

## Welcome

When I was in fifth grade, I got to do a book report with my crush, Becky (it was a big deal). We chose to do a book I had found on Ancient Egypt - specifically mummification. I had long been fascinated with mummies, and we went all-out for our book report. We gathered foods that vaguely resembled the various organs the Egyptians removed during the mummification process and actually acted out the process for the class. (We got an A+++ if you must know.)

Mummification is a process by which a human body is dried out and preserved, along with vital organs. Egyptians were mummified because of their views of the afterlife - they believed they would get to live forever with everything buried with them. It's why the Pharaohs built elaborate tombs and were buried with fabulous wealth, their families, servants, and even horses and cats.

Of course, we know today that didn't happen. Instead, the Pharaohs' tombs were robbed century after century to the point that archaeologists today have found only a small fraction of the fabulous wealth they were buried with.

The Egyptians' beliefs about the end of the world shaped how they lived. Because they believed they could take their possessions with them, they developed a culture where the very powerful took advantage of those below them, all to get more wealth, more status, more power - and then it was all locked in a tomb with them. Their picture of the afterlife created injustice.

We're going to talk about afterlife today - specifically, what the Bible says about the end of all things and what's in store for US and how that shapes how we live today. Take a poll of Jesus people and you'll not be surprised that there's a pretty common picture of afterlife that emerges: Once we die, if we're good, we go to Heaven. We live in Heaven (which is up there somewhere), and at some point, God is going to come and get everyone else who's still down here and take us all away to live up in Heaven forever.

We're going to see today that this picture of the End isn't at all what the Bible says will happen. Quite the opposite, in fact. So today, we're going to talk about resurrection - not only Jesus', but our own resurrection at the end of time. We're going to talk about our bodies and the earth and the God who will not give up even an inch of ground to sin and death. And of course, we're going to talk about why all that matters for us today.

## Message

We're almost to the end of our Summer series, Believe. We've been working through the Apostle's Creed, one of the oldest statements about what Christians believe. These beliefs are not gateways to belonging but invitations to life. When we say, "I believe..." we are acting in faith, trusting the wisdom of the Church across the world and throughout time that has found these words to be the Way of God, the way to life.

We began by confessing God as our creator, insisting that our lives have meaning and purpose. Since then, we've been investigating belief in Jesus - everything from his identity as God to his incarnation to his second coming. Then we examined who the Holy Spirit is and what she does in our lives.

For these two final weeks, we're looking at the End. Today, **I believe in the resurrection of the body**. It's tempting to think this statement is about Jesus - that we're claiming Jesus' resurrection body was a physical body. And it's true that belief is an essential part of faith. But if that were what this statement in the Creed is claiming, we'd see it up in the section with Jesus' resurrection.

But this confession is in the part about the Spirit and the Church. So when we say with the Creed that we believe in the resurrection of the body, we're talking about *our* bodies. We're saying that we believe in the End, when Jesus returns, we'll all be raised to life *in our physical bodies*.

There's a disconnect between how we see Jesus' resurrection and our own. We can get behind the idea that Jesus' actual body walked out of his tomb on the third day. But when we think about our own afterlife, we imagine ourselves as spirits floating in the clouds. Angels wearing white robes and playing harps. We imagine our afterlife differently from Jesus. And that's a big problem.

[**Scripture Slide 1**] Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15. This is a letter written by Paul, one of the first converts to Christianity. He's writing to a church he founded in the Greek city of Corinth. Paul is Jewish, which means he was raised with the belief that God would come one day, resurrect all peoples and judge them.

But Greeks didn't have that same belief. For Greeks, dead is dead - that's part of why the Good News about Jesus being raised was so hard for them to wrap their heads around. And the fact that they couldn't believe that we would actually rise from the dead was actually causing a lot of problems in their Church. Through the whole letter, Paul has been addressing problem after problem, and now he is bringing everything around to WHY it matters so much.

Let's listen in on his conversation, because Paul grounds *our* bodily resurrection in Jesus'. He points out that OUR end is going to look like JESUS' end (which makes a lot of sense!):

**Tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.**

**But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. -- 1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

Paul points out that Jesus' resurrection isn't a separate thing from ours. That what began in Jesus' resurrection is still happening, and won't be finished until we are all raised - in bodies - from the dead.

Since we haven't read the whole letter of 1 Corinthians, we are scratching our heads a little and wondering why Paul is making such a big deal out of bodily resurrection. Why is this such an important thing to believe? Why not just shrug and say, "No one knows, and we'll figure it out when we get there!"?

Because *not* believing our bodies are eternal was causing a lot of problems in the Corinthian Church. And it causes a lot of problems in our world, too. A lot of Christians find it hard to care too much about the physical needs of people. When we travel the world to tell people the good news about Jesus, we don't take food, water and other basic necessities. Because we don't think starving, thirsty, unprotected bodies matter. We think all that matters is the spirit inside. They could die tomorrow, and as long as they believe, they get to go to heaven.

One of my favorite authors is C. S. Lewis, but he imagines two soldiers on opposite sides in World War 1 killing each other, and then laughing about it as they float up to heaven. Really?

It comes out in how we treat our own bodies, and how we treat the Earth. If we think God is going to destroy both, then who cares how you care for them?

The way you think the story ends affects how you live now. That was true in Paul's day and it's true in our day, too. That's why we need to keep the End in mind.

[Scripture Slide 2] Turn with me to Revelation 21 - the very end of the Bible. We confess God to be the creator of Heaven and Earth. But if we think the end of the story is that God abandons Earth and everything God created in the earth - including our bodies, well... that's a pretty terrible story.

It means that Sin and Death win. They get to claim, forever, good things God created. Which is why Revelation *doesn't* end that way. We already saw in 1 Corinthians that Paul promises our bodies will be raised. Now see how the Revelator sees the end of all things:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. -- Revelation 21:1-7

Friends, this is the end of the story: God will return and reclaim the earth. Sin and Death will be defeated, and we will all live on a restored Earth in resurrected bodies with God. Just like Jesus, we will live in physical bodies forever.

And that affects how we live today. We know the end, so it shapes us now.

What does it mean to be a Church that believes in the resurrection of the body?

We believe in learning to love our bodies. This is challenging in a culture that tells us we're never the right shape or size or color. But we work hard to find the wise path between disregard for our bodies and doing too much.

We believe in caring for each other - not just meeting spiritual needs, but physical needs too. We care for each other when we're sick (often by providing meals and being present). We pay attention to the bodies of the vulnerable, those who slip through the cracks, who are valued less by our culture.

We believe in caring for the Earth and for all the creatures of the Earth. Regardless of our political persuasion, we recognize that our first calling as God's image-bearers was to steward creation, to rule the Earth as God rules. We take that responsibility seriously - it affects everything from what we eat to what we throw away.

We believe in a physical world, and we trust that God is not abandoning us or our world. God is bigger than our sin, and God's victory over sin is not partial.

### **Communion + Creed**

[Communion Slide] Jesus gave us a physical practice - a meal.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

### **Assignment/Blessing**

10 min of Silence