

## 1 Sermon, August 7, 2011

Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Title: "On the Resurrection of the Dead"

(Sermon 137 – John Wesley's sermons, updated) Written in the year 1732

[This Sermon was originally written by Benjamin Calamy, D.D., Vicar of St. Lawrence, Jewry, London. It occurs, p. 275, in a volume of Sermons which bears his name, published in 1704; and is here abridged and revised by Mr. Wesley. – EDIT.]

*But some man will say, how are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?* 1 Corinthians 15:35

1. We want to know what's beyond this life
2. Wesley Gives us a Biblical picture
  - We die; we become dust.
  - The coming of the day of God's restoration
  - Resurrection to same body – yet without sickness - glorified
  - A spiritual resurrection – our souls will then join this body
  - Eternal joy
3. Fortunately, Wesley didn't try to describe hell
4. But really, we can't know. We can trust.

### 1. We want to know what's beyond this life

It seems to be in the makeup of most of us to want to know the unknowable. We have a natural curiosity. And there is nothing more unknowable than what happens after death.

With things often unhappy and unjust here on earth, we want them to be put right after death. We want the virtuous who have suffered to have a reward. We want there to be justice, somehow.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, the justice is meted out in a new reincarnation. Those who have done right will be born over again into this world in a more advantageous position. Those who have done wrong will be reincarnated as a dog or a worm.

But Christianity has nothing to do with reincarnation. In the Christian faith, justice comes at the end, at the last trumpet, when all creation comes under the judgment of God.

The good, the faithful, are rewarded eternally. The bad, the hurtful are punished eternally.

...Although Christians differ somewhat here. Many Christians don't see how a loving God can punish eternally. It doesn't make sense. A loving God would always offer some way, even in hell, of becoming faithful, and reaping a reward.

Some Christians say there is no hell.

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Others say, "The hell there isn't."

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#### 2. Wesley Gives us a Biblical picture:

Today I'm going to give you John Wesley's answers to what comes after death. John Wesley himself borrowed them from Benjamin Calamy, Doctor of Divinity, an Anglican priest in London.

Wesley says that, first, we really do die. We turn into the finest dust, scattered over the face of the earth. In fact, the substance of our bodies nourishes the ground, which nourishes the plants which provide human nourishment again.

Then what happens? Well, our souls or spirits somehow live on, in a way that Wesley did not define. That is really not talked about in scripture, either.

And then at some point comes a moment when God restores the creation. Wesley didn't try to predict any time period for this. No, predicting the day or hour is what Jesus said we couldn't do. That would be pure speculation.

But Jesus said in John chapter 5:28, "The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

At that time, our mortal nature will put on the immortal.

Wesley was insistent that the very same body that died will be restored, all the same exact molecules put back in the places they were at death. God would gather all our dispersed dust from wherever it had gone, and put it back together again.

God will do it, even though we cannot know how.

This same body, however, will then be immortal and will not age or fall apart.

Here Wesley quotes 1 Corinthians 15:53:

For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality.

Wesley states that we shall be perfectly free from all the bodily evils which sin brought into the world; that our bodies shall not be subject to sickness, or pain, or any other inconveniences we are daily exposed to. This the Scripture calls "the redemption of our bodies," -- the freeing them from all their maladies.

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The book of Revelation says:

"God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

Wesley goes further: Our bodies shall be raised in glory. Just as Moses face shone when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments, just as Jesus glowed with unearthly light on the mount of transfiguration, just as Stephen's face glowed before his martyrdom in the book of Acts, we will glow with the light of God's love.

If that were not enough, Wesley states that we will be raised in Power, so that our sluggish speed and strength that we now have will be nothing compared to when we are raised in power.

### A spiritual resurrection – our souls will then join this body

At that time, when our bodies are raised imperishable, disease-free, and glowing, God will put our souls back into them. We cannot say this is impossible. Our Saviour himself was dead, rose again, and appeared alive to his disciples and others, who had lived with him many years, and were then fully convinced that he was the same person they had seen die upon the cross.

Our bodies, it says in 1 Corinthians, "will be raised spiritual bodies." Wesley said:

Our spirits are now forced to serve our bodies, and to attend their leisure, and do greatly depend upon them for most of their actions. But our bodies shall then wholly serve our spirits, and minister to them, and depend upon them.

### Eternal joy

And you can imagine that, in this state, we will be joyful. Joyful for eternity. Revelation speaks of those who surround the throne of God saying:

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created."

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Wesley said,

The unspeakable joy that we then shall feel will break through our bodies, and shine forth in our countenances; as the joy of the soul, even in this life, has some influence upon the countenance, by rendering it more open and cheerful.

### 3. Fortunately, Wesley didn't try to describe Hell

The picture that Wesley presents is a beautiful one, and I think that Wesley was purposely unclear as to when this all happens. Jesus said to the thief on the cross next to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise," which certainly seems to mean that both of them would be going to heaven that day. It's an individual vision of going to heaven one at a time.

But many other passages in scripture speak of the dead being raised together. In First Thessalonians 4, Paul writes:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; 17\* then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Fortunately, Wesley didn't try to describe Hell, even though he believed in it. It makes a nicer sermon that way.

### 4. But really, we can't know. We can trust.

I've just shared with you John Wesley's understanding.

I disagree with him on a couple of points, but that doesn't really matter.

You see, I trust God to do the right thing. So it doesn't matter to me exactly what's ahead. God will do what God will do, and it will be the very best thing, whatever it is.

Frankly, we can't fully know what's beyond the end of this life. The most important thing is to do our best to be faithful. After that, we trust that God is good, and God will do the right thing.

Amen.