

He Is the New Humanity

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[0 : 0 0] Now, if any of you missed this morning's service, you should know that our dear sister in Christ, Elizabeth Graham, has gone home to be with the Lord.

She loved Jesus dearly, and so we know that she fell asleep in the Lord. And we know that she woke instantly in the presence of her King.

She woke unencumbered by mortal weakness, frailty, unencumbered by sin, by suffering.

So we miss her now, and we just carry on for a while as we wait for our turn, knowing that we'll be with her again soon. Now I prayerfully chose this text for the sermon well before I knew that death would hit home so soon.

But praise God that he knew, and the Spirit wanted us to hear tonight about resurrection. Isn't he kind?

[1 : 1 0] Now, 1 Corinthians 15 is a big chapter, and there's a lot in it. But here's what I really want to get at tonight.

Everything that we do in this life proclaims either death wins or life wins.

Every decision, every action, every act of service, every act of self-service proclaims in some way to others or to your own heart, either death and despair or life and purpose, meaningfulness.

What we believe about death should completely change the way that we live. That's the trajectory of this whole chapter. That's why Paul ends the chapter in verse 58.

It's his purpose statement when he says, be steadfast. He says, therefore, be steadfast and immovable, abound in the work of the Lord, and know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[2 : 1 7] That's what he's driving at. I know it's a long chapter, but let's just think through and summarize what Paul's been getting at in 1 Corinthians 15.

He begins by talking about how important the resurrection of Jesus is. And then he works that out. He fleshes that out. He says, on the one hand, if Christ wasn't raised from the dead, then our faith is futile.

We're still in our sins. Death is forever, and we Christians are the most pitiable people on the planet. And then there's that excellent but God, you know, come one of those but moments in the Bible where he says, but Christ has been raised from the dead.

And so because of that, he says, we will be raised too. Death will be destroyed, and so we should live like it.

That's just a summary of his argument. That's why at the end he says, therefore, be steadfast and immovable. That's the goal of Paul's chapter, and that's the goal of the sermon, is the Lord wants us to become those kind of people.

[3 : 3 2] Not unsteady but steady, not flimsy but immovable, not full of doubt that everything we do and everything we suffer has no purpose but knowing that our labors in the Lord are not in vain.

So how do we become people like that? Well, we need to get to grips with three things. The first is the foundation, the union, and the death of death.

All right. Number one, the foundation. In verse three, Paul says that this is of first importance. This is the foundation of everything. It's the linchpin that holds the faith together.

Jesus, the Son of God, became a human, which is incredible. But maybe even more incredible is that he died.

And most remarkably, that he came back from death. He came through death and came out the other side, not just a resuscitation. He didn't just come back as a normal mortal.

[4 : 3 6] He came back as a new creation with a body that will go on forever in surging vitality.

We humans have a shelf life. If I had a lid, I'd have an expiration date written on the top of my lid. Check the top.

We all have one. Paul says that in the resurrection, what was perishable is raised imperishable. What was weak is raised in power.

So when Jesus stepped out of that grave 2,000 years ago, it was with a glorified, new resurrection body. He is the true human.

Jesus is the blueprint for what humanity was always designed to become. And Paul says, if that's not true, why bother?

[5 : 37] If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead like that, then really nothing matters. And we can just do as we please. Friedrich Nietzsche was being entirely logical when he said that if God is dead, we might as well be as just immoral and opportunistic as we like.

That's reasonable, actually. But God is not dead. Jesus did not stay in that grave. He is alive. And that is the bedrock foundation of our faith.

Without that foundation, there is no purpose in anything. But with that foundation, there is purpose in everything.

And that includes suffering, by the way. If Jesus is alive, then all of your suffering and your loneliness and your weakness and your frailty has a glorious purpose.

Derek preached this morning from Revelation 14.13, blessed are those who die in the Lord, blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors for their deeds.

[6 : 48] Follow them. The resurrection, the foundation of our faith, means that every act of mercy, every deed done in the name of Christ, every ounce of suffering is not in vain, but has a purpose.

That's the foundation. Now, number two, the union. I'm talking about union with Christ. We are united to Christ when we put our faith in Jesus.

Paul talks about this constantly in a strange way. He says that as Christians, we are in Christ, we are in the Lord. What he means is we are so united to Jesus in his death and resurrection that what happens to Jesus happens to us.

That's why Paul calls Jesus the first fruits in verse 20. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

First fruits are only first fruits if they're second fruits. First fruits make sense if there's a whole harvest on the way. Let me use an absurd illustration.

[8 : 08] Imagine standing on a skateboard. It might take a lot of imagining for some of us. Imagine standing on a skateboard and holding onto the end of a rope. It's a long coiled rope in front of you and the other end of that rope is tied to the end of a car.

There you are on your skateboard with this rope and that car starts to drive down the street. In that moment, the most certain thing in the world is that you are going to follow that car probably faster than you'd like.

The skateboard is if you like, united to the car by the rope. You, if you believe in Jesus, are united to Jesus by the spirit and he's on the move.

So he's gone through death and he's come out the other side, glorious new creation human, resurrected in a body of surging vitality that will go on forever.

And the most certain thing in the world for us Christians is that you're going to follow him if you are united to him.

[9 : 22] Jesus is alive and glorious and we will be alive and have new creation bodies one day like his because he earned that reward for us.

Jesus obeyed God perfectly in our place and died the death that we should have died and he gives us the reward. Isn't that crazy?

Donald McLeod writes that the believer's resurrection body will be as glorious as the obedience of God's own son deserves.

Think about that. Jesus is 36 and 37, Paul writes, what you sow is using agricultural gardening language.

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be but a barycarnal, perhaps of wheat or some other grain.

[10 : 22] Our bodies are like a seed and seeds must die in order to become what they were meant to be.

When we are in Christ then we're like a seed which has a glorious and eternal future to stand tall in the eternal light of the sun which means that suffering and death is not the barrier to life.

It's not the thing standing between us and life and getting in the way. It's the doorway into that life. Some of you may know Tim Keller, the preacher from the states, is probably in his final months with the terminal cancer diagnosis.

And I heard on a remarkable interview the other day, he said, I'm not fighting cancer, I'm fighting sin.

He knows. Elizabeth knew. Suffering and death is not the barrier to life. It's the doorway.

[11 : 29] The seed must die but the flower will be lovely. Number three, the death of death.

Jesus conquered death 2,000 years ago but death will be finally defeated. The last blow will be leveled on death when we've all been changed, when we've all been resurrected into our glorious Christ-like bodies and be with Jesus.

Verse 54, and following, when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Every part of this life is proclaiming either death wins or life wins.

How then will we live? Will we accept our labor of love and service in the Lord? Will we accept good times and hard times from the hand of our King?

[12 : 51] Will we do war with our sin? Or will we do whatever we want, seeking all the earthly comforts we can?

Will we proclaim with our lives the victory of death ultimately or the victory of Jesus, the Lord of life? That's the choice in front of us.

In verse 2, Paul reminds us, he says, I would remind you of the gospel you believed unless you believed in vain. I wonder if we have a category for believing in vain.

That's what our theme this year of hearing and doing is kind of all about. If we live like death wins by fleeing from difficult things and running to comforts outside of the Lord by making out like truces with our sin, if we live like that, then we can agree with the gospel all we like, but it's completely in vain.

If we believe the gospel, we've got to live like it. That totally changes the way that we see suffering now. Difficulty.

[14 : 04] Joni Erickson Tata, if I'm saying her name right, she was only 17 when she had a diving accident and broke her neck. And she became paralyzed from the shoulders down.

No use at all of her hands or her feet. And on a radio program that she hosted one day, she said this, let me read it to you. I always say that in a way, I hope I can take my wheelchair to heaven with me.

I know that's not theologically correct, but if I were able, I would have my wheelchair up in heaven right next to me when God gives me my brand new glorified body. And I will then turn to Jesus and say, Lord, do you see that wheelchair right there?

Well, you were right when you said that in this world, we would have trouble because that wheelchair was a lot of trouble. But Jesus, the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you.

And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. So thank you for what you did in my life through that wheelchair.

[15 : 10] And now you can send that wheelchair to hell if you want. Joni knew, Joni knew how the Lord uses difficulty in our lives, how he doesn't work in spite of our mortal human weaknesses, but through them.

Do you see how the resurrection of Jesus can make us into steady, immovable Christians full of purpose?

If you lean on Jesus in your weakness, you'll find not only is he strong, but that he will raise you up one day into such a life that your life now will, it will be the difference between like a sunflower and a seed in the palm of your hand.

Which one seems more alive? Let me just end by saying something which is really easy to forget. I think it's particularly a problem of my generation.

Heaven, this is so important. Heaven is not going to be a bunch of disembodied spirits floating around playing harps in the clouds. That is not our eternal future.

[16 : 31] That's boring. That is not what we're in for with Christ. In the new creation, the new heavens and new earth, you will have such a body because you will have need of a body.

Jesus is preparing a glorious body for you because he's preparing a glorious place for you. And if that's our future, we can take whatever he gives us in this life.

So let's live like that's true. Let's kill the sins. The fruit of sin is death. Let's be done with that. Let's lean on Jesus and our weakness and in our suffering and find that he is strong and let's know for certainty that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Let's pray. God of all comforts. Lord of life.

We come to you this evening in awe of your power that you would raise your son up through death that death could not hold Jesus down.

[17 : 55] And we come tonight in awe of your kindness that you would so unite us to your son that we share in his life.

We praise you for the immovable hope that we have in Jesus.

The hope that changes the tincture of our grief from despair to something beautiful.

And so we do grieve and we miss Elizabeth already, but not as those without hope.

We lift up the whole Graham family now, Billy, and everybody, Lord, and they were so well loved on multiple continents for all those who are just broken up over the loss of their dear friend, mother, wife.

[19 : 07] Lord would you be so near to them and make Jesus so glorious in this moment?

We ask it for the glory of Christ, for the joy of seeing you face to face one day.

Amen.