

The Imperfect Church – 29  
The Eternal Church  
1 Corinthians 15:35-49

### Introduction

Sam Leith is an English author and literary editor of the British Newsmagazine *The Spectator*. He spends most of his time reading great pieces of writing. However, he enthusiastically makes the case for playing video games, which are supposedly mindless and a waste of time. Leith asks if the time spent playing video games is pointless. "Well, possibly—but it's ... pointless in the same way meditation is pointless ... and playing or following sport is pointless. It's a pointless thing that fulfils a foundational human need. Not being able to bear very much reality, and all that."

Leith's main point is that these games offer an escape from the often grim, harsh, and mundane experience of real life. Life can be cruel and often doesn't give you second chances. "Out here ... things fall apart. Time runs only one way. But in the game world, the resurrection of the virtual flesh is not a miracle but a routine occurrence. There's always another life, another try, the possibility of remaking the world of the game afresh."

Why are video games so popular? Is it only because they help us escape from reality? Or is possibly because they offer at least a muted experience of resurrection? Isn't this why we learned Up/Up/Down/Down/Left/Right/Left/Right/BABA/Start to get 30 lives instead of 3 in Nintendo games? Could it be that we crave the do-over, the mulligan, and endless opportunity to live? Perhaps that desire is stamped onto our souls.

TS – As we continue in 1 Corinthians 15 we find ourselves in the heart of Paul's teaching on the resurrection. In the early verses, Paul, a first-century church leader, establishes the gospel, the Good News of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. That is the most important thing that matters more than anything else. It is the one thing that defines our lives. Today, let's ask a simple question - so what? Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. He rose from the dead on the third day. So what? What difference does that make today for those who believe that?

TS - The Bible will now give us two guarantees because Jesus has risen from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection guarantees...

## 1. OUR RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 - <sup>20</sup> But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

<sup>21</sup> So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. <sup>22</sup> Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. <sup>23</sup> But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

Because of the truth of the gospel, we know that death is not the end for those who trust in Jesus. Jesus' resurrection, he says, is the first of a great harvest. He rose first, so that the rest of us can rise later. His resurrection guarantees our own.

Think maybe of Christ's resurrection as a store receipt. If you're in a department store and you buy something, you always make sure you have the receipt. Why? Because if you're still walking around the store a security person could stop you and ask to see it. Or when you are walking out of Wal-Mart and they have that little "security" setup at the exit to check your receipt. And if you don't have a receipt you could get in trouble. So you if somebody stops you, you want to be able to hold up your receipt and say, "Oh, dear security person, trouble me not because this receipt proves that this has been paid for and I do not have to pay it again." The resurrection is a giant receipt stamped across history for all people to see, a receipt that allows you to know that your future is certain, you are all paid for and good to go.

Or maybe as Tim Keller puts it: "If someone goes into jail because the law says that ten years in jail is the punishment for the crime, the day that man comes out of jail he has paid for the crime. That law doesn't have a claim on him anymore. He's free man. The wages of sin is death, and when Christ went down into death, he paid for our debt. When he came up out of the grave that meant it was paid. Christ's resurrection proves that it was fully paid." The penalty for your sins has been paid for. Jesus already died your death, so now that penalty has no claim on you. You are paid in full! His resurrection guarantees that.

To make his point, Paul will go all the way back to the very beginning of history in Genesis 3. He reminds us that death came to the human race through Adam when he and Eve sinned against God in an event called The Fall. God's perfect creation, the innocence of humanity...all of it was broken and stained by sin. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus and Adam are compared and contrasted, even going as far as calling Jesus 'The Second Adam.'

Romans 5:15 - <sup>15</sup> But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.

So now because of Jesus, death no longer reigns supreme. It doesn't have to be the final voice. Forgiveness, grace, new life...those now reign because of Jesus. Because of Jesus, we too will experience the resurrection from the dead.

Now let's be honest for a couple minutes...we really don't talk about this much do we? This isn't high on the topic list of normal conversation, even in church. Very few sermons on this topic. Why? Because it can leave us with more questions than answers. There is much we don't understand.

We struggle with the idea of eternity, of never-ending time. We struggle with the nature of Heaven. What will it be like? We chafe with this issue because some of our popular concepts of heaven and eternity sound awful. Science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov expressed the attitude many have about heaven when he wrote, "I don't believe in the afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse."

Sadly, a similar view of the afterlife is common even among Christians. Our vision of heaven is often limited to an extended, boring, uninspiring church service. Many see it as a place where we will mosey about among clouds in long white gowns while strumming on harps. Somehow our image of heaven has become grotesquely distorted, and the prospect of life after death has not captured our imaginations or transformed our lives.

Apologist Sean McDowell wrote that he asked a room full of students what they would do if they had only three days left to live before they died and went to heaven. How would they spend those few remaining days? Answers included skydiving, traveling, surfing, and (of course) having sex. He

followed up with a simple question: "So, you think there may be pleasures and experiences in this life that if you don't do them before you die, you will miss out on altogether because they won't exist in heaven?" All but two students answered yes. He ends by writing this: "The prospect of heaven dismayed and disappointed them."

I've heard well-meaning worship leaders coerce people into singing during their worship service because "that's all we are going to be doing in Heaven, so we better get used to it." I'm sorry, but singing is not my favorite part of a worship service. I love it, I enjoy it, but preaching is what captures my attention. That's why I'm a preacher, not a worship leader...plus the fact that I don't have any talent whatsoever!

Perhaps the greatest question we have about eternity and the resurrection is one the Corinthians were already asking - what will we be like? How does this even work?

1 Corinthians 15:35-44 - <sup>35</sup> But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" <sup>36</sup> What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. <sup>37</sup> And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. <sup>38</sup> Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed. <sup>39</sup> Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. <sup>41</sup> The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory. <sup>42</sup> It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. <sup>43</sup> Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. <sup>44</sup> They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

There is a lot of odd language here that we will walk through, but Paul's main point is this - our resurrected bodies will be nothing like our current bodies. And isn't that good news?! I don't want to be stuck like this for eternity! We are encouraged here by an image we are familiar with...farming. The planting of seeds and the harvest of new life. Paul gives us four phrases that contrast our bodies now with our bodies then:

### —Temporary/Eternal

15:42b - Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever.

The reality that all of us must face is there is a day coming when our bodies will simply wear out. Everything in our bodies will fail. Death is inevitable. The stats on death are quite impressive - one out of every one person will die. Right now the stats are hovering at 100%. But Paul assures us that the passage of time will have no effect on the resurrection body. It will never fail. It will never quit.

### —Brokenness/Glory

15:43a - Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory.

Brokenness, we know what that is like. We live in a world with words like spina bifida, cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer's, cancer, autism, depression. One of my good friends turns 100 years old later this month. Macular degeneration has taken much of his eyesight and years of being around loud engines in the Air Force has taken much of his hearing. He has been, and still is frustrated by these things every single day. He longs for the wholeness of eternity.

My stepfather passed away in 2015, which prompted our move back to Illinois from Boston. He had muscular dystrophy. He longed for the day when he wouldn't be strapped to a wheelchair anymore. On November 2 of that year, at the moment of his death, he was able to walk for the first time in his life.

The bible assures us that no matter what brokenness our body may suffer from; God will deal with it when the time comes.

### —Weakness/Strength

15:43b - They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength.

Not only are our bodies temporary, in that they are all stamped with an expiration date, but as we grow older and move toward that date, our bodies grow weaker. We get to the point where the sports we used to play, that were once really fun for us, are now miserable to play - and you have to take aspirin...before...you play. So we trade baseball for softball, soccer for bowling, basketball for golf. And even those things start to hurt us!

Sometimes even the typical daily stuff we do becomes tedious. We run out of energy. The ability to clean up that room AGAIN is just gone. I get tired just watching my kids play. I turned 40 this past week, meaning I have fully entered the phase of getting injured, not by sports, but by sleeping or sneezing. But again, we are assured by God that our bodies will not always be this way. They will be raised with strength.

### —Natural/Spiritual

15:44 - They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies.

Our bodies not only suffer from physical weakness, but also suffer from spiritual weakness as well. Our bodies of flesh struggle with sin.

Romans 7:15-21 - <sup>15</sup> I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. <sup>16</sup> But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

<sup>18</sup> And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. <sup>19</sup> I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. <sup>20</sup> But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

<sup>21</sup> I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.

I know I can relate to that. We struggle with following Jesus like we want to. We mess up, we make mistakes. We fail. But a day is coming when new bodies will not be susceptible to sin. It won't be a struggle for us anymore. In fact, sin will no longer exist after Jesus returns. No more words spoken in anger we wish we could take back. No more lying that hurts someone we love. No more regrets over past decisions. No more abuse. No more disappointment.

Tim Keller tells the story that when his wife was growing up, every summer her family spent two weeks at a small compound of cottages on the shores of Lake Erie. Now the cottages are all gone—in fact that part of the beach is gone. Whenever she visits that childhood vacation spot, she weeps because she knows the beach is irretrievable. That sense of irretrievability is like a death. And the older we all get, the more we realize that certain losses are irretrievable; they're gone, and that sucks the joy out of our lives.

“But here's where Christ's resurrection offers something unique. Even religions that promise a kind of spiritual future or spiritual bliss, only offer consolation for what you've lost. But the resurrection of Christ even promises the restoration of what you've lost. You don't just get your body back; you get the body you always wanted but you never had. You don't just get your life back; you get the life that you always wanted that you never had.”

Friends, there is no religion, no philosophy, and no human being who can offer this kind of future. And as Christians our hope for the future is based on the historical fact of the resurrection. So if you are not a Christian, let me ask: Why wouldn't you want that? Even if you don't like different aspects of the Christian faith, why wouldn't you want this hope for restoration? You're not being honest with yourself if you say you don't want that.

TS - So all of that to say that we will be changed. We will not be as we are now. God restores all things. And that is good news. But why bother with all of this? Why is all this necessary? Paul answers that next.

1 Corinthians 15:50-54 - <sup>50</sup> What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.

<sup>51</sup> But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! <sup>52</sup> It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. <sup>53</sup> For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. <sup>54</sup> Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

You see, God has to change us. Because as we are, we are not fit for eternity. We wouldn't make it. We aren't equipped for forever. The way we are is not the way God wants us to be. He wants us to be with him forever. And because of the resurrection, we can be. Because of resurrection, those who trust in Jesus will be.

So the resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection and all that is included in that. But there is one more issue to discuss if we are going to understand the difference Jesus makes, one we will center on in a couple weeks.

In 15:54, Paul quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. So let's look at the original quote, because contained in it is the second guarantee because of Jesus' resurrection.

Isaiah 25:6-8 - *In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies*

*will spread a wonderful feast  
for all the people of the world.*

*It will be a delicious banquet  
with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat.*

*<sup>7</sup> There he will remove the cloud of gloom,  
the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.*

*<sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death forever!  
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears.  
He will remove forever all insults and mockery  
against his land and people.  
The Lord has spoken!*

The quote Paul uses is at the beginning of verse 8. But look at what was right before that.

Isaiah 25:7 - *<sup>7</sup> There he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.*

In speaking about eternity, God will remove the 'cloud of doom' and death itself. What is this 'cloud' that God will remove? This word is translated elsewhere as 'veil' or 'shroud.' And when it is used, it refers to 'ignorance.' Specifically, an ignorance of God. Because when you put a veil/shroud/cloud over something, you can't see it. You might be able to make out a general shape, but you won't get a completely accurate picture. This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote in:

1 Corinthians 13:12 - *<sup>12</sup> Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.*

TS - So as Paul quotes this passage in 1 Corinthians 15, he has these promises that Isaiah wrote about in mind. So what Paul is saying then in 1 Corinthians 15 is that Isaiah 25 and its promises are fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. Because of the resurrection, we get a clear picture of who God is. We are no longer ignorant of who God is. The cloud has been removed.

So Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection, but also...

## 2. GOD'S REVELATION

The resurrection reveals who God is. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have the assurance that we can know God. The New Testament has no shortage of references to the truth that the people of God will KNOW God.

1 John 3:1-2 - See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. <sup>2</sup> Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.

2 Corinthians 4:6 - <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 21:3-4 - <sup>3</sup> I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.

So the Bible is very clear - God's people will live where he lives, see him with their own eyes, KNOW him. He will no longer be blocked from our sight. These are great promises! We all want to live forever. We all want to know God. Jesus' resurrection guarantees the things. How can we ensure we are part of this deal? We must respond to the Gospel.

Believe/Repent/Confess/Baptize

Communion