

CHRIST WILL MAKE OUR LOWLY BODIES GLORIOUS

At Jesus' transfiguration, while He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His body was suffused with bright light. We do not know whether Peter, James, and John had been overcome with sleep before this happened, or because the sight of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in glory overcame them. Even Jesus' garments became dazzling white.

Paul wrote in Philippians: "We are citizens of heaven and look for the Lord Jesus Christ to come from heaven as the Saviour. He will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body, because He has the power by which He can make everything subordinate to Himself" (Plp 3:20-21). In many aspects of the Christian faith, believers can say, "Because of Jesus, we too!" In this present existence, the human body is affected in many ways through the results of sin, is under the condemnation of God's Law, and is subject to weakness, decay, and death. Nevertheless, in the life to come, we shall see Jesus Christ as He is, and be like Him. The bodies of those who will be with the Lord in eternal life will be glorious and vigorous. When Jesus explained His parable about the weeds in the wheat, He said, "Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." All the bodily defects, illnesses, marks of old age, sorrow, tears, and death, which are consequences of sin, will be removed.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He no longer, as a human being, refrained from using all the power, glory, and majesty that He had always possessed as God the Son. When God raised Him from the dead, Jesus did not have to wait for someone to unravel the linen strips around His body, as when Lazarus shuffled out of his tomb. Jesus asked people to roll the stone from Lazarus' grave before He raised him. However, Jesus did not have to wait for the angel to roll the stone away to let Him out of His tomb. His body, now a spiritual and glorified body, passed through those linen strips, and through the rock of the tomb. The wrappings were still rolled up when Peter and John saw them. The angel rolled away the stone, not to let Jesus out, but to inform all who would hear that He had left the tomb. We should not think of a misty, unreal body after the general resurrection. Mary Magdalene thought that the risen Jesus was the gardener near the tomb, but, in spite of her tears, she still recognised Jesus by the sound of His voice, and clung to Him until Jesus told her to desist. That evening, Jesus had His same body, with the nail marks and the spear-wound. His body could eat, be seen, and be touched. However, though the doors had been locked where the disciples were, out of fear of the Jews, Jesus was suddenly present in the room. His body could go beyond the bounds of ordinary, local, presence.

We cannot say much more than that about a spiritual and glorified body. It is beyond our experience. However, the bodies of God's children will be redeemed, and, for that, they wait eagerly. They will be freed from the futility that sin and death have caused. In 1 Corinthians Paul makes a series of contrasts: "The body is sown in decay: it is raised without decay. It is sown in dishonour: it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness: it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-44). Though Jesus was sinless, the body in which He became incarnate was able to die. He experienced human poverty, derision, and suffering. His glorified body, and those of His saints, will be freed from all that.

One of the most basic contrasts is between sin and death in our present existence, and glory, which is the bright light of God's presence. When God called Isaiah to be a prophet, he was in the temple. When the foundations of the doorposts shook because of the angelic voices that were calling out, and when the temple was filled with smoke because of the glory of the Lord, Isaiah reacted in mortal fear, "Woe to me! For I am ruined! For I am a man with unclean lips; and I live among people with unclean lips! For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Sinful human beings are overwhelmed and expect to die in the presence of the Lord and even of His angels. Isaiah was spared when one of the seraphs flew to him with a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. The seraph touched Isaiah's mouth with it and said, "Look! This has touched your lips; your guilt has been taken away, and your sin has been atoned for." Sinful human beings can endure the glory of God only if their sin is taken away. When the seventy elders of Israel saw the Lord on Mount Sinai, Moses wrote that what might have been expected did not occur, "However, God did not stretch out His hand against the eminent men of Israel." When the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds on Christmas night, they were terribly afraid. When a cloud came and overshadowed the disciples during Jesus' transfiguration, they were very afraid, and fell on their faces.

Even when the disciples of Jesus witnessed a miracle of God, they were sometimes overcome by thoughts about their own unworthiness. When Peter witnessed the miraculous catch of fish, and realised that Jesus was not only His master, but also his Lord, his reaction was, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!"

Another basic contrast is that God, the almighty and powerful Creator, has nothing greater to look up to.

He looks down at His creatures, and at the misery below Him. The glorious God exalts the lowly. Human beings look up to what is great in God, and to what is infinitely beyond them. Isaiah is said to have “seen the Lord.” However, it was not a face-to-face encounter. The Lord was sitting on a high and lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Seraphs surrounded Him, calling to each other: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts! The whole earth is full of His glory!” Smoke also filled the temple (Isa 6:1-6). “Seeing God” was similar when the seventy elders of Israel went up on Mount Sinai with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. We are told that they saw the God of Israel. However, it was also not a face-to-face encounter. They must have been down on their faces, so that they reported only that under the Lord’s feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself (Ex 24:9-11). At the transfiguration, the glory that overwhelmed the disciples came from above. They heard a voice of the heavenly Father out of the cloud: “This is My Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to Him!” In the glorious life to come, God’s great majesty will remain. His glory is something that is far beyond our comprehension now. Then we shall know as God now knows us. For the present, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has comprehended, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” Nevertheless, believers will see God, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. John wrote that when Jesus appears, believers would be like Jesus, and see Him as He is.

There is another aspect of the glory of God. It is wonderful and attractive. When Jesus was glorified, Peter began to talk about putting up three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Though he did not realise what he was saying, he was probably expressing a desire for the wonderful experience to continue. It was enjoyable for the seventy elders of Israel on Mount Sinai. When they saw God, and they ate and drank. After the general resurrection on the last day, believers will be able to sit down in the joyous heavenly feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

We can ignore objections that bodies that “have gone back to dust and ashes, or that have been devoured by lions, crocodiles, and sharks cannot be raised again. Jesus brushed aside all doubts about the resurrection itself by saying that they come from those who do not know the Scriptures of the power of God. We shall be changed. When the archangel Michael blows the trumpet that ends this world’s existence, God, by His almighty power, will instantly transform both the dead who are raised and those who are still living.

Though we shall be raised in our same bodies, there will be differences. Paul wrote, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Jesus said, “They cannot die any more either, because they are equal to the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.” We should explain this in the context of His own words, “For in the resurrection people do not marry, nor are they given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.” Angels have no bodies. Though we shall have bodies, and expect that differences in gender will remain, we shall be like the angels in that marriage will not continue in the coming kingdom of God. Although food-time and harvest, and our present food and clothing will cease when this world ceases, the saints in their spiritual and glorified bodies will join in the heavenly feasting. However, they will not have to eat, drink, digest, and sleep in order to survive in healthy bodies. God will spiritually feed and sustain glorified bodies with indestructible life. We will say, like Peter, that it is good to be there.