

The Body: Old and New

by J. Glyn Owen

The Apostle Paul's view of death and the resurrection emphasizes the hope and assurance that Christians have in the face of death, and the promise of a new body in the resurrection.

Duration: 48:00

Scripture: Deuteronomy 29:29, Psalm 119:105, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Topics: "Body"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of our physical bodies as temporary dwellings, comparing them to tents that wear out. He emphasizes the importance of believing in the revelation of God and having hope for the future. The preacher mentions the Apostle Paul's desire to be with Christ and his yearning for a heavenly home. The sermon also addresses the questions raised by Terry Fox's suffering and eventual passing, and the need to understand death and resurrection through Jesus Christ.

Transcript

The suffering and the eventual passing of Terry Fox has raised in many minds some of the most basic questions concerning life and death. Members of the congregation might be amazed at the number of questions that are being raised by non-Christian people as well as by those within the church concerning these very important issues. Now, it would be impossible to answer all the questions that have been raised in one sermon or even in two.

But I thought it wise this morning, and we shall follow this on this evening, if we were to concentrate at least upon one passage that has much to teach us concerning death and our eventual resurrection to life in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is good to see what the New Testament has to say about these issues. I trust it will be of comfort and lead to a renewed hope in every Christian heart and that should there be among us those who do not as yet know the hope which is so evident in this passage and which is the privilege of every truly Christian person, I trust that this will be a day when you will lay hold upon the hope that is set before you and that together we may rejoice and be able to sing from a true heart forever with the Lord.

Amen. So let it be. Life from the dead is in that word.

It is immortality. May the Lord therefore help us as we come to meditate this morning upon the first five verses in 2 Corinthians 5 and we shall be picking up the thread this evening perhaps with verse 5 going on to the end of that section at verse 10. I'm not going to read all that passage again, but we shall be reading the verses as we comment upon them in the body of our exposition.

It is a very daring thing to mock death and the grave and to challenge their capacity to harm us or to triumph over us. But you will remember that is precisely what the Apostle Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15. Without any sense of shame or weakness or frailty, he challenges death and the grave.

And what may not be normally appreciated, he doesn't do so in his own words. He lays hold of words that come, one from the prophet Isaiah who had said similar things before and then from the prophet Hosea. And he intertwines these words together and he says, Death has been swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your sting? O grave, he says, where is your victory? I'm challenging you. Then he goes on to explain, the sting of death is sin. And the power of sin, that which makes sin so mighty and so powerful is the law of God that we heard about on Wednesday evening last.

The power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul challenges death and the grave.

And he does so, as we shall see in a moment, out of an experience of the glorious certainty that God has given him to proclaim not only to a few, but to all who would receive the message. Now, that is in 1 Corinthians 15. Here in 2 Corinthians 5, the apostle, generally speaking, takes up the same theme.

But you will notice that there is a difference. In 1 Corinthians 15, he was basically, though he goes wider than this, but basically, he was answering the question, how are the dead raised? That's how our reading began this morning. Some will ask, how are the dead raised and with what bodies do they come? Paul proceeds to answer that question in 1 Corinthians 15.

Here, however, Paul goes beyond that. And he comes to deal with the nature of the resurrection body itself. In 2 Corinthians 5, he's not saying that we shall rise from the dead.

He's taking that for granted. That has been said. Christ is risen.

We shall rise in Christ. That's been said in 1 Corinthians 15. And the reason for our hope has been there exposed.

If we are in Christ, if we have received the gospel, if we have died with Christ, we shall rise again with him. And the resurrection of the spirit, so that we are born again, is a foregleam and a proof of the fact that one day, the Christians shall physically rise from the grave and share in the glorious victory of our Lord and his redemption, which involves, among other things, the redemption of the body, the reclamation of the body from all the miseries that sin has brought upon it, from the fall of Adam to our own falls and iniquities. Now, death and the future that lies beyond its boundaries are too important a subject, therefore, for us to neglect.

This morning, the main thing I shall want to be dwelling upon is the aspect of the Christians' assurance that is particularly enunciated in these first four or five verses. Look at the first verse again. Now we know.

It's not that we guess. It's not that we hope in the sense that we normally use the word. That is, hope for the best.

Even when the New Testament uses the word hope, it means we are assured of something. It's never in the sense in which it is commonly used. Christian hope is a real hope.

It's a certainty. It's an assurance. But here Paul doesn't use the word hope.

We know. What do we know? We know, he says, that if our earthly tent, the earthly tent we live in, is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. I'm quoting from the New International Version.

Now let's look at some factors included in this marvelous assurance that God has given to his people. Paul is here speaking of another body. Another body.

The apostle affirms that in the possible event of death, preceding the Lord's return, and thus causing the dissolution of the bodies that we now inhabit, then we may rest assured that we shall not face, what he calls in this context, a condition of nakedness. Now you may have often wondered what that means. A condition of nakedness.

What the apostle has in mind is this. If death overtakes us before the coming of Christ, then the body will be dissolved, will either be buried at sea, or in the earth, or in some other way, disposed of in some other way. And the spirit will go, and until the morning of the resurrection, our spirits will go to an intermediate state, to be with Christ it is certain.

And yet not into the final enjoyment of its full salvation, because it is only when Christ returns that the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed and have a body like unto his. So there is an intermediate state, and Paul speaks of it as a state of nakedness. We're neither in the old body nor in the new.

Or to quote what he says here, we are without a home, we are without a house. That is the spirits that we have, our human spirits, our redeemed spirits, is in this intermediate state of nakedness, as he calls it. Now he says, death, when it precedes the Lord's return, as it does, has for a multitude of Christians, and may yet do, though we mustn't take that for granted.

We must remember that, even if it does, ultimately we have a building of God. We may be naked for a moment, but we have a building from God, and that is a house that has not been touched by human hands. Human hands have had nothing to do in its making.

It is an eternal house, and he's talking about the body. It is an eternal house already there awaiting us, as it were, in heaven. Heaven is not the house, heaven is the place where it is kept for God's people.

Now since it will be inevitably asked how the apostle could be so sure of things which are not capable of being proven by human intelligence, it is important to note Paul's precise language here. The verb translated, we know, is the key. Dr. Philip Edgecombe Hughes, in his magnificent commentary on 2 Corinthians, says this about that verb, *oidomen*, in the Greek.

Oidomen, he says, is used here in its proper sense of to know. To know as a result of perceiving or seeing a truth by intuition or revelation. In contrast to the acquiring of knowledge by instruction or research, which

has an entirely different verb to know, *genoskein*.

Now what are we saying? Paul's assurance and certainty concerning future matters, concerning the fact that there is a future body and we shall receive it in due course, it doesn't come because Paul has researched into this area. Now he may have thought a lot about it, doubtless he had, or he couldn't write as he does. But this knowledge did not come by Paul's ingenuity, by his being able to think clearer than somebody else.

It isn't the fruit of human research. How did he get it then? How does he know it? Well Paul is able to say, we know because the knowledge of which he speaks is the knowledge that comes by revelation from God. So that you see, if you don't believe that God is and is capable of communicating, capable of revealing himself and truth to man, well now you're in a fog land and you will find it difficult to accept this.

Paul knew that God lived. Paul knew that God was real. Paul knew that God could communicate.

And as one who was involved in the process of receiving from God his word to declare to men and women, there was no doubt in his mind at all. So he is able to say, we know. Now there are many things that we Christians do not know.

I find it is necessary for those of us who are blessed with certainty concerning eternal issues to remind ourselves of this from time to time to keep us humble. God has privileged us immensely in granting us an assurance of sins forgiven, an assurance of peace with himself, an assurance of resurrection from the dead, an assurance that we have a new body awaiting us and that it is like the glorious body of our Lord. These are glorious certainties given to every man and woman who really believes in Christ.

But, let us remind ourselves there are a multitude of things that we simply do not know for God has not revealed them. Even the incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus said, concerning one matter, he said, only the Father knows. In my state of humiliation, I have chosen not to desire to know the day and the hour when I shall return in glory to judge the world.

Not anyone, there is no one who knows, the Father only. He is the only one who knows. There are many things we do not know.

But here is something that God has revealed to his Apostle. Through his Apostle he has revealed it to us and therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, it is something we may know. And I want to invite you this morning to put the arms of faith around what is said here for your comfort and encouragement and in order to capacitate you to speak to every other man and woman in Christ and to urge others to come in and enjoy the same certainty as God has made available for us.

But now, notice, let's move from that. Whereas Paul here stresses the newness and the distinction or the difference between the new body that awakes the redeemed and that which is our present habitat, this must not be taken out of context. Paul wrote two letters to the Corinthians as we have already implied.

He did more than two actually. He speaks of one, of a third one, another one that must have got to them but it has not been preserved for us. But in the first, he stressed that there is a certain continuity between the body that now is, the one in which you are living this morning, the tent in which you are living, there is a continuity between the body that we now have and the body that we shall ultimately have.

Now, in 1 Corinthians, that is basically the stress. Now, he stresses the other side too but fundamentally it is that. And he does it in this way.

When you sow, he says, you do not plant the body that will be but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined. And to each kind of seed, he gives its own body.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised, it is raised imperishable. Now, the words I want you to notice is this.

It is raised. It is raised. And it runs through the whole passage.

But this will suffice for us to get the point. The body that we sow into the ground, the body that falls into the ground or into the fire, that body, it is raised. Death is not the annihilation of the body.

Death does not leave the body forever dismembered or decomposed. That is Paul's statement. It is raised.

There is a resurrection of the body that is buried. Now, the stress there is upon the continuity of the old in the new. He puts it elsewhere in this language.

The seed is sown and it continues and expresses itself in the fruit. You sow a seed, it becomes a grain of corn. You sow a seed, it becomes a flower or whatever.

But there is continuity there between the seed that is sown and the flower that emerges from it. The old is in the new. Paul has exactly the same thought in Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21.

There he says this. Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. Now, do you see the point? He will transform our lowly bodies.

He takes the material, whatever there remains. He takes the material of the decomposed physical body and He transforms it. He uses it to transform it and make it anew after the pattern of His own glorious body.

But there is continuity. Now, there may be very little left of your body as it is today. You may be buried at sea.

You may have been cremated. You may have been buried in the ground. But what there is, the Almighty Creator will take of it and He will use it and employ it and out of it.

He will refashion a body like unto the glorious body of our Lord. The concept there, let me stress, is of the ultimate transformation of our present body so that it resembles the glorious and glorified body of Jesus. And that again implies continuity of the old in the new.

The new is not entirely new. And yet it is very new. That's what Paul is stressing in 2 Corinthians 5. It is new.

Have you noticed how he does that? He's got a beautiful image here. And in the context, to the first readers of the New Testament, I'm quite sure it would have had a very real significance. We are

unfortunately superficial in our reading of the Bible all too often.

Taking up the new body will be, says Paul, like moving from a tent into a temple. Now that's the language he uses. From a temporary canvas dwelling into a permanent body fitted for another sphere that human hands have had nothing to do in the making of it.

And it is eternal. You can say about the new body, it's not just for a moment. Here in the body pent absent from him I roam.

But one day we shall pitch the tent for the last night. We shall go to sleep for the last night or wake up for the last day. And the tent will decompose.

It will run away. And somebody will put it in the ground. And some minister will say ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and so forth.

But concerning the body that is to be, it is a temple. It is a, in comparison, more permanent building fitted for a permanent habitation which is heaven. And that spells discontinuity between the old and the new.

It spells a veritable distinction. There is a world of difference between the new body and the old body. But we must hold these two concepts in balance.

Not forget the one and simply stress the other. There is continuity but there is discontinuity. And the Apostle Paul is here stressing that the new body will be something that eye has not seen.

No ear has heard a full description of it other than what God has revealed concerning it. Another body. But now Paul has more to say about its texture.

I've referred to it but I want to just disentangle the thoughts a little. He says that the new body is a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not made with hand. The Apostle has just referred to our present bodies as tents.

Now the notion of a tent is quite obvious. It's simple, it's universal. But especially was it so in New Testament times and it would have a very real significance for the first readers.

What's the difference between a tent and a temple? Well, a tent is a thin canvas that you put up when you're hiking, when you're on pilgrimage generally. You don't normally live in a tent. But you pitch a tent in the morning and you dismantle or in the evening and you dismantle it next day and you move on.

When the tent has been under the weather of heat and cold and rain, you will soon find that it shows that it is suffering from wear and tear. The tent pegs begin to rot after a few years and sooner or later the tent will gradually wear out and the rain will come through and it will totter and it will fall and it will be just a crumbled thing. But the temple, the house in heaven of which Paul speaks, doesn't share in that kind of characteristic.

By sheer contradistinction it is entirely different. It is eternal. It continues.

It abides. Time has nothing to do with it. There are no ravages of time that cause it to decompose and to wear away or to wear out.

None whatsoever. Now, it is more than probable that if Paul were writing this letter to Jews, he would have made explicit something that is evidently implicit in his thought. Because it is more than probable that the image in Paul's mind is that of the difference between the tent of meeting, the tabernacle, in which God met with the Israelites under the old dispensation, and the temple in Jerusalem of later times.

He uses words here that specifically, I would say, refer to the real distinction between these two. Now, you know the tent of meeting. Well, they took it down one day and they went so far and they pitched the tent of meeting again.

And gradually it wore out. And ultimately there came a time in God's providence and in God's will when there was no need for it and no place for it. And it was put on one side and it was folded, put on one side forevermore.

But then there's the tabernacle. Then there is the temple in Jerusalem, an altogether different entity. It is solid.

It is lasting. Now, as history shows us, it has not lasted either. So even this is not a perfect illustration.

But the image is there and the contrast is there. But as far as God's house in heaven, the body, the new body that God has for his people, it is, unlike even the temple in Jerusalem, it is eternal. An eternal house in heaven.

The contrast is glaring. Now, in order to stress the contrast between the old and the new, Paul is not even content to say what I have referred to now. He goes one step further.

And I think we ought just to make mention of it in passing on. He adds these words, that the body in heaven is eternal, not made with hands. Now, when you read those words, you may be tempted to ask, well, is the present body made with hands? Surely the present body is God's creation.

I would answer, Paul is not denying that at all. Not at all. He agrees with that.

Everything was created by our Lord. Nothing that has been created was not created by him. Your body is his, he says, elsewhere.

He made it. It's his. But now, you see, it is possible that some husband and wife might turn around and say, well, I do have a share, we do have a share, in the creation of the bodies of our children.

By the process of procreation, it is we who bring a child into the world. Maybe God has given us the capacity, maybe God has given us the gift for doing that. It is we who do it.

We are involved. Lest somebody should say that, Paul says, as far as the new body is concerned, you've got absolutely nothing to do with it. Not a thing.

Not a thing. If you do not believe, therefore, in a God who is almighty and all-gracious, omnipotently powerful to save and to keep his promises, then you cannot accept this. The acceptance of this presupposes that you not only know that God is omnipotent and almighty as well as all-gracious, but that you accept it for yourself, and he is able.

By sheer contrast, no human hand will have any role to play in the formation of our new bodies. Now, these are some features included in the Christian's assurance. They are among the things that are divinely

revealed and therefore unquestionably true.

Scripture says elsewhere, and I would relate to it now, and I would hold to it in my heart, the secret things belong to the Lord our God. There are certain things which are secret, and we shouldn't try to delve into them. They belong to God almighty.

But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever. What God has revealed, what God has disclosed, what God has said, you and I should read, you and I should believe, you and I should trust. The secret things belong to him.

Don't enter into that territory where you don't belong. But trust and receive what God has revealed. He wants you to have the assurance and the joy of believing.

The other thing that I want to mention this morning is this. I just want to say one or two things about that which is inspired by the possession of such assurance. What is it that is inspired? Now let me read to you these words from three versions, three translations.

I'll quote the King James Version first. In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. That's the King James.

The RSV puts it like this. Here indeed we groan and long to put on our heavenly dwelling. And the New International Version puts it in this way.

Meanwhile we groan longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. Longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. Now what we're focusing upon is this.

That which is inspired by the possession of the kind of assurance that Paul had concerning the body that is to be. Now there's a small technical point. I have to mention it because it doesn't really come through in any of those translations though the most astute commentators will refer to it.

It's a technical point. There are two little words in the Greek that underlie the first part of that verse. There are two simple little words.

Entuto. And these two words elsewhere in the New Testament without exception have the force of the phrase on this account. Or if you like, for this reason.

On this account. On account of what? Well on account of what the Apostle has already said. We know that if our earthly house the earthly tent we live in is destroyed we have a building from God an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands.

For this reason not meanwhile as the NIV puts it but for the very reason that we know these things because these things are true God has revealed them and we know them on the basis of what God has revealed for this very reason because of the revelation that has granted us the knowledge we have what? Well, we groan. Longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling because when we are clothed we will not be found naked and so forth. Now without delving further into this technical point I want to stress that I think it ought to be translated in that way here too.

It should be that translation for the very reason specified in verse 1 that is why Paul says here We groan longing to be clothed upon by our house which is from heaven. The late Dr. James Demme who has got a very erudite commentary on 2 Corinthians puts it in this way If Paul had no hope he would not sigh for the

future but the very longing which pressed the sighs from his bosom became itself witness to the glory which awaited him. Paul was sighing, Paul was longing Why? Because of the thing for which he hoped.

You say, is that important? What's the point of stressing this? Well, I'll tell you. The point is this There are those who would say that we groan Paul means that we groan in this present body because of its weakness because of sicknesses because of weariness, tiredness and the kind of things that can afflict our bodies. Now, Paul would not want to deny that that in and of itself is true Neither would I want to deny that that in and of itself is true You're sick, you have a fever and you're a little bit weary and perhaps at that time of your fever or your sickness you have a deeper, greater yearning for the body that is to come OK, alright, granted but that's not what Paul is saying here What he's saying here is this If we really know anything about the body that is to come we groan longing Notice, groan longing For what?

For the body of which we're certain We groan longing to be made like our Lord not only in our spirits He will come back to that later on when he urges us to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord but we yearn longing also to have a body like unto His so that in our purified spirits and in our new bodies we shall dwell the new sphere and serve Him acceptably in a sphere into which sin does not enter where sickness and sorrow and suffering and separation are all alike unknown in the glory of His presence I don't know whether I dare try to illustrate that There is no ultimate illustration of this but I was reminded as I was meditating and trying to prepare for this morning I was reminded of an incident I won't tell you where It was a wedding The young bride was going to live with her husband in the apartment where he had lived as a single man and she was very pleased with it quite pleased but they were not going there for long The bridegroom's husband was a builder and the father had promised that when he was able he would build them a house and so of course they were going to this apartment only in the interval She was thrilled with it It was such a nice compact apartment as she said But then a number of things happened You may guess there was a builder's strike somewhere there That was the first thing and it was a prolonged one A second thing that happened was this that her husband was taken ill and she had to nurse him in the apartment and she found that really the facilities that would have been all right for them whilst everything was well were not quite so good when she had to nurse him But then there came this last link in the chain The house was ready and she was taken to see it Her husband was still in bed at home in the apartment but she went to see the house completed and she was utterly thrilled with it Everything was just it, just perfect and all the gadgets you can possibly think of you can possibly think of Now when she went back to the little apartment to nurse her husband you know she had become almost intolerant with the crampedness the confined characteristic of the little place where she had been quite happy earlier on And she became just eager, yearning, impatient to possess the new house Brothers and sisters in Christ that's the kind of thing we have here Don't press the analogy too far But when once you and I know You see when you have real Christian assurance We use the word assurance rather flippantly When we have the real biblically based Christian assurance And it relates even to this The house that is to come When we know that When we believe that When this assurance is deep in our souls and masters us Then we begin to yearn forever with the Lord Amen So let it be Why does a man yearn for the body that is to come?

For this reason Only because he knows of its glory And however great it is in this present body However much we think of this present body Unfortunately we think far too much about it in one sense I do not want to suggest that either Paul or any other Christian should think lightly of this body It is the creation of God And we should look after it for God And we are answerable for what we do to it as well as in it But after all God only meant this as a tent overnight On pilgrimage for a couple of years Thereafter to be dismantled and left behind And he will continue the grains from it in his organizing of the new entity that awaits us in

the hell Now my friends I conclude I come back to the point where we started Do you know anything of the revelation that God has given ministering

comfort to your hearts That you can begin to hope for things that are not seen At the end of chapter 4 Paul has said that one of the characteristics of a Christian is this We live for And we anticipate We are not so concerned with the things that we can see Because the things that are seen are temporal But we are concerned and we anticipate things unseen And they the unseen things are eternal My question is this Have you received the revelation that God has given in his son And in his word through his apostles To the point that having believed them you have begun to hope Now this is what it means to be a true believer Let us forget the shallow nuances that we hear of from time to time This is what it means This is part of what it means An important part To be a genuine believer We do not

simply take the apostles doctrine And say yes it is that, yes it is that As if we were professors sitting in a chair And weighing things objectively Putting the odd pieces together No, no, no, no, no Belief is something that has an impact upon the soul The truth touches us It moves us It creates It genders hope It is a very disturbing thing to find Christians That know nothing of the heart strings Pulling them toward the land unseen And the Jerusalem that is above Unless, unless we can say with the apostle Paul We know this Then we are probably confined to Interests that surround our bodies The physical bodies we have now And this is true of course If you and I were to examine ourselves this morning I'm afraid we would have to say that Eighty, ninety percent of our time is taken up with

Things that relate to the physical body The tent that is wearing out And whether you realize it or not It's wearing out right now as you sit in the pew And as I stand in the pulpit here It's a tent of clay Paul calls it an earthen vessel in chapter four Here it's a tent of canvas not clay That wears out It's in the process of wearing out If we are really believing the revelation that God has given That in turn should gender the beginnings of hope And we look forward to it And we anticipate it As the apostle says elsewhere Having a desire to depart To be with Christ which is far better That does not mean that he did not appreciate life No, the apostle was willing to live And he was willing to suffer anywhere and anytime If the will of God required it But in the depth of his heart There was

always a yearning for home I am a stranger here he would say Within a foreign land My home is far away upon a golden strand And he always knew The homing instinct To dwell in the house that God had prepared Do you know anything of that?

Let us pray as we conclude then That the Lord will grant us An ever deepening confidence in the word he has given In the work he has wrought And will yet work on behalf of his people To bring them into the full possession Of the purchased possession Let us pray Heavenly Father We would magnify your holy name for the gospel We crave your mercy oh Lord That all too often we have thought of your redemption As relating only to our souls We thank you that when Christ died He redeemed the souls of men And that those who trust in him Are redeemed Justified Freely from all things Pardoned But we bless your holy name That that same redemption purchased for us A new habitat A house that human hands have had nothing to do in the making of it Eternal Glorious Like the resurrection body of our Lord himself And we pray that you will give to us The corresponding hope that should be in our hearts Even as we enjoy the privileges of this present life Or otherwise As we bear with the problems And the sufferings And the sorrows of this life Grant that in and through all these things There may be an undercurrent of yearning And of hoping That corresponds to assurance In order that out of a sense of peace and prospect We may be witnesses to yourself In a world that is lost And undone And these things we ask in Jesus name Amen

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