will give us the details in the verses that follows.

Now he illustrates first from the natural world, and he points out first that there is continuity, that which thou sowest is not made alive except it die, but that which dies is the same thing which is made alive, so there is continuity. In other words there is a definite kind of continuity between our body today and the resurrection body. It is like planting a seed in the ground, and planting a seed in the ground and soon there is a beautiful flower or a beautiful plant of some kind or other. There is identity. No one not knowing anything about the process of growth would realize that the seed is really the same thing as the plant. The resurrection body is like that. So the apostle tells us there is continuity.

Then he says in the 38th verse, but God giveth a body that hath pleased him and to every seed its own body. So there is a particular body that pertains to each particular seed. One of the marvels of God’s creation is that there is nothing in the creation that is exactly alike. You have seen those remarkable pictures of snowflakes in the films done by Moody for example, to realize that every snowflake is different, is a marvel of the omnificence and wisdom of our great God, and the same thing is true of the resurrection body. Every one of our bodies will be different. But of every one of them it can be said

it is like Christ’s own glorious body, as Paul says in Philippians chapter 3 verse 20 and 21. So there is identity.

It’s its own body and yet there is diversity. As the verses that follow show. “All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another of beast, another of fish, another of birds. There are celestial bodies there are terrestrial bodies. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, another glory of the stars, for one star differeth from another star in glory, so there is continuity. There is identity. There is diversity. These are things that are stated about the resurrection body.

This raises some interesting questions. Of course, that last statement in verse 41 has raised a considerable amount of discussion, one star differeth from another star in glory, and on the basis of this, many have affirmed that in the eternal state there are some individuals who shall have a position that is greater than other individuals in the family of God, and that this is part of the reward of faithful service.

Now of course, this is a slender text on which to hang that doctrine. There are other texts that bear on the subject. However, I am not sure that we can speak with great authority here, but let us say this, that if it is true, that in God’s eternal state some of us have greater glory than others of us, it will not make us sad. It’s evident that capacity may be different assuming this doctrine to be true, and the capacity of each individual is perfectly met by the blessing that God gives us. And if our capacities are fixed by God, we shall be completely happy. The person who has greater capacity because of greater faithfulness in this life may have a greater enjoyment, but we shall have perfect enjoyment, those of us who are just ordinary believers and some of us who have been very failing believers.

Well I say that is a slender text on which to hang a doctrine like that. It may be so. For one star differeth from another star in glory, but it’s only an illustration the apostle is using, and perhaps we shouldn’t lay too much stress on it. There are, however, in the Bible sufficient warnings to us concerning faithful serve that should stir us up to faithful

service of our God. It just may be that the things that we are doing now do affect our capacity in the eternal state. Perhaps that is limited to the millennial age. Those are incidental questions, and I remember again Luther’s statement, so I don’t want to say anything more about that.

This raises some other questions though. If we are going to have a resurrection body and everybody is going to have the same body that he had before. In other words, his resurrection body is going to be identified with this particular body. In other words I am going to have in my resurrection a body that is different from this body and yet it’s essentially the same, just like the seed is like the flower that grows from it, that has raised a lot of interesting questions. And some have even in their ridicule of the doctrine of the resurrection suggested what we then have pictured in the Bible is a scene in which there is a lot of flying dust of bodies which are buried in various places going to meet the spirits that are with the Lord.

Now it seems to me that is a very carnal presentation of the doctrine of the resurrection, and if I don’t know anything much about science I gladly admit. If I talked anymore about it you would know of course that I don’t. I could easily prove it in just a few more sentences that I don’t know anything about science. But I am told by scientist that the body changes every three and a half years, and that strictly speaking I am not the same person I was three and a half years ago. And yet I am the same person, for while all of the features of my body have changed biologically or chemically -- I don’t even know which is the proper adverb -- but the same structure is there and the structure has been there all along. You would identify me even though I am not the sane person.

So the resurrection of the body is not to be conceived out of a carnal way as if God is dependent upon the dust that is left in our tombstone after corruption has set in. God’s resurrection is the resurrection of his mighty right arm of power, and he doesn’t need to have dust flying around to recreate in his own power Lewis Johnson, so I don’t think that is much of an objection.

Some have even illustrated this by incidents in history. You may remember that Roger Williams was one of the great spiritual men of our early history in the United States, and this in spite of the fact that he was a Baptist, [laughter] now I’m just kidding you. Roger Williams was a great Christian man, and he is regarded as many or the Baptist as the founder of their work in his country. He was buried in a certain place.

Some years later individuals wanted to move his burial place to another. They were chagrined to discover when they came to his grave that a tree had grown right up out of his tomb and that strictly speaking, as they examined what had happened, that tree the roots of the tree, the trunk of the tree had actually come right out of the place -- and this is a strange thing to talk about in Bible class but it pertains to the resurrection -- that trunk of the tree had grown right out of his skull and the roots of the tree had gone right down his back bone to the bottom of his feet. So what had actually happened was that the contents chemically of the body of Roger Williams were now contained in the tree. Now that doesn’t mean that Roger Williams is not going to have a resurrection. He is going to have a resurrection just as surely as the rest of us. God’s resurrection is not a material kind of resurrection such as that, flying dust. Now I hope I have obviated the necessity of someone coming up and asking me questions like that.

Also in connection with this it has often been wondered, will we recognize one another in heaven? And I like the reply that someone gave to that question, well surely we will have as much sense then as we have now. [Laughter] Of course we are going to recognize one another. We have some indications in the Bible of this, because in the case of Moses and Elijah who were with our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, the text implies that the apostles understood exactly who they were they saw Moses and Elijah.

Bunyan captures some of this when he describes Christian approaching the city, and as he looks up, he sees the saints leaning out over the wall, and he named specifically the saints that he sees, and Bunyan himself evidently believed that it would be

a part of our enjoyment of heaven to be able to recognize those who were in heaven, and I think also we are given power to recognize those perhaps whom we have never seen before. So I will know you and you will know me, and we will probably also know Paul and James and the rest of the apostles and prophets of the Old Testament. We shall recognize our loved ones.

The application of the resurrection body follows in verses 42 through 44 and the apostle stresses four particulars. He says, it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. Now, it is sown in corruption in the sense that this body decays. All of this of course is a result of sin. This is the great fact of the Bible, the fact of human sin. If a man can come to understand the doctrine of sin in the Bible he has got the foundation of understanding most of the great teaching of the word of God. He says secondly in verse 43, it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. Third, it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. Fourth, it is sown a natural body or a psychical body or a soulish body; that is, it is a body which is dominated by the soul, used by the soul. It is raised a spiritual body. So it is formed to be the organ of the spirit in the resurrection.

Now what this precisely means we of course cannot say. We are not really told what the body is like. We are simply told it is an incorruptible body. It’s characterized by glory, it’s characterized by power, and it’s spiritual, but we don’t know anything about what it looks like. So in effect we are told that it’s not like the body down here on the earth. That’s very tantalizing, but I think also we must realize that we probably could not understand if God were to tell us exactly what the body is. We just couldn’t understand it. We would say, we don’t understand and it’s impossible. Remember, the Lord Jesus said there were some things he couldn’t tell the apostles until the Holy Spirit came. We cannot bear them now. So we cannot bear this. I cannot bear this. No theologian, no matter how great a theologian he is, can bear this; it’s something beyond us.

I do not have any reason to say that we shall only have certain senses with our resurrection body. There may be fifty different kinds of senses in the resurrection body.

There are strange things that animals can do that we cannot do. I was speaking to my class in theology yesterday and trying to illustrate the doctrine of illumination, how we must have the Holy Spirit to understand Scriptures, and I illustrated it by the bats of Carlsbad Caverns. These bats winter in Mexico -- why they do that I don’t know; it seems to me they could have picked a much better place than Mexico to winter, but perhaps it’s at Acapulco -- at any rate, they come back in May, and they come back millions strong, and they live in the caverns of Carlsbad.

The striking thing about these bats is they can fly in that utter darkness. Have you been in Carlsbad and have you ever got half way down and have the guide say now let’s turn off the lights? I know what the Bible means when it says, the blackness of darkness forever. That’s the best illustration I know. I now know exactly where where was the figure, I couldn’t see my hand before my face; I couldn’t. I lifted my hand up and I couldn’t see it. Now those bats can fly in and out among those stalactites and stalagmites nearing perfection. They never run into any of them, and they fly by kind of natural sonar. Someone has described it as echo-location. They send out little squeaks that glance off of these stalactites and stalagmites, and as they rebound, they know exactly where they are, and they fly in and out them all.

Now the interesting thing about is that you can hear those little squeaks. You can hear them when they squeal in rage or pain. I guess in joy, too. I don’t know much about bat joy [laughter] but the human ear cannot detect those little squeaks. That’s part of their capacity which we do not possess.

Now the same thing is true about the Bible. I was trying to illustrate the Bible is a book which you cannot understand unless you have the Holy Spirit. That’s the capacity to understand holy Scripture. So in connection with the resurrection body, it may have powers that we have no idea exist today. It may have senses that we don’t have any knowledge of at all. It is a glorious resurrection body. The Lord Jesus was able in the resurrection body to pass through a door without opening it. It’s possible that the

resurrection body is something like the sheen that one sees from moonlight or sunlight. You can see it, you can almost put your hand on it, but it’s transparent. Now I’m trying to tell you what the body is like, and I told you nobody knows what it’s like, so I better stop. That would be foolish. Perhaps the pattern of Transfiguration is the best pattern that we have in the New Testament

Now the apostle confirms this by reference to Scripture. He says, so it is written the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a life giving spirit. However, that is not first which is spiritual but that which is natural and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy, the second man is, you might expect him to say of a heavenly material, but he doesn’t. You see, he wants to avoid telling us anything about the material of our Lord’s body. He doesn’t really know too much about it himself. So he simply says, he is the Lord from heaven, and even in his language you see he is trying to let us know you cannot know some things as much as you want to; strain as much as you want to, you cannot understand.

As the earth is such, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such as they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall bear the image of the heavenly. So he simply says, we are going to have a resurrection body; it’s going to be glorious, it’s going to be incorrupt, it’s going to be powerful. It’s going to be spiritual. Beyond that, we cannot go. It’s a glorious body, and in other places I’ve said several times, it’s like our Lord’s own glorious body.

Two octogenarians were once speaking with one another, and one of them said to the other as they were parting, “Well see you when we are 33.” And someone happened to overhear them and said to them, what do you mean 33, you’re both over 80? And they said, “But the Lord said we are going to have a body like unto his own glorious body, and he was about that age when he died. [Laughter] That’s perhaps a little carnal, but it expresses the fact that our bodies are going to be like his and changed from the ones we have now.

Well that raises of course the question of what happens to those who do not die? Remember in 1 Thessalonians the question that Paul faced was what happens to those who have died, and Paul said that when the Lord Jesus comes in the rapture, those who have died are raised first, then those of us who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we always be with the Lord.

But now here he answers the different question, what happens to those who do not die, because he has been talking about resurrection. So in the 50th verse he discusses the change. “Now this I say, brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” In other words, a transformation is necessary if we are to enter the kingdom. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus had said, remember, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which born of the spirit is spirit.”

Now if we are going to enter heaven or if we are going to have eternal life, then we must have a spiritual rebirth, and if we are to enter heaven and enjoy heaven, we must have a spiritual resurrection. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. I’m so glad. Heaven wouldn’t be heaven if all the people down here on earth were in heaven; that would just be another earth, and particularly if a transformation has not occurred in them. Now mind you, I’m not saying I don’t want people in heaven. I just happen to know the Bible tells us not everybody is going to be in heaven. As far as I’m concerned I would like to have everybody in heaven, but the Scriptures are very plain, not everybody’s going to be in heaven. And the Scriptures are also very plain that if we are going to get to heaven we must have a new birth, and Paul says also in getting to heaven we will be given a new body. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. If thieves went to heaven, the first thing they would do would be to pick the pockets of the saints. They would act according to their nature. So that’s the principal.

Now Paul makes the application. “Behold, I show you a secret.” Now when he says I show you a secret, he doesn’t mean something mysterious; he means something

that has not been revealed in Scripture in God’s revelation. Behold, I show you a mystery a secret, we shall not all sleep -- now what does sleep mean; how many of you were here last week? What does sleep mean? Why it’s the biblical word to describe the death of saints. We shall not sleep -- what does that mean? Then it means not all the saints shall die.

Now there is a text in the Bible that says, it is appointed unto men once to die, after this then, the judgment. But there is a generation that is going to escape it, just as in the Old Testament Enoch was translated so that he did not see death. That’s a general truth. It does not apply to every person. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, so even those who do not die are going to have to have a change.

Now he describes it. He says, it’s in a moment. He says it is in the twinkling of an eye. These words are very interesting because the first one, in a moment, is a Greek word *atomas* which means “that which cannot be cut or divided.” That is, it is the smallest possible thing you can think of. It’s the word of which we get our word, atom of course. In a moment. And then he says in the twinkling of an eye, and that word *rhipe* is a word that refers to the idea of throwing; a twinkling of an eye is the time that it takes to cast a glance or perhaps to flutter an eyelid. That quickly -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye -- at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound.

Remember in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 in verse 13 through 18 the apostle had said something about that? He had said, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first,” and I said that that probably refers to a shout which an archangel makes or a noise which an archangel makes when he plays a note upon the trumpet of God, and here Paul says at the last trump, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.

So he now describes what happens to those who have already died. He says their corrupt bodies shall be raised up out of the grave, incorruptible, and we who are alive

and remain shall be changed, for this corruption that we have on, this body that we have now, must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. This corrupt body that we have shall be incorrupt and that body that has died shall be given a body in which the individual shall never die.

Then he goes on to say, “This corruptible shall 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.” Then there are two questions, “O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?” Those two questions, incidentally, are addressed to the people involved. The first one to the living, O death where is thy sting, for in the case of those who are alive when the Lord comes, death does not operate and they do not die. The sting of death does not reach its culmination, so that we breathe our last in the body that we have, O death where is thy sting. In other words, one of the effects of human sin is cancelled by the rapture of the church through the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Then the second question is addressed of those in the grave, O grave -- really the Greek text here says, also death, but some of the manuscripts still have grave -- the point is still the same, O grave where is thy victory? In other words, we died, but our being overcome by death was not permanent: O grave, where is thy victory? So the two classes of individuals, those who die and those who don’t have to die overcome death in the coming of our Lord Jesus. Paul explains the sting of death is sin, the strength of the sin is law, but thanks be to God who giveth us our victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. That text which we often quote of course refers to the resurrection.

Well now let me sum up what has been said. The apostle says at the rapture of the church these things will happen. All of the dead that have died, their spirits are with the Lord at the present time, when he comes the spirits of those who have died in Christ whose bodies are sleeping shall come with him, as he comes in the air. First of all, the dead in Christ the bodies of those who have died, shall be raised up from the grave, given

a body like our Lord’s own glorious body, the spirits of the those who have come with the Lord shall rejoin those bodies. Then we who are alive on the earth, we shall be suddenly changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, just like fluttering an eyelid. We shall be changed we shall not die, but we shall have a body like unto his own glorious body too, and we shall join those saints who have come with the Lord whose bodies have been resurrected and so the whole church shall be together.

Now that is really body life. That is true body life, and it only occurs completely and finally at what my good friend of Campus Crusade calls, the great snatch, or rapture, and we are with the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Now Paul said in 1 Thessalonians, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words,” but here he says, “Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast unmovable always abounding the in the work of the Lord for as much as ye know your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” In other words, for you Corinthians, less speculation about the resurrection and more work is what you need, and this is to be your comfort and this to be your strength in the midst of your service for him.

Next week, we want to consider the question when does this rapture occur. So let’s bow in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the holy Scriptures, and again we thank Thee for these glorious promises which mean so much to us. We long for the day when we shall as a whole church be together in worship praise and adoration. In the meantime, Lord, motivate us by our hope to be steadfast, unmovable, abounding in the work of the Lord, doing that which thou hast for each one of us individually, that special work that thou would have us to do. That special great work which thou would have us to do until he comes. We pray in his name. Amen.