

*Introduction:*A. Illus.: Tony Campolo tells this story:

I went to my first black funeral when I was 16 years old. A friend of mine, Clarence, had died. The pastor was incredible. From the pulpit he talked about the Resurrection in beautiful terms. He had us thrilled. He came down from the pulpit, went to the family, and comforted them from the fourteenth chapter of John. "Let not your heart be troubled," he said, "'You believe in God, believe also in me,' said Jesus. Clarence has gone to heavenly mansions."

Then, for the last 20 minutes of the sermon, he actually preached to the open casket. Now, that's drama! He yelled at the corpse: "Clarence! Clarence!" He said it with such authority, I would not have been surprised had there been an answer. He said, "Clarence, there were a lot of things we should have said to you that we never said to you. You got away too fast, Clarence. You got away too fast." He went down this litany of beautiful things that Clarence had done for people. When he finished—here's the dramatic part—he said, "That's it, Clarence. There's nothing more to say. When there's nothing more to say, there's only one thing to say. Good night. Good night, Clarence!" He grabbed the lid of the casket and slammed it shut. "Good night, Clarence!" Boom!

B. No wonder Campolo never forgot that funeral! But *then* what happened to Clarence? That's really the lurking question at every funeral: **what happens next?** There's no fuller answer to that question *for Christians* than in **1 Cor 15**. Turn there.

In this chapter Paul establishes that Jesus literally rose from the dead, appearing to many people, and that everything we believe rests on that actually happening.

Now beginning in v.35 he turns his attention from Christ's resurrection to ours. For 15 vss Paul drives toward this statement in **v.50**: *"I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."* **In other words, you cannot get into heaven wearing what you've got on.** That body of yours, no matter how fit, just will not do!

I. WE MUST HAVE THE RESURRECTED BODIES GOD PROMISES IF WE WANT TO LIVE IN THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM HE HAS PREPARED (15:35-50)

A. Paul begins in a flower bed. **Vv.35-38...** Illus.: Here in my hand I have a tulip bulb.

- Is it a tulip? Well, yes and no.
- So over here I have a tulip. It's beautiful, isn't it? But it came from an ugly bulb.
- How did that happen? The bulb was planted—buried—in the ground and then the flower grew from it.
- Well, what happened to the bulb? It died.
- So the bulb died in order to become a flower? Yep. That's how it works, but if the bulb had feelings, do you think it would mind?

You and I are like seeds—walking bulbs—waiting for the day we're buried and transformed into someone far more beautiful; so different from these "bulb bodies" that we can't imagine it. But, oh how beautiful we will be!

Do we become angels? **NO!!** You hear that a lot but it is wrong. We will always be human, which is far better, for we have a relationship with God that not even angels can have. God sent Jesus to *die* for us. He calls us his sons and daughters. The angels are neither redeemed nor adopted.

These mortal bodies carry our essence—our souls—and when these mortal bodies are buried God draws that essential part of us up into the new bodies he will give us, the way DNA and life flow from the bulb to the flower. **You will still be you when God gives you a new body, because he draws the ‘you’ in this mortal seed of your body into the ‘you’ in the immortal flower of your resurrection body.**

- B. **Vv.39-42a...** Of course, God will give us new bodies splendidly suited to our new environment, uniquely recreated to function in our new world.
- C. So the body they bury will not be like the body God raises.
1. **V.42b:** *“The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.”* Right now, we all have a short shelf life. Our bodies, like the bread or eggs in your kitchen, are perishable. They won’t last. **We’re time-stamped with a “Use by” date.** But our new body will be everlastingly new. There’s an old gospel song that celebrates, *“Never grow old, O we’ll never grow old! There’s a land where we’ll never grow old!”*
 2. **V.43a:** *“It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.”* No matter how great a person has been, his or her corpse is... well... embarrassing. There’s no honor in a dead body. You don’t want it around too long. And no embalmer’s skill can change that. But our new bodies will be astonishingly glorious to see. They will have extraordinary dignity and grace and capacities.
 3. **V.43b:** *“It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.”* You’ve never seen anything—anything—so weak as a dead body. Couldn’t lift a finger. Couldn’t have the simplest thought. Couldn’t must up so much as a smile! **But when God raises us, our bodies will be powerful.**

Not just Superman-strong, but Christ-strong; bodies unhindered, minds quick and curious and knowing; energetic with a kind of holy zeal. Not just big muscles, but mighty in love and righteousness.

4. **V.44:** “*It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*” What is a “spiritual body”? Well, isn’t *spirit*. It isn’t ghostly, floaty, like a human fog or phantom. When we’re raised from the dead we will have a real body—like Jesus after his resurrection. The difference will be that God’s own Spirit will fully *enliven* us then. **Here we have only our oxygen-fed breath to give life to these bodies. Then the Breath of God, the Holy Spirit, will give us life. But the Holy Spirit is not simply an element like oxygen but a living Being.** He will give us God’s own capacity for living in heaven, the Holy Spirit’s own intimacy with God.

- D. Listen to **vv.45-49**... Our new bodies will no longer be shaped by the genetics of the first Adam, but by the genetics of Jesus, the last Adam. Remember, Christians are people who have been *born again*. Our *re-creation* has already begun. **The first Adam, you might say, was a *breathee*,** someone who breathed life from God. But our sin has given us a kind of spiritual emphysema. We find it more and more difficult to breathe—to live.

The last Adam, Jesus Christ, once he rose from the grave, was a *breather*. He was the “*life-giving Spirit*”—the *life-giving Breath*. There’s that scene when Jesus meets his disciples after the resurrection and he *breathes* on them, like God breathing life into Adam, only *this* Second Adam says, “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” The risen Christ is the very one who breathes with God’s own Spirit. And that is the kind of life our new bodies will have.

Our celebration of Jesus' resurrection not only looks back. We look forward. **All of us who rest our lives in Christ draw our hope that we, too, will have our own Easter morning.** We too will rise from the dead! That is where Paul takes us in **vv.50-51.**

II. "LISTEN, I TELL YOU A MYSTERY: WE WILL NOT ALL SLEEP, BUT WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED."

- A. There may be some among us here this morning who will not die before Jesus comes back, but whether we fall asleep in Christ or not, we will all be changed! These mortal bodies couldn't breathe there, couldn't move there; couldn't *last* there. We couldn't breathe! The beauty is too bright for these eyes, the fragrances too intoxicating for these noses, the feasts too sumptuous for these taste buds, the hymns too musical for these voices, the sounds both too delicate and too thundering for these ears, and everything from the leaves and stones to the friends and the Savior are too holy to touch with these hands.
- B. The change will be earth-shattering and instantaneous. **Vv.52-54...** Ever since Adam and Eve, death has been unfettered and unchecked—except in the death of Jesus himself. The Puritan **Thomas Brooks** wrote, "*Death has for its motto, 'I yield to none!'*" He said, "*Death is the greatest monarch and the most ancient king of the world.*" **But death's death warrant has been signed and in that instant when Jesus returns death will surrender his scythe, his scepter and his keys.**
- C. So now we can taunt death for the disarmed bully it is. "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" In **v.56** Paul explains just why death has always been so powerful... "*The sting of death is sin.*" Think of a death as a scorpion. It is a little and weak thing, except for

the venom in its stinger. **It isn't the death that that is so deadly, it is the venom in sin.** Sin kills us inwardly, deeply. Sin kills our souls and brings a sentence of death upon us physically and spiritually. Ironically, the thing that makes the venom of sin all the more lethal is God's own law: *"and the power of sin is the law."* Knowing what God expected of us only served to make us more defiant and disobedient against God. We didn't say to God, *"Oh, thank you for telling me what you expect so I can please you."* Instead we have responded to God, one and all, in a thousand different ways, *"You aren't the boss of me! I'll do what I want!"*

- D. Finally, v.57, *"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* First, because Jesus has saved us from the consequences of our terrible disobedience and sin. We no longer face God's judgment! Secondly, that means that death has lost its stinger, it's venom, it's threat. I read a couple of funeral sermons by **Thomas Brooks**. He blessed me by reminding me how, for the believer, death not only ceases to be our conqueror; death actually becomes God's meek helper. He wrote, *"Remember this—death does that in a moment, which no graces, no duties, nor any ordinances could do for a man all his lifetime! Death frees a [person] from those diseases, corruptions, temptations, ... that no duties, nor graces, nor ordinances could do... Every prayer then [when we die] shall have its answer; all hungering and thirsting shall be filled and satisfied; every sigh, groan, and tear that has fallen from the saints' eyes shall then be recompensed. That is not death but life, which joins the dying man to Christ!"*

Conclusion:

[The preacher at that funeral] grabbed the lid of the casket and slammed it shut. "Good night, Clarence!" Boom!

Campolo wrote,

Shock waves went over the congregation. As the preacher then lifted his head, you could see there was this smile on his face. He said, "Good night, Clarence. Good night, Clarence, because I know, I know that God is going to give you a good morning!"

The choir stood and starting singing, "On that great morning, we shall rise, we shall rise." We were dancing in the aisles and hugging each other.

I knew the joy of the Lord, a joy that in the face of death laughs and sings and dances, for there is no sting to death.

[Tony Campolo, in the sermon "The Year of Jubilee," PreachingToday.com]