

Resurrection

Dr. Steve Schell | John 11:17-27 | Week 6 Essential Doctrines

Excerpt from *Preaching Through John*, “Resurrection and Life” (Jn 11:17-27)

You aren't your body. You express yourself through your body; you are influenced by your body; you even have to take care of your body, but your existence is rooted in another dimension altogether. That's because God made you in His image, and He doesn't have a body. He is spirit (Jn 4:24). When He created Adam and Eve, He created rational, volitional, conscious beings who were able to know Him, obey Him, love Him and communicate with Him, person to person. He gave us a body, said it was “good,” and intends for us to have one forever. But you are not your body. No human is. Once conceived we are eternal spirits: rational, volitional, conscious beings.

I admit it can be difficult to remember this when someone dies. They look dead, but that's because the spiritual person isn't there anymore. He or she has gone somewhere else. Their body was just the “clothing” they once wore, and someday God will give them a new one. Without this perspective nothing in the Bible makes sense. The ideas we read there are based on the understanding that this season of time in which we now live on this planet is only a testing ground, so people can decide for or against God. Then based on the decision they make, they will spend the next season, which lasts forever, either with Him or separated from Him.

As we watch and listen to Jesus, it is quite evident that He was constantly seeing both dimensions, the physical and the spiritual. To Him the line between life and death was very thin. In no way did He think a human being ceased to exist when their body died. He spoke of people who died as simply stepping into another level of existence and knew that it was possible, given the right circumstances, for someone to return to their body. And what made that possible was Him. Wherever He was, that could happen because life radiated from Him like light shines from the sun (Jn 1:4). So in His presence dead things could come back to life... and He could give that gift of life to whomever He chose.

Standing on the outskirts of a little village called Bethany, Jesus tried to explain this truth to a grieving woman, but on that day the Father had given Him the assignment to do more than simply use words. His assignment was to demonstrate His power over death, to show her what He is going to do for her, and for all of us, someday. So He not only told her that He was the resurrection and the life; that day He proved it.

Read John 11:17-27

Arriving at Bethany

When Martha heard that Jesus was approaching the village, she quickly went out to intercept Him before her guests could discover He was there. Meanwhile, Mary remained in the house, possibly because she was overcome with grief, but possibly to keep the guests in place so Martha could sneak out undetected.

When Martha saw Him, she said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (v21). It's possible to interpret her words as a scolding, that she was asking Him why He had delayed. But if Lazarus died shortly after the sisters sent the messenger on his way, then this statement probably expressed only disappointment. Yet with her next breath she declared faith. She immediately added, “And [even] now, I know that whatever You ask God, God will give You” (v22, literal). In this second statement she appears to be responding to His earlier reply to their plea for help. He had told the

messenger, "This sickness is not to death but for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v4, literal). And those words meant "Lazarus won't die!" And yet Lazarus had died, so she may have been expressing hope that it was still possible for a miracle to bring her brother back to life.

Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again," to which she replied, "I know he will rise again in the rising again (resurrection) in the last day" (vs23-24, literal). Her statement was a confession of faith in promises found in the Bible which say that the righteous will come back to life at the end of the age. For example, God told Daniel that those whose names are written in God's book, "who sleep in the dust of the ground" will awaken to everlasting life (Da 12:1-2). But at that moment Martha's words did not appear to include much hope that her brother's dead body could physically come back to life.

Martha's confession was true. There will be a resurrection at the end of the age (Jn 5:28-29), but Jesus wanted her to understand that the raising of dead bodies and the giving of eternal life were not simply actions that He would perform someday in the future; they were the natural result of who He is. So He said, "I am the resurrection (rising again) and the life."

And then He said this: "And the one who believes in Me, even if he should die, he will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will not die into the age" (vs25-26, literal). And then He asked her, "Do you believe this?" The first part of His statement is addressed to those who believe in Him, but then their bodies die before the resurrection takes place. They are promised that they will not be lost or forgotten. At a future time appointed by God, their spirits will be clothed with an incorruptible physical body. But the second part of His statement is addressed to those who believe in Him, but have not yet died. He is saying that they have no reason to fear death. Their spirit, the real person, will never cease to exist but will simply step from this life into the presence of God.

Joined to the Source

This is what I believe Jesus was saying to Martha: When you put your faith in Me, you are joined to Me spiritually so that the life in Me gives life to you. Those whose bodies die before I return from heaven will remain fully awake. Their human spirit won't die; they will be caught up into the presence of God. Those who have not yet died can rest assured that they will never be separated from God. Death will merely be a brief moment of transition. Their bodies will "sleep" for a season, and then at an assigned time in the future, each person will be "re-clothed" with a new body that will never die, experience disease or suffer again.

Here is a simple way to express this truth: To be joined to Jesus is to be alive... instantly. Eternal life begins for us, says Jesus, the moment we believe in Him, the moment we are joined to the One who is the Source of life.

Resuscitating Lazarus

And Lazarus had believed in Jesus before he died. So though his body was dead, he wasn't. He was fully alive in the presence of God. That's why he could hear Jesus' voice when He shouted his name (v43). And as soon as he heard it, his spirit obeyed his Master. He left where he was, returned to the body he had once lived in, struggled to stand up because it was still wrapped in strips of linen filled with myrrh and aloes, and then somehow he managed to stagger out through the opening of that cave into the midst of a gathered crowd.

When Lazarus died, he didn't go into a coma-like sleep; he didn't wait in a dark place somewhere deep in the earth. He never lost consciousness but was quickly drawn up into heaven. During those four days while his body was dead, he was with God and with his believing loved ones who had died before he did. There in heaven Lazarus was given a spiritual body which was recognizable, and he remained in that wonderful place until he heard Jesus shout. It was probably a rather sad moment for him when he realized that he was being drawn back into this world and that God still had work for him to do here. It

meant he would have to go through the process of physically dying one more time because this time his body was only being “resuscitated” (his old body came back to life), not “resurrected” (then he will put on a new, incorruptible body).

Resurrection

You might think that going to heaven and receiving a spiritual body is good enough. But our destiny as children of God is far greater than that. These old bodies of ours are going to be redeemed from the power of death as certainly as our spirits have been rescued from eternal separation from God. Remember, when God created the first humans with physical bodies, He said what He had created was “very good” (Ge 1:31). Sin entered in and damaged God’s plan, but God always comes back to His original plan. Adam and Eve were supposed to eat from the “tree of life” and live forever (Ge 2:9). Yes, that part of God's plan was interrupted, but for those who accept God's offer of salvation, that season of separation is not permanent; it's just an interruption. In the new heaven and earth, which God will prepare for us, the tree of life will be there again (Rev 22:2) to remind us that God was able to rescue what we had lost.

The apostle Paul speaks a great deal about the resurrection of our bodies. He teaches that God’s plan is not complete until our bodies have been resurrected. Listen:

- Romans 8:22-23 “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for [our] adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:1-4 “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this [house] we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.”

He even describes the kind of flesh God will give those bodies. He says,

“All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one [flesh] of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the [glory] of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable [body], it is raised an imperishable [body]” (1Co 15:39-42).

And in case anyone questions that these physical bodies of ours must be resurrected, he makes this amazing statement:

“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1Co 15:50).

In fact, when we review various New Testament passages on this subject, it appears that the entire physical universe, the heavens and the earth, along with all people (both the evil and the righteous) will experience a transformation of the substance from which they are made (Jn 5:28-29; Ac 3:19-21; Ro 8:19-23; 1Co 15:22; Rev 20:4-5,11-13). This miracle will equip them to exist unharmed in the atmosphere of the unrestrained glory of God. Without it, without a “resurrection,” all physical things would be consumed when God releases His fiery presence (the full force of His glory) beyond the confines of heaven and into the farthest reaches of His creation. When that happens the old heavens and earth will evaporate (2 Pe 3:10-13; Rev 20:11) and a new eternal order will take their place (Rev 21:1).

So why is God going to resurrect everything? Because death was never part of His original plan, and He always comes back to His original plan. That doesn't mean that those who refused to repent and trust the grace of God during their lifetimes will enjoy being in His unrestrained presence in their resurrected state; they won't. But they will be resurrected and continue to exist forever which is why the choice we make here on earth is so important. It is, by far, the most important decision we will ever make.

Do you believe this?

Standing on the outskirts of Bethany, Jesus said this to Martha:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die" (vs25-26).

And then He asked her this question: "Do you believe this?" She answered, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, [even] He who comes into the world" (v27). That was her answer, and it was a powerful confession of faith. But Jesus is also asking you and me that same question. Will we give Him the same answer?

Questions

1. Let's suppose someone who believed in Jesus dies, and you have to explain to a child where that person is right now. What would you say?
2. How do the truths that we talked about today change the way a person would grieve over the loss of a loved one? (1Th 4:13)
3. Describe, step by step, what you think will happen to you when you die. Can you point to any verses of Scripture that support what you believe? How does your faith change the way you feel about death?

Our salvation isn't finished, our adoption as children of God isn't complete, until our bodies are resurrected, death has lost its grip on us and we shine like Jesus with the glory of God. C.S. Lewis said if you saw the lowliest Christian after the resurrection, if you didn't know better, you would fall down and worship.

- Read 1Co 15:12-19, 35-57
Ro 8:18-25