



Hope, Because of His Resurrection Promise
1 Corinthians 15

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Phil Zuckerman is a professor, sociologist, and author of several books, including *Living the Secular Life* and *Faith No More*. Without concern or worry, Zuckerman writes this about death. “Everything dies. Everything. That’s just how it works ... When I’m dead, I’m dead ... But for now, you have to live life to the fullest ... because there is no other life.”^{1,2}

If the secular view is right, there is no such thing as hope. In contrast to secular thinking, pastor and author Tim Keller said the thing that distinguishes us from animals is hope. Hope is built in. It’s innate in the human soul.

Tim Keller was the founding pastor of Redeemer Church in New York City and the author of several significant Christian books. Before he passed away in 2023, Keller’s hope was put to the test. He wrote about it in *The Atlantic* magazine.³

I’ve spent a good part of my life talking with people about faith in the face of imminent death. I’ve sat at countless bedsides, and occasionally watched someone take their final breath. But when I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, I was completely caught unprepared. Unprepared to face the fact that death was growing inside me.

My wife, Kathy, and I spent much time in tears and unbelief. We expected some illness to come when we got really old, but not now, not yet.

A significant number of believers in God find their faith shaken or destroyed when they learn that death is coming at a time and in a way that seems unfair. One woman with cancer told me years ago, “I’m not a believer anymore. I can’t believe in a God who would do something like this to me.” Cancer killed her God.

And now I wondered, would that happen to me? Or would I be able to take my own advice? Advice I had given to countless people through the years as a pastor.

I found myself thinking, “I can’t die. That happens to others, not to me.” When I said that out loud, I realized the delusion I was living under, the delusion I think most live under. Death is an abstraction to us, something technically true but not yet a personal reality. But after my diagnosis, of which 80% die within a year, death, “the last enemy” as the Bible calls it, became very real. I realized my beliefs would have to become just as real or I wouldn’t be able to make it through the day.

So I set out to reexamine my convictions. I admit it. After being a pastor for almost 50 years, I had to reexamine what I really believed. And it took me to the resurrection. Before cancer, the resurrection had been mostly a theological and theoretical issue, but not now.

Again, through much prayer and many tears, my wife Kathy and I became convicted of how much we had made heaven out of this world. Too much of our joy and comfort and security was in this world. But when you’re facing terminal

cancer and realize this world may not last much longer, you're forced to look for joy and comfort and security somewhere else.

And I found it in the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of my own resurrection one day, became what it should have always been – my real, and only, source of joy and comfort and security.

The hymn we often sing asks the question all humanity is asking, “What is our hope in life and death?”⁴ ***We believe our hope in life and death is Christ alone!***

Our hope rests on one amazing event – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. And we believe the resurrection promise. The Bible promises, “God not only raised up Jesus, He will also raise us up from the dead” (1 Corinthians 6:14). When we talk about resurrection, we're not just talking about His resurrection. We're talking about our resurrection, ***because His resurrection is the promise of our resurrection.***

THE PROMISES

The Bible is filled with promises of life after death, promises of heaven and eternal life.

- Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).
- Long before the resurrection of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke about resurrection. “Those who die in the Lord will live, their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy!” (Isaiah 26:19, NLT).
- Daniel talked about resurrection. “Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up ... to everlasting life” (Daniel 12:2, NLT).
- Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, a time is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live ... Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out” (John 5:25, 28-29, NIV).
- Paul said, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, NAS). First fruit refers to the first harvest, to the early harvest. If the first harvest was plentiful, the second harvest would be as well. Jesus' resurrection is called the “first fruits,” because His resurrection is the promise of our resurrection.
- “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal (dead) bodies” (Romans 8:11, NAS).

- “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Philippians 3:20-21, NAS).

The Bible is filled with promises of life after the death, and guarantee that His resurrection is the promise of our resurrection. When Jesus returns, our souls will rejoin our bodies, and we will come out of our graves and be more alive than ever!

OUR BODIES

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15 to explain the theology of the resurrection. He declared the resurrection as the foundation of the Gospel.⁵ Paul also explained what our resurrected bodies will be like.

The church in Corinth was in turmoil. There was division in the church and theological confusion as well. It had been 30 years since Jesus’ resurrection, and some were doubting that it actually happened. Family and friends were still dying, people were still being buried, so they doubted the resurrection promise. Even those who still believed it were debating what a resurrected body would look like.

In 1 Corinthians 15:34-36, Paul confronted their confusion. “Some of you are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame. Some of you are asking, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’ How foolish!” (1 Corinthians 15:34-36, NIV). I think that’s a valid question, but Paul called it “foolish.” Why such a harsh response to an honest question? Because the Corinthians were being influenced by the pagan culture which mocked the notion of resurrection, so they were doubting the promise. And they were fixated on the decayed body, and not sure they wanted to see grandma after she had been in the grave for 20 years. Their thinking was foolish because they did not understand the power of God to breathe new life into a dead body and make it brand new.

Verse 36, “How foolish!” Paul said. “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body” (1 Corinthians 15:36-38, NIV).

Paul used the analogy of a seed to illustrate what the resurrection will be like. The seed buried in the ground looks nothing like the plant that grows out of the ground. A tiny seed becomes a beautiful bouquet of flowers. A tiny seed becomes a plant loaded with fruit. A tiny acorn becomes a towering oak tree.

Nature is a picture of the resurrection. A seed is buried. It dies. It germinates and then pushes new life through the dirt. And the plant that grows out of the ground – whether a flower, a fruit, or a tree – is far more amazing than the seed that went into the ground. The seed looks nothing like the plant. The seed is mundane, but the plant is fruitful, the flower is colorful, and the tree is majestic. “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead,” Paul said (1 Corinthians 15:42, NIV).

One of my favorite authors is Joni Eareckson Tada, and she comments on Paul's analogy from nature. "If you were to tell the tiny acorn that one day it would be as tall as a building, with heavy branches and thick, green leaves, a tree so great it would house many squirrels, that nut (that acorn) would say you were crazy. A gigantic oak tree bears absolutely no resemblance to an acorn ... Yet, somehow, within that acorn is the promise of the tree it will become. And somehow, within you, is the promise of the heavenly person you will become."⁶

Paul explained in verse 39, "All flesh is not the same, men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies, but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another, and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:39-42, NIV).

There is variety in the universe, and there will be variety in the resurrection. When we are resurrected, we will not be clones. Paul was saying that if God can create all kinds of earthly bodies and heavenly bodies, then surely, He can create a resurrected body that will be glorious and live forever.

In verse 42, Paul said, "The body that is sown (buried) is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown (buried) in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown (buried) in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown (buried) a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body ... Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49, NIV).

Notice the contrasts of the body that goes into the grave to the body that comes out of the grave.

- The body that goes into the grave is *perishable*, subject to aging, disease, and death. The body that comes out of the grave will be *imperishable*, immortal and eternally alive.⁷
- The body that goes into the grave is one of *dishonor*, carrying the marks of sin and the sentence of death for sin. The body that comes out of the grave is one of *glory*, a body radiating righteousness and all that pleases God.
- The body goes into the grave in *weakness*, but the body comes out of the grave in *power*.
- The body that goes into the grave is *natural*. The body that comes out of the grave is *spiritual*. Spiritual, but still a physical body.
- The body that goes into the grave is *earthly*. The body that comes out of the grave is *heavenly*. Heavenly, but still a physical body.
- The body that goes into the grave is *mortal*. The body that comes out of the grave is *immortal*.⁸

What does all this mean?⁹ When Jesus returns, on the day of the rapture, all the cemeteries in the world will become resurrection fields and bear a glorious harvest.¹⁰ Imagine what that day will be like. Resurrection fields! We will be there. We will see that day!

The theology of resurrection is about continuity. The same you that went into the grave will come out of the grave. It will still be you. You will have the same face. Jesus was recognized by His followers. He had the same face. Our bodies will be bodies. We won't be spirits or ghosts. We will still be male and female. We will have our five senses – able to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. The new earth will be a physical world and we will experience it physically.

Again, the same you that went into the grave will come out of the grave. But we will be different, as verse 49 says, “We shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” We believe in the physical, supernatural resurrection of Jesus. That’s amazing enough, but we also believe that His resurrection is the promise of our resurrection. On that day, God will breathe new life into our dead bodies, and we will come out of our graves and be more alive than ever.

But this hope only applies to those who have put their faith in Jesus. Hope only applies to those who, as Acts 2 says, have been “pierced to the heart.” To those who have been convicted of their sin and fallen before Jesus and said, “Oh no, what have I done!” Hope only applies to those who cry out to Jesus and say, “Please save me!” To those who look at Jesus and believe that He died on the cross for their sin, that He took their place, and that He offers forgiveness and grace. Hope only applies to those who believe Jesus rose from the dead proving He is the Son of God. The Bible does not teach universalism, that every human being will be saved and enter heaven. Only those who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus have this hope.

THE HOPE OF A NEW BODY

I want to introduce a man who longed for the resurrection, who longed for a new body. Dee Elliott was a graduate of the Naval Academy, a naval officer, served in Vietnam, and at the Pentagon in military intelligence. Later in life, Dee became a successful businessman in Dallas. Listen to Dee tell his story and why he looks forward to the resurrection. **[VIDEO¹¹]**

Dee Elliott died in 2018 at the age of 71. ALS crippled his body and we understand why he longed for a new one. He believed that Jesus’ resurrection was the promise of his resurrection. He believed, as Paul said, that his suffering was temporary.¹² He believed, as Paul said, “that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed” (Romans 8:18, NIV). Dee had hope. Hope that overcomes the dread of aging and disease and dying. Hope that overcomes all our suffering and pain and sadness. Dee had hope, and so can we.

THE VICTORY

As we read 1 Corinthians 15, we can almost hear Paul shout, “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ... Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55, 57, NIV).

The last event in every person's life is death. We dread it and we wonder when and how it's going to happen. But Paul mocked death and three times used the word "victory" when he talked about it. Resurrection hope allows us to walk with a spiritual swagger because God promises to overcome the thing we dread most.

"What is our hope in life and death?" "Christ alone! Christ alone!" Because of Jesus, we have hope. And our hope rests on one amazing event – the resurrection of Jesus. And we believe that His resurrection is the promise of our resurrection. "God not only raised up Jesus, He will also raise us up from the dead" (1 Corinthians 6:14).

NOTES

¹ Phil Zuckerman, *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), page 168.

² Instead of mourning and repentance, in the face of God's judgment, the people said, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:19).

³ Tim Keller, "Growing My Faith in the Face of Death," *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2021. Excerpt and paraphrased.

⁴ "Christ Our Hope in Life and Death," word and music written by Keith Getty, Matt Boswell, Jordan Kauflin, Matt Merker, Matt Papa, Getty Music Publishing, 2020.

⁵ According to 1 Corinthians 15:13-14, if there is no resurrection, then there is no hope. If there is no resurrection, then there is nothing to believe.

⁶ Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven, Your Real Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995, 2018), pages 54-55.

⁷ See 1 Peter 1:4.

⁸ See 1 Corinthians 15:53.

⁹ All the effects of sin will be left in the grave. What an amazing reality. When we rise from the dead, we will no longer carry the effects of sin. Romans 8:11 declares, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

¹⁰ See John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984), page 440, quoting Erich Sauer.

¹¹ Link to Dee Elliott's story, [Dee Elliott - Faithful Servant on Vimeo](#).

¹² See 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.