

# Resurrection: Physical & Spiritual

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Preaching on:  
1 Corinthians 15:35–50

This morning I'm closing my four-part "fundamentals" of Christianity sermon series. We began with repentance—the opportunity to realign myself totally with the values of the Kingdom of God. In part two that led us to the core values of the Kingdom of God: love and justice. Part three was a reminder that (despite our calling to act out our faith) what we long to be transformed into through love and justice is ultimately something more than human, more than we can do on our own, and it requires God's activity, God's grace. So, this morning, where does this journey finally lead us? What are we being transformed into by God through repentance, love, justice, and grace? This morning we're talking about resurrection.

Now, if you were to ask the average Christian, "Where does our faith journey ultimately lead us? What is our final destination?" the average Christian would respond, "Heaven." And that's what we teach our children, right? In Sunday School for sure but also every time somebody dies, we teach our kids that the departed person has gone to heaven, and we'll see them again when we go to heaven. We believe and we teach that heaven is our ultimate destination. It's simple, it's clean, and it's spiritual.

Our kids do learn about resurrection—mostly in the Easter season. And we usually learn that resurrection is something that happened *to Jesus*. And if we believe that resurrection has anything to do with us, it's usually in some kind of poetic or symbolic or perfectly natural sense. Resurrection is about life victorious death. Resurrection is about social renewal and revolution. Resurrection is about springtime blossoms. But resurrection isn't about me, it isn't going to happen to us, it's not on our itinerary. Is it?

The Bible talks a lot about heaven. And if you read your Bible after losing grandma and grandpa and being taught that they're in heaven waiting for you and after Sunday School lessons that teach you that believing in Jesus is about getting that golden ticket to heaven after you die, then it's easy to read many of those passages as reinforcement that heaven is our ultimate spiritual destination.

The Bible also talks a lot about resurrection—our resurrections. I mean a lot a lot. But we're not so sure, right? Resurrection is messy, it's weird, and it seems a little too physical to be an ultimate destination, right? So, we kinda skip over it. If heaven is the ultimate destination, let me just worry about that and let someone else worry about some of the Bible's weirder details.

But resurrection isn't just a detail. You can't escape the centrality of resurrection in the New Testament or the fact that if you read your Bible naïvely (without any preconceived notions), it's clear that early Christians like the Apostle Paul believed that resurrection is the Christian's ultimate destiny. It wasn't until later that theologians began to develop ideas about an intermediate, heavenly waiting place before resurrection. And over time those ideas about the "afterlife" began to lose their temporary status and began to feel ultimate, overshadowing the core Christian teaching of resurrection.

Now, to be clear, I'm not saying that grandma and grandpa aren't in heaven. I fully believe that the soul survives death. But what we believe our ultimate destination is matters because we're called so fundamentally to live out our faith in this world. I think there's a difference between heavenly faith and resurrection faith.

If heaven is the ultimate destination, it's too easy to lose faith in God's creation. We might begin to think that the Earth doesn't matter—that we can trash it, that it doesn't deserve the same respect that we would offer to heaven. We would never landfill toxic waste in heaven, right? But this place? It's just a temporary dumping ground for the time being. And these bodies of ours? Well, they don't really matter either. Our sufferings and our pleasures, our desires and our hungers, our emotions and our feelings, they're all just physical distractions from the spiritual life. The body is in the way—a prison for the spirit that will one day be permanently left behind.

But if resurrection is the ultimate destination, the body isn't a prison, it's a temple. It's not a distraction, it's an integral part of the evolving process. And so is the rest of God's creation. The Christian's resurrection faith reminds her that Christian spirituality is physical from beginning to end. And for the Christian, the physical world is spiritual. It's not heaven AND earth, it's heaven-and-earth. Our ultimate goal as Christians is not to escape this existence through death. Our ultimate goal as Christians is to play our part in God's resurrection and transformation of all creation. We can't do it on our own. We need God. But God also can't do it without us, without our commitment to the transformation that we believe is coming. What we commit ourselves to matters.

We think about resurrection mostly on Easter. And we tend to think that we have two choices of what to believe in on Easter morning. We can either believe in the literal resurrection—that's the physical one that Bible teaches about. Or we can believe in some sort of allegorical resurrection—that's the one where we take all those wild Easter stories with a grain of salt, but we still affirm that the teaching of resurrection contains some profound spiritual truth. Literal or allegorical. Physical or spiritual. But this is a false dichotomy. It is the false dichotomy that Christianity is so much a part of perpetuating and also trying so hard to overcome. We see it throughout our culture: Scientific, physicalist progress in the form of new technologies divorced from meaning, miracles, and consequences on the one hand. And on the other hand, old-school, fundamentalist escapism from the demands and the opportunities of the physical world. But what if resurrection redefines all those boundaries? What if resurrection is both literal and allegorical, physical and spiritual? What if resurrection encompasses the entirety of the human experience?

That's precisely what Paul tells us resurrection is in 1 Corinthians. Paul believed, without any contradiction or difficulty, that the resurrection body—the ultimate destination for me and you and everybody—is both a physical and a spiritual body. This helps us make a lot more sense of those wild Easter stories where people don't recognize Jesus right away, or he sort of just appears in the room with you and eats a fish off the table. The resurrection is the perfect and final integration, final balance

between our physical and our spiritual natures. On the other side of resurrection, there will no longer be physical and spiritual, there will have to be some some new word, maybe like a celebrity dating mashup: Let's call it a "physiritual" or "spirisical" existence. It's a harmonious blending of the physical and spiritual, an integrated, transformed life. This is the ultimate goal of our faith journey—a new creation where heaven and earth are united, and the physical and the spiritual coexist without boundaries. And if our culture as a whole were to begin to understand this—were to begin to understand that Christianity is not a war between the physicalists and spiritualists—just imagine how we might develop, what we might discover, how our commitment to love and justice and the values of the Kingdom of God might grow.

Resurrection, then, is not just an event we anticipate after death, but a process we participate in now. It redefines how we see ourselves, our lives, and the world around us. We are called to live resurrection lives, embracing the physical and spiritual as one. To live with love, justice, and grace is to embody the transformative power of resurrection in the here and now—enabling God to work through us in renewing all of creation.

How would your faith change if you shifted your future gaze from heaven to resurrection? How might that shift change how you live in the world? What would it be like to physical and spiritual all at once without any estrangement or contradiction? Is it possible that you and I can glimpse that future existence in the here and now, that we could expand our own capacity and the capacity of our wider culture to experience our existence as a resurrection in progress? May we live as resurrection people, deeply connected to these bodies, to this world, and to their transformation. Amen.