

1 Corinthians 15:35-36

by St. John Chrysostom

The resurrection of the dead will be a glorious transformation, where our corruptible bodies will be raised in incorruption, glory, and power, and we will receive spiritual bodies that will be much more glorious than our current ones.

Topics: "Resurrection Hope", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the resurrection of the dead, addressing doubts and questions about the process and nature of the resurrection. He emphasizes the transformation from corruption to incorruption, dishonor to glory, weakness to power, and a natural body to a spiritual body. Chrysostom encourages believers to find comfort in the hope of resurrection and to trust in God's plan for the departed. He urges them to offer prayers, alms, and sacrifices for the souls of the departed, believing in the power of God's mercy and redemption. The sermon concludes with exhortations to give thanks in all circumstances, trust in God's providence, and find solace in the promise of eternal life.

Transcript

But some one will say, How are the dead raised? And with what manner of body do they come? Thou foolish one, that which you yourself sowest is not quickened, except it die.

Gentle and lowly as the apostle is to a great degree every where, he here adopts a style rather pungent, because of the impiety of the gainsayers. He is not however content with this, but he also employs reasons and examples, subduing thereby even the very contentious. And above he says, Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead; but here he solves an objection brought in by the Gentiles. And see how again he abates the vehemence of his censure; in that he said not, but perhaps you will say, but he set down the objector indefinitely, in order that, although employing his impetuous style with all freedom, he might not too severely wound his hearers. And he states two difficulties, one touching the manner of the resurrection, the other, the kind of bodies. For of both they on their part made a question, saying, How is that which has been dissolved raised up? and, with what manner of body do they come? But what means, with what manner of body? It is as if they had said, with this which has been wasted, which has perished, or with some other?

Then, to point out that the objects of their enquiry are not questionable but admitted points, he at once meets them more sharply, saying, Thou foolish one, that which you yourself sowest is not quickened, except it die. Which we also are wont to do in the case of those who gainsay things acknowledged.

2. And wherefore did he not at once appeal to the power of God? Because he is discoursing with unbelievers. For when his discourse is addressed to believers, he has not much need of reasons. Wherefore having said elsewhere, He shall change the body of your humiliation, that it may be fashioned like to the body of his glory, Philippians 3:2 and having indicated somewhat more than the resurrection, he stated no analogies, but instead of any demonstration, brought forward the power of God, going on to say, according to the working whereby He is able to subject all things to Himself. But here he also urges reasons. That is, having established it from the Scriptures, he adds also in what comes after, these things over and above, with an eye to them who do not obey the Scriptures; and he says, O foolish one, that which You sow: i.e., from yourself you have the proof of these things, by what you do every day, and do you doubt yet? Therefore do I call you foolish because of the things daily done by your own self you are ignorant, and being yourself an artificer of a resurrection, you doubt concerning God. Wherefore very emphatically he said, what You sow , thou who art mortal and perishing. sowest &c. The force or emphasis may be gathered thus. If God doth give a body unto that seed which thou sowest for thine own use and benefit, much more will the same God give a body unto the seed which He Himself doth sow, seeing the end why He sows it, is not thy temporal benefit or commodity, but His own immortal glory. Dr. Jackson's Works, vol. 3:338. See also vol. 3:333-443.}-->

And see how he uses expressions appropriate to the purpose he had in view: thus, it is not quickened, says he, except it die. Leaving, you see, the terms appropriate to seed, as that it buds, and grows, and is dissolved, he adopts those which correspond to our flesh, viz. it is quickened, and, except it die; which do not properly belong to seeds, but to bodies.

And he said not, after it is dead it lives, but, which is a greater thing, therefore it lives, because it dies. Do you see, what I am always observing, that he continually gives their argument the contrary turn? Thus what they made a sure sign of our not rising again, the same he makes a demonstration of our rising. For they said, the body rises not again, because it is dead. What then does he, retorting their argument, say? Nay, but unless it died, it could not rise again: and therefore it rises again, because it died. For as Christ more clearly signifies this very thing, in the words, Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides by itself alone: but if it die, it bears much fruit: John 12:24 thence also Paul, drawing this example, said not, it does not live, but, is not quickened; again assuming the power of God and showing that not the nature of the ground, but God Himself, brings it all to pass.

And what can be the reason that he did not bring that forward, which was more akin to the subject: I mean, the seed of mankind? (For our generation too begins from a sort of decay, even as that of the grain.) Because it was not of equal force, but the latter was a more complete instance: for he wants a case of something that perished entirely, whereas this was but a part; wherefore he rather alleges the other. Besides, that proceeds from a living body and falls into a living womb; but here it is no flesh, but the earth into which the seed is cast, and into the same it is dissolved, like the body which is dead. Wherefore on this account too the example was more appropriate.

1 Corinthians 15:37

3. And he who sows, sows not that body that shall be.

For the things before spoken meet the question, how they are raised; but this, the doubt, with what manner of body they come. But what is, you sow not that body which shall be? Not an entire ear of grain, nor new grain. For here his discourse no longer regards the resurrection, but the manner of the

resurrection, what is the kind of body which shall rise again; as whether it be of the same kind, or better and more glorious. And he takes both from the same analogy, intimating that it will be much better.

But the heretics, considering none of these things, dart in upon us and say, one body falls and another body rises again. How then is there a resurrection? For the resurrection is of that which was fallen. But where is that wonderful and surprising trophy over death, if one body fall and another rise again? For he will no longer appear to have given back that which he took captive. And how can the alleged analogy suit the things before mentioned? Why, it is not one substance that is sown, and another that is raised, but the same substance improved. Else neither will Christ have resumed the same body when He became the first-fruits of them that rise again: but according to you He threw aside the former body, although it had not sinned, and took another. Whence then is that other? For this body was from the Virgin, but that, whence was it? Do you see to what absurdity the argument has come round? For wherefore shows He the very prints of the nails? Was it not to prove that it is that same body which was crucified, and the same again that rose from the dead? And what means also His type of Jonah? For surely it was not one Jonah that was swallowed up and another that was cast out upon dry land. And why did He also say, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up? For that which was destroyed, the same clearly He raised again. Wherefore also the Evangelist added, that He spoke of the temple of His body. John 2:19-21

What is that then which he says, You sow not the body that shall be? i.e. not the ear of grain: for it is the same, and not the same; the same, because the substance is the same; but not the same, because this is more excellent, the substance remaining the same but its beauty becoming greater, and the same body rising up new. Since if this were not so, there were no need of a resurrection, I mean if it were not to rise again improved. For why did He at all pull down His house, except He were about to build it more glorious?

This now, you see, he said to them who think that it is utter corruption. Next, that none again might suspect from this place that another body is spoken of, he qualifies the dark saying, and himself interprets what he had spoken, not allowing the hearer to turn his thoughts from hence in any other direction. What need is there then of our reasonings? Hear himself speaking, and explaining the phrase, You sow not the body that shall be. For he straightway adds, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind; i.e., it is not the body that shall be; not so clothed, for instance; not having a stalk and beard, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind.

1 Corinthians 15:38

But God gives it a body even as it pleased Him.

Yes, says one, but in that case it is the work of nature. Of what nature, tell me? For in that case likewise God surely does the whole; not nature, nor the earth, nor the rain. Wherefore also he making these things manifest, leaves out both earth and rain, atmosphere, sun, and hands of husbandmen, and subjoins, God gives it a body as it pleased Him. Do not thou therefore curiously inquire, nor busy yourself with the how and in what manner, when you hear of the power and will of God.

And to each seed a body of its own. Where then is the alien matter which they speak of? For He gives to each his own. So that when he says, You sow not that which shall be, he says not this, that one substance is raised up instead of another, but that it is improved, that it is more glorious. For to each of the seeds, says he, a body of its own.

4. From hence in what follows, he introducing also the difference of the resurrection which shall then be. For do not suppose, because grain is sown and all come up ears of grain, that therefore there is also in the resurrection an equality of honor. For in the first place, neither in seeds is there only one rank, but some are more valuable, and some inferior. Wherefore also he added, to each seed a body of its own.

However, he is not content with this, but seeks another difference greater and more manifest. For that you may not, when hearing, as I said, that all rise again, suppose that all enjoy the same reward; he laid before even in the preceding verses the seeds of this thought, saying, But each in his own order. But he brings it out here also more clearly, saying,

1 Corinthians 15:39

All flesh is not the same flesh. For why speak I, says he, in respect of seeds? In respect of bodies let us agitate this point, concerning which we are discoursing now. Wherefore also he adds, and says,

But there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of birds, and another of fishes.

1 Corinthians 15:40

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

1 Corinthians 15:41

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory.

And what means he by these expressions? Wherefore from the resurrection of the body did he throw himself into the discourse of the stars and the sun? He did not throw himself out, neither did he break off from his purpose; far from it: but he still keeps to it. For whereas he had established the doctrine concerning the resurrection, he intimates in what follows that great will be then the difference of glory, though there be but one resurrection. And for the present he divides the whole into two: into bodies celestial, and bodies terrestrial. For that the bodies are raised again, he signified by the grain: but that they are not all in the same glory, he signifies by this. For as the disbelief of the resurrection makes men supine, so again it makes them indolent to think that all are vouchsafed the same reward. Wherefore he corrects both. And the one in the preceeding verses he had completed; but this he begins now. And having made two ranks, of the righteous and of sinners, these same two he subdivides again into many parts, signifying that neither righteous nor sinners shall obtain the same; neither righteous men, all of them, alike with other righteous, nor sinners with other sinners.

Now he makes, you see, first, one separation between righteous and sinners, where he says, bodies celestial, and bodies terrestrial: by the terrestrial intimating the latter, and by the celestial, the former. Then farther he introduces a difference of sinners from sinners, saying, All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of fishes, another of birds, and another of beasts. And yet all are bodies; but some are in more, and some in lesser vileness. And that in their manner of living too, and in their very constitution.

And having said this, he ascends again to the heaven, saying, There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon. For as in the earthly bodies there is a difference, so also in the heavenly; and that difference no ordinary one, but reaching even to the uttermost: there being not only a difference between

sun and moon, and stars, but also between stars and stars. For what though they be all in the heaven? Yet some have a larger, others a less share of glory. What do we learn from hence? That although they be all in God's kingdom, all shall not enjoy the same reward; and though all sinners be in hell, all shall not endure the same punishment. Wherefore he added,

1 Corinthians 15:42

So also is the resurrection of the dead.

So, How? With considerable difference. Then leaving this doctrine as sufficiently proved, he again comes to the proof itself of the resurrection and the manner of it, saying,

5. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. And observe his consideration. As in the case of seeds, he used the term proper to bodies, saying, it is not quickened, except it die: so in the case of bodies, the expression belonging to seeds, saying, it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. He said not, is produced, that you might not think it a work of the earth, but is raised. And by sowing here, he means not our generation in the womb, but the burial in the earth of our dead bodies, their dissolution, their ashes. Wherefore having said, it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption, he adds,

1 Corinthians 15:43

It is sown in dishonor. For what is more unsightly than a corpse in dissolution? It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. For before thirty days the whole is gone, and the flesh cannot keep itself together nor hold out for one day. It is raised in power. For there shall nothing prevail against it for all the future.

Here is why he stood in need of those former analogies, lest many on hearing of these things, that they are raised in incorruption and glory and power, might suppose that there is no difference among those who rise again. For all indeed rise again, both in power and in incorruption; and in this glory of their incorruption yet are not all in the same state of honor and safety.

1 Corinthians 15:44

It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

What do you say? Is not this body spiritual? It is indeed spiritual, but that will be much more so. For now oftentimes both the abundant grace of the Holy Ghost flies away on men's committing great sins; and again, the Spirit continuing present, the life of the flesh depends on the soul: and the result in such a case is a void, without the Spirit. But in that day not so: rather he abides continually in the flesh of the righteous, and the victory shall be His, the natural soul also being present.

For either it was some such thing which he intimated by saying, a spiritual body, or that it shall be lighter and more subtle and such as even to be wafted upon air; or rather he meant both these. And if you disbelieve the doctrine, behold the heavenly bodies which are so glorious and (for this time) so durable, and abide in undecaying tranquillity; and believe thou from hence, that God can also make these corruptible bodies incorruptible and much more excellent than those which are visible.

1 Corinthians 15:45

6. So also it is written, Genesis 2:7 the first man Adam became a living soul: the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.

And yet the one indeed is written, but the other not written. How then said he, it is written? He modified the expression according to the issue of events: as he is wont continually to do: and indeed as it is the way of every prophet. For so Jerusalem, the prophet said, should be called a city of righteousness; Isaiah 1:26 yet it was not so called. What then? Did the prophet speak false? By no means. For he is speaking of the issue of events. And that Christ too should be called Immanuel; Isaiah 7:14 yet was he not so called. But the facts utter this voice; so also here, the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.

And these things he said that you may learn that the signs and pledges both of the present life and of that which is to come have already come upon us; to wit, of the present life, Adam, and of the life to come, Christ. For since he sets down the better things as matters of hope, he signifies that their beginning has already come to pass, and their root and their fountain been brought to light. But if the root and the fountain be evident to all, there is no need to doubt of the fruits. Wherefore he says, The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. And elsewhere too, He shall quicken your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwells in you. Romans 7:11 It is the Spirit's work then to quicken.

Further, lest any should say, why are the worse things the elder? And why has the one sort, to wit, the natural, come to pass not merely as far as the first-fruits, but altogether; the other as far as the first-fruits only?-- he signifies that the principles also of each were so ordered.

1 Corinthians 15:46

For that is not first, says he, which is spiritual, but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual.

And he says not, why, but is content with the ordinance of God, having the evidence from the facts testifying to that most excellent œconomy of God, and implying that our state is always going forward to the better; at the same time by this also adding credibility to his argument. For if the lesser have come to pass, much more ought we to expect the better.

7. Since then we are to enjoy so great blessings, let us take our station in this array, and bewail not the departed, but rather those that have ended their life ill. For so the husbandman, when he sees the grain dissolving, does not mourn; rather, as long as he beholds it continuing solid in the ground he is in fear and trembling, but when he sees it dissolved rejoices. For the beginning of the future crop is its dissolving. So let us also then rejoice when the corruptible house falls, when the man is sown. And marvel not if he called the burial a sowing; for, in truth, this is the better sowing: inasmuch as that sowing is succeeded by deaths and labors and dangers and cares; but this, if we lived well, by crowns and rewards; and that, by corruption and death but this by incorruption and immortality, and those infinite blessings. To that kind of sowing there went embraces and pleasures and sleep: but to this, only a voice coming down from heaven, and all is at once brought to perfection. And he that rises again is no more led to a life full of toil, but to a place where anguish and sorrow and sighing are fled away.

If you require protection and therefore mournest your husband, betake yourself to God, the common Protector and Saviour and Benefactor of all, to that irresistible alliance, to that ready aid, to that abiding shelter which is every where present, and is as a wall unto us on every side.

But your intercourse was a thing desirable and lovely. I too know it. But if you will trust sound reason with this grief, and will consider with yourself who has taken him away, and that by nobly bearing it you offer your mind as a sacrifice to our God, even this wave will not be too strong for you to stem. And that which time brings to pass, the same do thou by your self-command. But if you shall yield to weakness, your emotion will cease indeed in time, but it will bring you no reward.

And together with these reasons collect also examples, some in the present life, some in the Holy Scriptures. Consider that Abraham slew his own son, and neither shed a tear nor uttered a bitter word. But he, you say, was Abraham. Nay, thou surely hast been called to a nobler field of action. And Job grieved indeed, but so much as was proper for a father who loved his children and was very solicitous for the departed; whereas what we now do, is surely the part of haters and enemies. For if when a man was taken up to court and crowned, thou were smiting yourself and lamenting, I should not say that you were a friend of him who was crowned, but a great enemy and adversary. Nay, say you, not even as it is do I mourn for him, but for myself. Well, but this is not the part of an affectionate person, to wish for your own sake that he were still in the conflict and subject to the uncertainty of the future, when he might be crowned and come to anchor; or that he should be tossed in mid ocean, when he might have been in port.

8. But I know not where he has gone, you say. Why do you not know, tell me? For according as he lived well or otherwise, it is evident where he will go. Nay, on this very account I lament, you say, because he departed being a sinner. This is a mere pretext and excuse. For if this were the reason of your mourning for the departed, you ought to have formed and corrected him, when he was alive. The fact is thou dost every where look to what concerns yourself, not him.

But grant that he departed with sin upon him, even on this account one ought to rejoice, that he was stopped short in his sins and added not to his iniquity; and help him as far as possible, not by tears, but by prayers and supplications and alms and offerings. For not unmeaningly have these things been devised, nor do we in vain make mention of the departed in the course of the divine mysteries, and approach God in their behalf, beseeching the Lamb Who is before us, Who takes away the sin of the world -- not in vain, but that some refreshment may thereby ensue to them. Not in vain does he that stands by the altar cry out when the tremendous mysteries are celebrated, For all that have fallen asleep in Christ, and for those who perform commemorations in their behalf. For if there were no commemorations for them, these things would not have been spoken: since our service is not a mere stage show, God forbid! Yea, it is by the ordinance of the Spirit that these things are done.

Let us then give them aid and perform commemoration for them. For if the children of Job were purged by the sacrifice of their father, why do you doubt that when we too offer for the departed, some consolation arises to them? Since God is wont to grant the petitions of those who ask for others. And this Paul signified saying, that in a manifold Person your gift towards us bestowed by many may be acknowledged with thanksgiving on your behalf. 2 Corinthians 1:11 Let us not then be weary in giving aid to the departed, both by offering on their behalf and obtaining prayers for them: for the common Expiation of the world is even before us. Therefore with boldness do we then intreat for the whole world, and name their names with those of martyrs, of confessors, of priests. For in truth one body are we all, though some members are more glorious than others; and it is possible from every source to gather pardon for them, from our prayers, from our gifts in their behalf, from those whose names are named with theirs. Why therefore do you grieve? Why mourn, when it is in your power to gather so much pardon for the departed?

9. Is it then that you have become desolate and hast lost a protector? Nay, never mention this. For you have not surely lost your God. And so, as long as you have Him, He will be better to you than husband and father and child and kinsman: since even when they were alive, He it was who did all things.

These things therefore think upon, and say with David, The Lord is my light and my Saviour, whom shall I fear? Psalm 27:1 Say, You are a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows: Psalm 68:5 and draw down His aid, and you shall have Him to care for you now more than before, by how much you are in a state of greater difficulty.

Or have you lost a child? You have not lost it; say not so. This thing is sleep, not death; removal, not destruction; a journeying from the worse unto the better. Do not then provoke God to anger; but propitiate Him. For if you bear it nobly, there will thence accrue some relief both to the departed and to yourself; but if the contrary, thou dost the more kindle God's anger. For if when a servant was chastised by his master, you stood by and complain, you would the more exasperate the master against yourself. Do not then so; but give thanks, that hereby also this cloud of sadness may be scattered from you. Say with that blessed one, the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Job 1:21 Consider how many more well-pleasing in His sight have never received children at all, nor been called fathers. Nor would I wish to have been so, say you, for surely it were better not to have had experience than after having tasted the pleasure to fall from it. Nay, I beseech you, say not so, provoke not thus also the Lord to wrath: but for what you have received, give Him thanks; and for what you have not to the end, give Him glory. Job said not that which you say unthankfully, it were better not to have received, but both for the one he gave thanks, saying, The Lord gave; and for the other he blessed God, saying, The Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord forever. And his wife he thus silenced, justifying himself against her, and uttering those admirable words, Have we received good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? And yet after this a fiercer temptation befell him: yet was he not even thus unnerved, but in like manner bore it nobly and glorified God.

This also do thou, and consider with yourself that man has not taken him, but God who made him, who more than yourself cares for him and knows what is good for him: who is no enemy nor liar-in-wait. See how many, living, have made life intolerable to their parents. But do you not see the right-hearted ones? say you. I see these too, but even these are not so safe as your child is. For though they are now approved, yet it is uncertain what their end will be; but for him you have no longer any fear, nor do you tremble lest anything should happen to him or he experience any change.

These things also do thou consider respecting a good wife and guardian of your house, and for all things give thanks unto God. And even if you shall lose a wife, give thanks. Perhaps God's will is to lead you to continence, He calls you to a nobler field of conflict, He was pleased to set you free from this bond. If we thus command ourselves, we shall both gain the joy of this life and obtain the crowns which are to come, etc. etc.

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