
The Resurrection of the Body

DAVE BAST

Dr. Timothy Leary was a one-time guru of the counterculture who was best known for his enthusiastic advocacy of the use of mind-altering drugs and his embrace of Eastern religions. Shortly before his death, a news story reported that he had paid \$35,000.00 to have his head cut off and frozen after he died in the hope that someday medical science would be able to bring it back to life again. When asked about it, Leary replied, “I know it’s a long shot, but the only alternative is to let the worms get you.” Is that really the only alternative? Christians do not think so, and today on Groundwork, we will tell you why.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are joined, Dave, once again during this series on the last part of the Apostles’ Creed, by Dr. Sue Rozeboom, who is assistant professor of Liturgical Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. So, welcome back, Sue.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Thank you. It is a privilege to be among you.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is great to have you again, Sue, and we are really looking forward to these last two programs in the series on the closing section of the Apostles’ Creed, which really, in one way, all deals with the Holy Spirit – what the Holy Spirit does – and today we come to the idea that through the Spirit one day even our bodies will be raised again. We believe in the resurrection of the body.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is something that a lot of people think about because, as we know, and as a bumper sticker that some people have perhaps seen, states: Eat right. Stay fit. Die anyway. We all know; we repress it or we put it out of our minds, but we all know that someday there will be a place in the ground for us. None of us get off the planet without going through the cemetery, as somebody once said, and that inevitably raises the question: Is that it? For me, for my body, for my existence, for everything I ever knew, for everybody I ever loved; is that the end?

DAVE BAST

Yes, and it is a question that everybody wrestles with, I think, sooner or later. Most of us defer that. We do not want to think about it; especially while we are young and healthy. So much of life, maybe so much of the feverish activity that people throw themselves into is an effort to put off that question: What happens next? What comes next?

Before we get into the whole belief in the resurrection of the body, Sue, I wonder if you could reflect a little bit about why this is connected with the Holy Spirit. Maybe what scripture has to say about that.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right. Eat right. Stay fit. Die anyway. That sounds a little like the Epicurean quote that Paul gives us in his letter to the Corinthians; and it is not only in Corinthians, but also in Ephesians, and I will quote Romans, where Paul gives us a very different view, and says: No, that is not the case. We do have a different hope as Christians, and it is because of the work of the Holy Spirit; the work of the Holy Spirit that is manifest to us in Christ, in Christ's very resurrection. So, to quote just very briefly from Romans 8, Paul says:

¹¹If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit that dwells in you. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

DAVE BAST

There is the explicit statement: God will do it through the agency of the Spirit, and it is the same God who raised Jesus. He will also raise you, Paul says, to the Christians in Rome.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right; and it is not simply new life as spiritual new life, but here he says: Give life to your mortal bodies."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Many of us can remember this from the different parts of the New Testament, particularly the Book of Acts, but also to a degree – and we will be looking at part of I Corinthians 15 in the next segment – in the world to which Paul was writing that, that was radical because the Greeks had a very different view. They did believe in some sort of existence after death, but the last thing in the world the Greeks ever wanted to believe in was an embodied existence after death. They viewed the body as a prison house, almost as the tomb of the soul, such that as it was for Socrates, when he was so happy to be able to die, death for the Greeks was release from this miserable, yucky, fleshy body, and we will never go back to that again. Which is why, in Acts 17, when Paul is preaching to the people in Athens, or having a conversation with them, they were very interested in everything Paul said right up until the last line, when he said, "And then we will be raised from the dead bodily like Jesus was," and then they all started to snicker and said, "Well, we'll talk to you another day, Buddy," and they all went home, because to the Greeks, that did not sound like good news, but for the Christians it was.

DAVE BAST

They actually had a little play on words in Greek: *Soma-sema*. *Soma* means body; *sema* means tomb. As you said, Scott, it is like a prison that we are held in, and you mentioned Socrates. There is a very poignant account of Socrates' death written by his pupil, Plato, and Socrates' last words reportedly were: I go to my death; you to live. Which of us has the better prospect? The gods only know. Who knows, sort of vague, but certainly only spiritual. Let's get out of here and escape.

Sue Rozeboom:

It is so interesting, because in the time of the early Church, as you say, the Greeks had a very different concept of the relation of body and soul. The soul escapes the body. Christians say no. Yes, but the body is promised to be raised.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, they belong together, right? That is the one thing that Christians have... well, I was going to say all along that believers have professed – we can talk in just a minute about some Old Testament views – but the idea is, they belong together and ultimately they will be together because it is not right for the soul and the body to be apart.

SUE ROZEBOOM

So, their funeral practices or the treatment of the body at death is so interesting. The Greeks observe the dignity of the body; so they did not want their bodies to just rot randomly. They believed in the dignity of the body, but they did not believe in any kind of resurrection...

DAVE BAST

No future for the body...

SUE ROZEBOOM

There is no future for the body, so it was the Christians who perceived there is something to this. There is a future for the body; therefore, we dignify the body upon its death. So, the Christians were the only ones who were willing to gather the bodies of the dead, of the poor, and carry out rituals with respect to revering, if you will, the death of the body; the body itself upon death.

DAVE BAST

I think the classical pagans, Greek and Roman alike, would have a funeral, but let's cremate it and get rid of it and be done with it, and I think that would be interesting to follow up on, maybe in the next segment, too, but it also strikes me that, within Judaism in Jesus' day there was a little bit of this same controversy going on: future for the body, no future for the body; and this comes out in rather a famous thing that Jesus said toward the end of His public ministry, in Matthew 22. Let me just read these verses:

²³That same day, the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him with a question. And then they presented this little dilemma of a woman who is married seven times; okay, which one is she married to in the resurrection? Ha ha ha, we gotcha there, Jesus. ²⁹And Jesus replies, "You are wrong because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God." Snap, take that! ³⁰"At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said? ³²'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God the dead, but of the living." So, Jesus comes down firmly on the side of yes, there is a resurrection, even with the debate going on within Judaism in His day; and He does so because of the Nature of God. Those whom God knows and loves and calls to Himself are not going to slip away, even through death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is very interesting, too, because when I have read that passage before, Jesus says, "God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Well, an interesting thing for Jesus to say, since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all dead as far as we are concerned, but to God, they were still alive.

DAVE BAST

That is exactly His point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not bodily at that point yet, but their souls were still alive and their bodies would come back, and that is clearly where Jesus wanted people to go with their beliefs.

We will look a little bit more at what the New Testament has to say about this resurrection of the body, and we will do that in just a moment.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and Professor Sue Rozeboom, on Groundwork, and we are talking about the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. "I believe in the resurrection of the body," we say, toward the end of the Apostles' Creed, and we have seen already how this comes straight out of the New Testament. Paul talks about it in Romans, how God through His Spirit will raise our mortal bodies. Jesus

confounded His critics, His enemies the Sadducees, who rejected the resurrection in more of a Hellenistic or Greek fashion by saying, “No, God is the God of the living, not of the dead.” And that will include, someday, His mighty, active recreation through resurrection. So, that is not an easy concept for us. I think we all struggle with this, don’t we? How this could be?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, indeed; and the questions that can come up... Sometimes children are the ones who ask it if a grandparent or someone they know dies. But when we talk about being raised again bodily it raises all kinds of questions, like what will we look like? What age will we be in the new creation, when we get our body back, assuming we do not get old and die all over again? What if you died as a 13-year-old, will you be a 13-year-old forever in heaven, in the new creation?

DAVE BAST

Let’s hope not.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a good point; but, lots of questions. How will we recognize each other? And of course, the other amazing thing is that, of course, by the time Jesus comes back, most of the people who ever lived have long since turned beyond dust. Of course, some people were burned alive; there was nothing left of them; they were vaporized in a plane crash or something. So, it is not merely just that God is going to gather the exact... just take a body out of the cemetery. It is going to be a whole new act of new creation.

DAVE BAST

There are some technical difficulties here to this idea.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Clearly, these are questions that Paul was being pressed with; so, if you look at I Corinthians 15, he even says so. ³⁵Someone will ask, “Well, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? And Paul says, ³⁶“You foolish person!” as if to say, ‘Resign yourself to mystery.’ There is a sense in which we do not know, but let’s try this analogy: ³⁷What you sow does not come to life unless it dies and what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel; perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body as God has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ⁴²So it is with the resurrection of the dead; what is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is tremendous, isn’t it, as long as you don’t press it too much and get what is a spiritual body?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Okay, what is a spiritual body?

DAVE BAST

What is a spiritual body? Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If I recall, I think Paul kind of coins a new term in Greek there. The word in Greek for soul is *psyche*, from which we get psychology in English, but the spiritual body is like *psyche* [con] *soma*, a spiritual body, and nobody has ever really used that...

DAVE BAST

An oxymoron, in other words.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right. Like elementary algebra, that does not go together.

So, he coined a new term there, and so there is a sense in which, even though Paul is trying to explain and he uses the analogy of a seed, there is a sense in which we would almost have as many questions when Paul is done here as we had before; except for the assurance: God is going to do it, so do not get bogged down in the details. It is the power of God. This is nothing natural, this is nothing inevitable, but it is the power and the gift of God.

DAVE BAST

The point of the analogy is, I think, one that we get and is helpful, because he is talking about continuity, but discontinuity. He is talking contrast here; perishable/imperishable, weak/power, dishonor or shame, and you think about our normal reaction to a corpse – we shrink from it. There is something repulsive about that, which I think is a really good instinct. Death is not natural. That is another whole subject that we should get into sometime, about death coming into the world and being connected in the Bible with sin. So, it is sown in dishonor or shame, but it is raised in glory – all of those contrasts – and we do not know exactly how, but we see what he is getting at. It is still you. It is your body. It is the real you, but it is really different. It is completely different.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And isn't Jesus himself an exhibit of that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the first-fruits, in fact, right?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I do like the seed analogy because Paul is saying our bodies now are like a seed, and just like when you look at a seed, and just looking at the seed, if you have no idea what kind of seed it is, you have no idea what is going to happen after you plant it in the ground; it reminds me of a story from about 10 years ago in Japan. In some ancient tomb they found a half-dozen seeds, and nobody knew what they were seeds for. So they looked at them and studied them and tried to figure out what kind of seeds they were. Finally, one brilliant person said, "Why don't we plant one?" And so they did, and it grew into this enormous, six-foot high, nine-petaled flower that had not been seen in centuries. The point being, just looking at the seed, you would never guess what would come out of it. That is Paul's point. Our bodies now are a seed. Something glorious and good and new is going to come out of it, and we will stay tuned as to what that is, but it will be the gift of God.

DAVE BAST

Let me take this in a little bit different direction because I want to come back to this Greek idea that we talked about in the first segment. Really, we have been talking about resurrection – resurrection; the body. That is a little bit countercultural still today because I do not think most people really want that or are expecting that; and even many Christians probably buy in more to the contemporary idea that when you die your soul floats up and you live forever in the sky somehow.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and you see that in popular movies; a popular movie from about 20 years ago, *Ghost*, with Patrick Swayze. There is a lot of speculation. Recently there was a film called, *Heaven is for Real*, based on the book about a little boy who supposedly went to heaven; but in the pop culture, right, it is sort of like the *New Yorker* cartoons: We are floating on clouds and sprouting wings and we are decidedly not earthy, not bodily, but that is not the Christian hope. Our Christian hope is much more robust.

SUE ROZEBOOM

That even comes to play in our funeral practices; again, how often is it that we experience graveside services prior to a memorial service and the body is not present. And yet, there is a profound declaration about gathering for an occasion of grief and remembrance and celebration of life; but whose life are we celebrating? The life of Christ, ultimately; the new life that is promised us in Christ.

I read recently of a pastor who encourages families to think about having a private graveside – think about that as Good Friday; and then a memorial service, and think about that as Easter hope. On the one hand I think, okay, but then all of a sudden I realize, wait a minute. The body is not present and Easter hope is all about the body. There is continuity and there is discontinuity in Christ's being upon his resurrection, but it is the resurrection of the body.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; we tend to be in a little bit of a rush to get that body out of there. Let's not think about it too much. Let's not dwell upon it. Let's get it out of sight and then have a nice celebration. I agree. Funerals have changed so much just in the course of my career as a pastor. People do not go to the cemetery much anymore and they do not really make themselves reflect on the fact of death and the Christian hope that is real nevertheless in the context of a funeral.

SCOTT HOEZEE

At the end of the day, everything we are talking about, and some of what we have talked about is a little theoretical, a little speculative, a little mysterious, a little wondering, but it is finally a very personal matter of comfort and hope and joy. We will look at that as we close out the program in just a moment.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

This is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And I am Sue Rozeboom. Today on Groundwork, we are talking about the resurrection of the body; that line in the last article of the Creed that has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. As we noted before, talking about the resurrection of the body can get personal. Many of us are familiar with Job's statement of confidence.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Partly thanks to Handel, right? It has become a very famous chorus in Handel's *Messiah*.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right; so, the soprano sings: "I know that my redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and the worms destroyed this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." This is a hope that we ponder and reflect on.

DAVE BAST

And that is really an amazing place to dig it out of the Bible, isn't it? In the depths of the Old Testament; in the depths of a life of suffering, of unbelievable pain that Job experienced – and probably we all are familiar with Job's story – he suddenly, kind of out of nowhere, comes with this statement of sublime confidence, almost, that even though I still have my problems with God, I am still kind of arguing with Him, I am struggling with Him, I want to talk to Him about this; someday, though my body is destroyed, though it decays, though it disappears, yet in my body, in my flesh, I am going to see God. My eyes will see Him.

I just think, for me, that is... You know, we love people as a whole, we do not just love their spirits or their souls. We love their bodies; you know, our children, our spouses, our friends, and our bodies eventually all betray us. They get sick, they get old, they get ugly, they get weak, even before they die, but God says, “No, that is you and it has a future, too.”

SUE ROZEBOOM

Jesus’ relationship to his disciples was personal because of its embodiment. Rowan Williams has this incredible reflection on that. He says: The relation of Jesus to His disciples is not suddenly privatized after His resurrection. In His ministry, Jesus created and sustained the community of His friends by speech and touch and the sharing of food. And so after His resurrection, that community is sustained in the same way. It is not taken from history, from matter, from bodies and words.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I like that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have very little in the New Testament about post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, but that is a great quote, Sue, because the ones we do have – He eats with them, He touches them, He breaks bread with them, He blesses them, He cooks for them, even, in John 21.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And this is what He promises the thief on the cross: Today I will be present to you in body.

DAVE BAST

You will be with Me. Right.

I just had this thought of our modern culture: It is not just peoples’ popular ideas about heaven, “I just want my soul to go up.” There is this whole thing of artificial intelligence and some of the real extreme futurists, as they say, are talking about downloading their intelligence into a computer. There is a sense of disembodied, “I want to live forever, but I don’t want my body to be part of it.” It is like C. S. Lewis’s classic novel, *That Hideous Strength*, where there is a hatred of the flesh and the physical and we want to somehow escape that and meld with a machine. It is just creepy, and it is totally opposite in the Gospels.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We do not know exactly how... I suppose it was revealed to Job by the Holy Spirit... but how Job got to the point of being able to believe in what looks like the resurrection of the body, it was not a widely held view in the Old Testament – God revealed this over time – but our hope is very tangible because it is Jesus. Jesus is the first-fruits. He is the first example of coming back physically with a body that could eat fish and be touched and so forth. That is our hope. In fact, the German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, was always really good at saying: Easter Sunday is an historical event. It is in the past, but what Easter was was our future occurring in the past, which is why we paradoxically say that Jesus is the remembrance of things hoped for. What happened on Easter was a sneak preview of our collective future. We, too, will have an embodied existence, and it is not theoretical for Christians. It is not, “Well, we hope so,” or, “We think it will probably happen.” No, we say, “We know it will happen because it already did, in Jesus.” He is our sneak preview.

DAVE BAST

I do not want to pass by completely the idea that when you die you go to heaven. I think we all agree, the three of us, that that is true. There is a sense in which we continue to exist with God, with the Lord, as Paul said, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and my desire is to depart and be with Christ.” But, we want to bring the spotlight back on our ultimate hope, our future hope, which is resurrection. I know, Scott, you as a pastor – I have been a pastor for many years – and how often I have encouraged people, let’s say the Creed together when we are standing beside a grave in a cemetery, and when we get to the end, and say, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,” it always gives me a little

thrill to do it there, at that place and at that time, because it is so powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is one thing to say the Apostles' Creed in church, behind stained glass where it is all nice and cozy, but the boldness and the pluckiness of our Faith is most certainly revealed when we stand beside an open grave and say: That body that is in that hole; this is not the end. We believe in the resurrection of the body.

Thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and our guest this week, Sue Rozeboom. We want to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So, visit our website; it is groundworkonline.com; and suggest topics or passages for future Groundwork programs.

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