Faith in the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Augustine of Hippo, who lived from AD 354-430 once said “believe that you may understand.”

Similarly, Anselm of Canterbury once wrote that he had “faith seeking understanding.”

And Jesus Himself encouraged His believers to love God not with their hearts alone, but also with their minds (Matthew 22:37)

Any honest Christian must agree that there are a lot of things in this life and in our life to come that are hard to understand. Some understanding is essential for faith and likewise some faith is required to begin our journey toward understanding.

The scriptures, in Hebrews 11, say that:

“11 Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. 2 Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

3 By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.”

Hebrews 11:1-3 NLT

The writer goes on to share key acts of faith by many of the Old Testament believers and then it says this:

“13 All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. 14 Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. 15 If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. 16 But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT

As we move forward in 1 Corinthians 15, beginning with verse 35, I would like you to keep this at the forefront of your mind. Our faith and our understanding is an ongoing process, that will never be complete in this life. We, just like the examples God gives us in the scriptures, should be hungry to understand and know God our Creator and Christ our Savior. But we must also realize that we to will die with some of our expectations unfulfilled or at the very least we will be left with a lack of understanding with regards to who God is and what He has promised.

Some of God’s truth is very hard for us to grasp. Some things make sense to us without much reason, while others, like the resurrection of the body, may be harder to wrap our minds around. This is why Paul is assuring the Corinthians of the resurrection and challenging the Christians in Corinth to work hard and believe in the better things to come. Beginning with verse 35, in 1 Corinthians 15, he writes:

“35 But someone may ask, “How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?” 36 What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn’t grow into a plant unless it dies first. 37 And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. 38 Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed. 39 Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

40 There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. 41 The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory.

42 It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. 43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

45 The Scriptures tell us, “The first man, Adam, became a living person.”[h] But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. 46 What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. 47 Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. 48 Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. 49 Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like[i] the heavenly man.

50 What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.”

1 Corinthians 15:35-50 NLT

Notice that the Apostle Paul does not go into detail about what our bodies will be like. Instead, he uses illustrations to help us understand the differences between what is and what is to come. Let’s consider his comparisons.

One kind of flesh for humans another for animals.

Sun has one kind of glory while the moon and stars have another kind.

Earthly bodies buried heavenly bodies raised to live forever.

Earthly bodies buried in brokenness, heavenly bodies raised glorious. (Natural vs. Spiritual)

Earthly bodies buried in weakness, heavenly bodies strength.

Earthly bodies associated with Adam, resurrected bodies compared with Christ.

Resurrected bodies can live in the realm of God’s Kingdom and our physical (temporal) bodies cannot.

I cannot understand exactly what our resurrected bodies will be like, however, based off reason, I have an assurance that my new existence will be far more glorious than what I am living with right now. In fact, just using one of his analogies helps me gather that it will be like comparing the brightness of the sun to the brightness of the moon. The moon only reflects the glory of the sun, while the sun has glory that is so bright it cannot be directly looked at. Paul then goes on to share words of encouragement for those for whom death has seemingly separated or for those who see death as the end of existence. He writes:

“51 But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. 53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

56 For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. 57 But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 NLT

Friday, as I considered what would have been the 65th birthday of my friend Tim in this kingdom, my faith challenged me to believe that it was still his 65th birthday. He celebrated it in a much more glorious kingdom in a form without weakness and more glorious than my reason can comprehend. For him the sting of death is no more.

The same is true of:

Joell, Greg, Adrian, Karl, Kay, Betty, Shirley, Keith, Sam, every unborn child who never saw any evil days, all of your loved ones whose bodies were buried to this world but their spirits live on and their new glorified bodies await them.

The difficulty is that for us, our faith is still seeking understanding. We wonder why? We ask how come? We ponder what will happen? We try to nail down exactly how God will fulfill His promises. And sometimes we may even wonder if any of this really matters. God knows that we yearn to know these answers and so did the apostle Paul. That is why he finishes with verse 58.

“58 So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.”

1 Corinthians 15:58 NLT

Our faith matters, our work matters, in fact Paul assured us that everything we do for the Lord matters. My friend Tim, as he lived on this earth, was like the moon to me, reflecting the glory of the sun and it made a huge difference in who I am and the faith I have in Jesus. I can’t wait to see the Sun version of Tim. But until then, I will make it my goal to be the moon version of me and hopefully others will be helped to see God’s glory because of it. Today I am encouraging you to do the same. Be the most glorious version of you, reflect God’s glory even though it is hidden in cracked vessels of clay. And never give up faith that someday, all of us who are in Christ will be transformed and made to be like Christ “in every way.”

This life isn’t it for us. As good as it can be, there are far better things to come. It is my prayer for you and for me that we will continue to seek understanding and trust that “…nothing we do for the Lord is ever useless.”