

Like His Glorious Body

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 April 2007

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] Now, if perhaps we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 961, a passage we've read, and we'll have a moment's prayer.

Lord God, we long to hear your word, your word which shines like a light in the darkness of the world, your word which comes quenching our thirst as we long for a drink that will refresh us, your word that leads us to the living word, Christ Jesus.

So we ask that the Holy Spirit will throw light on this passage, that he will lead us into the truth, that he will show us Christ himself, in whose name we pray. Amen.

And so to this final section, which I'm giving the title, Like His Glorious Body. There was a young man who seemed to have everything going for him.

He was handsome, he was intelligent, he was well off, he was very popular. He is a keen Christian as well, which is wonderful, but he particularly had a great passion for athletics.

[1 : 37] He loved training, and he loved running in races and doing various athletic contests. One day he went to the doctor for a routine check-up, and to his horror and dismay, he discovered he had the beginnings of a dreadful, wasting disease, which could not be cured, it could be palliated, but not cured.

It wasn't long before he was no longer unable to run, he wasn't even able to walk. He was confined to a wheelchair, and eventually confined to bed.

And one day one of his friends visited him, and said something like this, It really is tragic to see a wonderful body like yours deteriorated so badly.

And he replied, Yes it would be, if this were the only body I was ever going to have. He realized painfully, as Paul says here in verse 49, that he bore the image of the man of dust.

He would decay, he would die, and his death indeed took place shortly afterwards. But he had the quiet confidence that one day he would bear the image of the man of heaven.

[2 : 53] One day, the body he was going to receive would be far more wonderful, far more glorious, than the body he had had before this disease struck it.

And that's what Paul is turning to now. The resurrection body, and if you like, the sequence of events that's going to lead up to it. Verse 35.

Verse 35. Someone will ask, How are the dead raised? Now Paul isn't going to give us a lesson in physics. He isn't going to give us a lesson in physiology. How in the sense of, what's the sequence of events?

How is this going, how are the events going to unfold? Which is going to lead from this body, the body that belongs to the man of dust, to the body that comes from the man of heaven.

Now you remember, those of you who have been here, that the Corinthians were averse to bodily resurrection. They regarded resurrection as something that got you free from the body.

[3 : 49] The body escaped from the, sorry, the spirit escaped from the prison of the body. The body decayed and you were at last free. Paul is saying no. It's not just the reanimation of a corpse.

That's far from the reality. It's a new and glorious body. And in Philippians 3 he says this. Paul says, We await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself.

Our lowly body will become like his glorious body, but notice Paul says more, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself. In other words, it's not just our bodies, it's the whole of creation that's going to be transformed.

When Christ comes again, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, nature will regain. Well, no, it won't regain Eden. It will be even better than Eden.

The Corinthians had this pseudo-spiritual idea that matter was evil and spirit was good. C.S. Lewis could have told them, as he says in one of his books, God likes matter.

[5 : 05] He made it. So if God made heaven and earth, he is committed to them and he is going to renew them. Now, how does Paul develop his argument then? I want to suggest Paul develops his argument in three stages.

First of all, in verses 35 to 49, he says, Look at creation and history. Look around you. Look at the created order. Look at history.

Secondly, he says in verses 50 to 52, Expect transformation. And finally, in verses 53 to 58, he says, Be encouraged.

These are the three things we're going to look at. First of all, look at creation and history. Now, Paul is saying in verses 35 and following, If you look at the created order, you'll find that this principle of death and resurrection is written into it.

God has made the universe so that bodies can move from one existence to another, different forms adapted to different conditions. The dominant word in this section is body.

[6 : 14] Now, that's not just flesh. It means material form. Anything material which can move from one set of existence to another. We're familiar with this.

A caterpillar becoming a butterfly. And that sort of thing is a very obvious example. Bodies are fitted to the situation of which they're made. So he says, Look at the earth.

Verse 36. The picture of the seed. You foolish person. I wonder if you have to be an apostle to get away with saying that. But anyway, I'm simply quoting him when I say, You foolish person.

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And foolish person is fool in the sense of the Old Testament use of the word. The fool says in his heart, There is no God.

The Richard Dawkins fool who weaves God out of consideration. The fool is not somebody who is stupid. The fool may be an ox or professor. But he is foolish because he leaves God out of reckoning.

[7 : 17] And Paul says, If you look at the earth, If you look at the seed, You will see that the seed dies, But death is not as strong as life.

Because the seed grows again. Verse 37. What you sow is not the body that is to be, But a bare kernel, Perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

The seed doesn't look like the plant, Which grows from it. Nevertheless, There is an organic connection. An organic unity. And similarly, In animal life, God, All flesh is not the same.

One kind for humans, Another for animals, Another for birds, And another for fish. Now you'll notice the important phrase in verse 38. God gives it. This is not just natural processes.

God has built this into the universe. In the universe, There is this principle that bodies can move from one form of existence to another. So he says, Look at the earth. Look around you.

[8 : 16] And then he says, Look at the sky. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, But the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, And the glory of the earthly is another. Look at the sky, And see the amazing beauty of a, Say for example, Of a glorious sunny day, Or a moonlit night, Or a starry sky.

Look at that, And see to you, See what God can do. And he says, What's written in nature, Is going to happen fully at the resurrection. So it is, With the resurrection of the dead.

And he uses four contrasts. What is sown is perishable. That is to say, What is sown in the field of this world, Is marked by weakness, By illness, Ultimately by death.

Death, But it is raised imperishable. That doesn't, That means more than just the decay is reversed. It means that the new body, Is no longer subject to decay.

No longer is it possible, For that body to decay. It is sown in dishonor. After all, Death is the ultimate human weakness, Is it not?

[9 : 31] Let, We, We reach the point, Where no longer, Are we in control of anything, And we simply cease to exist. Let down by sin, Let down by our physicality.

But, He says, It is sown in dishonor, It is raised in glory. Like the glorified Christ, Who appears to John, In the book of Revelation, His face shining like the sun.

It is sown in weakness, We cannot ultimately prevent death. This is an age of course, When we live as if we could prevent death.

The number of, Of course the advances in medicine, In technology and so on, Which we welcome, Have caused it, Have made it possible, For many people to live longer, And all these kind of, Age

defying, And wrinkle hiding creams, And all the rest of it, Which, I will say nothing about at all, It is sown in weakness, We cannot ultimately prevent decay, We cannot ultimately prevent death, But it is raised in power, In resurrection bodies, Young, Vibrant, Strong, And free. Who knows, May even get my hair back then. And you will lose your wrinkles, You will lose all these signs, Of aging, And the man of dust, It is, Sown a natural body, And then here is his master stroke, It is raised a spiritual body, The Corinthians thought, There was a total contrast, Between spirit and body, Paul says, Not a bit of it, You are going to have a body, But it is going to be, A spiritual body, So let's look at creation, What God has writ large in creation, Is going to happen, At resurrection, And then he says, Look at history, Look at the beginning of history, Look at Adam, And then at the end of history, From creation, To new creation, The first Adam, Became a living being, Verse 45, This Adam-Christ contrast, Adam only received life, Adam had no power, To give himself life, Adam was created, Indeed that is the essence, Of the Genesis story, Human beings are created, [11 : 44] Three times in Genesis 1, Humanity is described as, Created, Created, Created, That is the essence, Of being human, That we are created, We are not life giving, We are only life receiving, But Christ gives life, Notice that Paul says, We cannot escape the sequence, Because we belong, To the man of dust, As well as to the man, From heaven, Because we belong, To the man of dust, We will die, Unless Christ returns, Before then, But because we belong, To the man of heaven, We will be transformed, Into his image, Verse 49, Just as we have borne, The image of the man of dust, We shall also bear, The image of the man of heaven, And there is the story, Of human history, From Genesis 3 onwards, The conflict, And the contrast, Between the man of dust, And the man of heaven, And this, And this word, Image, In verse 49, Is really the transformation, Transition, Sorry, To the next section,

Because the theme of the next section, Is going to be transformation, The theme of this first section, Is body, Look at creation, Look at history, And look at the physical universe, Now he says, Expect transformation, Now Paul has been at his most eloquent, This is a glorious passage, One of my lecturers in Edinburgh, Used to say that Paul of Tarsus, Had no idea of poetry, No idea of literary style, He'd obviously never read this, Because this is a wonderful, Glorious passage, And Paul is at his, His most powerful, And most poignant, But surely that leaves, All the nagging questions, Doesn't it?

We still get older, We still die, We still sin, At this time of year, It's wonderful, To see the, The blossom coming out again, The vegetation returning, The trees putting out the leaves, Doesn't happen to us though, Does it?

We don't, We're not suddenly renewed, In the first bloom of youth, Every Easter, It just doesn't happen, I know we would like to be, But it doesn't happen, And that's why Paul is saying, Why Paul is saying this, That flesh and blood, Cannot inherit, The kingdom of God, In other words, The present body, The present body, Which belongs to the man of dust, Cannot unchanged, Untransformed, Enter the kingdom of God, Now Paul has been dealing, Up to now, With what happens to those Christians, Who have already died, Those, And of course, Immeasurably increase, Since Paul wrote these words, What he said, These Christians, Who have died, Whose bodies, Are like John Brown's, Mouldering in the grave, Those bodies, Are going to be resurrected, But more than resurrected, They're going to be transformed, Now he is turning, Well what happens, To the living, What happens, To that last generation, Of Christians, Who are alive, When Christ returns, That's what he's turning to now, And he says, This is a mystery, Verse 51, Behold, I tell you, A mystery, A mystery, A mystery, A mystery is not, A whodunit, In this context, A mystery, Is something, That we can only know, If God reveals it, In other words, Nature, Creation, History, Can tell us something, The footsteps of God, Are writ large, In both, In both of these, Like what the psalmist says, In Psalm 77, Your footsteps, Were in the sea, And your path, In the great waters, But just because of that, They were unseen, Paul is revealing to us now, First of all, That the living, Will be transformed, As well, As the dead, It's not just, That the dead, Will be raised, Incorruptible, It's that the living, Will also be transformed, Now from the moment, Of conversion, We begin, The journey, Towards the image, Of the man of heaven, That's what happens, [15 : 43] The moment, We are converted, We begin that, Journey towards, His likeness, And as we all know, It's a very erratic, Journey isn't it, It's not a, It's not a smooth, Uninhibited progress, We often, We often fall, We often get it wrong, Nevertheless, When Christ returns, This will be, Complete, It's not something, That we have to work at, And hope, That somehow or other, We will make it, Behold, He says, I tell you, We shall not all sleep, Not all, Every Christian will die, But every

Christian, Whether they've died or not, Will be transformed, Resurrection bodies, Like Jesus' very own, As we sang, And the second thing, He says, Is that this transformation, Will be instantaneous, There will be no purgatory, There will be no lengthy process, Problem about a view, Such as purgatory, Is it, More or less argues, That the work of Christ, On the cross,

Wasn't adequate, That there needs to be, A further work, That goes on, After death, Before we can, Enter his presence, Notice as Paul, This will be, Notice the words he uses, In a moment, In the twinkling, Of an eye, The smallest movement, That you can make, You almost, You know, We often say, If you blink, You'll miss it, Well, That is the kind of, Time scale, He's talking about, This instant, Transformation, At the last trumpet, Now in Isaiah 27, The last trumpet, Summons God's people home, From all over the world, Isaiah is talking, First and foremost, About God's people, Returning to Jerusalem, After the exile, But he's looking further, Into the future, As God's people, From earth's wide bounds, From ocean's furthest coast, Through gates of peril, Streaming the countless host, As the old hymn says, And in Zechariah, Chapter 9, That same trumpet, Announces the coming, Of the Lord, So see how Paul is taking up,

The big picture, That last trumpet, He says, That the old testament, Prophets spoke about, It was looking, Far beyond the return, To Jerusalem, It's looking to the time, When all of God's people, Will be changed, Will be transformed, Those who have died, Will be raised, And will be given, Resurrection bodies, Those who are still alive, Will receive those bodies, Without passing, Through death, Now it is staggering, And you can see, Why he calls it, A mystery, You can see why, This is something, That God has to reveal, To us, Because the empirical evidence, Doesn't seem to, After all, When a Christian dies, A Christian, The body of a Christian, Doesn't look any different, From the body of anyone else, But Paul says, By revelation, By the word of the Lord, I'm telling you, You're going to be like Christ, So if all that's true then, Paul says, In the final verses, Verses 53 to 58, Be encouraged, And,

I know, I want to start, At the last verse, That sounds stupid, Because, That implies, That Paul got it wrong, I'm not implying that at all, I'm simply saying, The important thing, To realize, Is that Paul is picking up, This word in vain, From the beginning of the chapter, Verse 2, He said, If you hold fast, To the word I preach to you, Unless you believed, In vain, Unless it was futile, The ecclesiastus word, The Hebrew word, Hevel, Which means, Empty, Futile, This is what the world is, Without God, And without Christ, Paul is saying, It is not, In vain, Verse 53, This perishable body, Must put on the imperishable, And this mortal body, Must put on immortality, Now must, Is an important word there, Sometimes we use the word must, We use it rather frantically, And helplessly, Because we're not at all convinced, That it's going to happen, Oh you must do this, Knowing perfectly well, The person isn't very likely, To do it, This is not that kind of, Frantic, Helpless must, This, Why must, This happen, It must happen, Because God has said, It will happen, That is why Paul says, We must, The perishable, Must put on the imperishable, And this mortal body, Must put on immortality, Just as earlier, He said in verse 25, He must reign, These are things, That are going to happen, Remember all through this passage, Paul has been talking about, According to the scriptures, And once again now, In this final section, He returns to the Old Testament prophets, He said, Read the prophets, They saw this, They knew this, They didn't see it fully, But read the prophets, And you'll see what's happening, Verse 50, 54, When the perishable, Puts on the imperishable, And the mortal, Puts on immortality, Then shall come to pass, The saying that is written,

[20 : 47] Death is swallowed up, In victory, A quotation from Isaiah 25, Who talks about death, Being swallowed, In the ancient world, There was a God, The God of death, Whose jaws, Reached from heaven to earth, And swallowed everything, That is going to, That comes his way, Paul says, The swallower, Is going to be swallowed, The destroyer, Is going to be destroyed, Paul is taunting death here, It's the laughter of Sam 2, He who sits in the heavens, Laughs, This is glorious, This is wonderful, Rather like a cartoon, I once saw, It was a, Apparently four Roman soldiers, Were sitting together, One evening in a tavern, In Jerusalem, One of them said, You heard about this guy, Called Jesus, The other said, No I can't say I have, His friend replied, Well, He's been mixed up, In four funerals, And he's spoiled, Every one of them, There is, This is the kind of spirit, In which Paul is speaking here, Death, Swallowed up,

In victory, And in Hosea, Death, Victory, Snatched away, Now once again, The prophets are looking forward, To the return from exile, God's people have been swallowed up, In exile, In a kind of death, As they had gone down to Babylon, A place from which Abraham, Had come, Many generations before, Now, It looks forward, To this greater victory, The victory over death, The words spoken,

Will be fulfilled, Heaven and earth, Said Jesus, Will pass away, But my words, Will not pass away, It must happen, Because God has said it, And where has he said it, He said it in scripture, And these Old Testament prophets, Are part of this great tapestry, Leading up to this final drama, And he says, We shall share in Christ's victory, Verse 57, Thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory, Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Yes, But what about verse 56, It seems to be irrelevant, The sting of death is sin, And the power of sin, Is the law, Surely Paul is reminding us, That, Of the big picture, Death is defeated, But death is still powerful, We cannot raise ourselves, And the law is good, Because it shows us our sins, And he's also reminding us, That death is not just a natural process, But the result of sin, The sting of death is sin, And the power of sin is the law, Notice how so often in the scriptures, This glorious, wonderful, Life changing truth, Is balanced by very practical things, After all, In the next chapter, He's going to say, On the first day of the week, Put something aside, And store it up, As he may prosper, In other words, If we're going to live, Resurrection lives, That has practical consequences, In our pockets, In our behaviour, And so it is here, And he's reminding us, That everything good, In this world,

And the next, Comes through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory, Through our Lord Jesus Christ, And then this, This final verse, Both very encouraging, And very realistic, What now, If you like, Because it could be many long years, Before this were to happen, Who knows, What any of us, May still have to face, Altogether, Apart from, Or the ordinary, Wear and tear of living, And Paul combines, Two things here, Which are very important, First of all, There is sober realism, About the present, All be steadfast, Immovable, When do we tell people, To be steadfast, And immovable, It's when they're in real difficulties, Isn't it, It's not going to be easy, The fact he used the word, Labor, Effort, Agony, Shows, It's going to be hard, And difficult, And tough, So he's realistic,

All these glories are true, They cannot be reversed, There is, There is no way, In which they can be stopped, Someone wrote a commentary, On the acts of the apostles, A number of years ago, Called, The gospel cannot be stopped, And Paul is convinced of that, The gospel cannot be stopped, And yet it's hard, And it's difficult, Notice he says, All was abounding, In other words, Not grudging and niggardly, But abounding, Doing it gratefully, For the Lord, So there's sober realism, About the present, It's not easy, It's not going to be easy, It's going to be tough, But also there is robust faith, About the future, Knowing, That your work for the church, Is not in vain, That's not what he says, Is it, Very often our work for the church, Is in vain, Isn't it, Because we do it, For the wrong motives, We fall out with people, And so on, In the Lord, Your labour is not in vain, That's what he's saying, It's not in vain,

[25 : 50] Because he is Lord, What do we mean, When we say that Jesus is Lord, We mean he's going to have, The last word, We mean that, What he has begun, He will continue, God who has begun, A good work in you, Will continue it, And complete it, Until the day of Jesus Christ, So ultimately, This gospel, Which is cross shaped, And resurrection shaped, Is not in vain, We have a gospel, If we didn't have the resurrection, We would have no gospel, And that gospel, Is a reality, So wonderful, So glorious, That we cannot begin to imagine it, Paul has already said, Earlier in the letter, I have not seen, Nor ear heard, Nor has it entered, The human heart, What God has prepared, For those who love him, So as we finish, Two things, First of all, The resurrection, Makes sense, Of the big picture, It holds, The stories, Of creation, And salvation, Together, The story of creation, Is that God, Made heaven and earth,

The story of the resurrection, Is that God, Will make a new heaven, And a new earth, And that depends, On the death, And resurrection, Of the Lord Jesus Christ, But the second thing, Is the significance, Of the present, We can do work, That will last, Into eternity, But that's another way, Of putting, Your labor is not in vain, Another way of saying this, Your work will last, Into eternity, Not everything we do, Will last into eternity, Many of the things we do, Will be burned up, As Paul says, Back in chapter 3, About, Burned, Saved us by fire, And yet, Because Christ is risen, Because he has conquered, What we do, In his name, And for his sake, Will last into eternity, Therefore, My beloved brothers and sisters, Be steadfast, Immovable, Always abounding, In the work of the Lord, Knowing that in the Lord, Your labor is not in vain, Amen, Let's pray, Amen, Let's pray, Amen, God our fathers,

As we struggle, To hold together, These glorious truths, Which we believe, And the mundane realities, Which confront us, We pray, That by Your Spirit, We may be, Greatly encouraged, That You will, Strengthen our faith, That You will, Quicken our hearts, And that You will, Lead us, Day by

day, Into His likeness, Until the day, When we see Him, Face to face, Amen, Amen,