

Introduction

- Did you know?
 - the most dangerous thing in the world is **living**. There's a **100% mortality rate!**
- Death is one of those slightly taboo subjects, that aren't often talked about openly.
- Occasionally subject of humour, but most often in our cossetted Western society, avoided.
- Yet all of us know that it is a reality we will one day experience.
- So, what will happen when we die?
 - **what will our existence be like?**
- These were exactly the concerns that the Corinthian church was struggling with.
- And so we get to look over Paul's shoulder as he seeks to put their minds at rest about one of the most fearful mysteries of humanity:

Recognisable

- The problem that seems to have really bothered the Corinthian Christians emerges in v.35:
 - **"How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"**
- Common sense told them that heaven would not be populated by walking, talking corpses.
 - but if that is so, **what would be the nature of their heavenly life?**
- Bishop Charles Brent said this:
 - 'What is dying? I am standing on the sea-shore, a ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon and someone at my side says, **"She is gone."** Gone! Where? Gone from my sight - that is all. She is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination. The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her; and just at the moment when someone at my side says, **"She is gone,"** there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up the glad shout - **"There she comes!"** - and that is dying.'
- That bishop, speaking in the images of the sail ships, was echoing one of Paul's main thrusts:
 - **we will be able to recognise people in their eternal form from what we know of their earthly form.**
 - it will be **different**, just as the daffodil plants that come up in the garden each spring are different from the daffodil bulbs we planted.
 - **God will choose a form of appearance for each of us that is unmistakable!**
- So, while things will be different, there will be a strong element of **continuity**:
 - for the good that God originally intended in men and women created in his image will be fully restored.

Transformed

- While our resurrection bodies will be recognisably the same, they will also be in every way better.
 - look at the **superlatives of v.42-44** - mortal becomes immortal; **ugly becomes beautiful**; **weak becomes strong**; **merely physical becomes spiritual!**
- For the **dying** that means that their body will **never again have to pass through death** - for all eternity!
- For those who feel **too fat** or too **thin, tall** or **short, ugly** or **self-conscious** that means that even the bits that we are embarrassed about **will appear as something glorious!**
- For those who are **frustrated by the limitations their present body imposes** - mobility, ability - their **transformed body** will be **powerfully good**.

- A father shows his infant daughter a **bird's egg**:
 - "Use all your imagination! What do you think it will grow into?" The little girl stares at the egg. She cannot make up her mind whether it is beautiful or dull. What might it become? She guesses. A rock? A football? Her father smiles and points to the sky. A robin flutters into the garden. The girl is open-mouthed with wonder as only a child can be. How could there possibly be a relationship between the simple egg in her hand and the glorious sight of a bird in sight? How could something so beautiful as that bird with its stunning red breast come from something so ordinary as an egg? How could her father recognise that the bird in the air was born as the egg in his hand, when the two are so different? She doesn't question these things. Because her father has told her, she accepts them as fact. Wondrous, yes, but facts! One day she will understand the answers to all those questions, and they will seem just commonplace realities of existence. But for now, her curiosity is satisfied; she can't understand, but she can marvel.
- Thus we try to understand what it will mean to have a body transformed, but recognisable, in eternal life.
 - we can only begin to grasp the edges of it - and wonder!

Christ Like

- The final point that Paul makes to these worried and upset Corinthian Christians is that our new bodies will, quite simply, be **like Jesus**:
 - *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.* (v.49)
- If all the previous promises only partially still the worry, cling to this:
 - you will be like Jesus, risen from the dead!
- Think back to those resurrection appearances:
 - recognisably the same person, able to eat (not just a ghost), continuing the deep, close friendships with the disciples and the rest of his followers after his resurrection;
 - but different too - able to appear and disappear at will, somehow different so that the two on the Emmaus road were kept (for a while at least) from recognising him; never more to die.
- Our bodies - our existence - will encompass all of that.
- But most wonderful of all is that we will be like our Lord, not merely physically, but in our character, our love, our compassion, our close fellowship with the Lord, never failing him, never letting him down.
 - We will be like Jesus!
- Eternal life is not merely survival through death - living for ever a life just like this one would be a dreadful prospect!
 - it means inheriting the glory and beauty and character of God!

Conclusion

- So, we can afford to put our curiosity on hold for just now.
- God, through Paul, doesn't answer every query we have, every little "what if... what about...?"
- But he does give us good grounds for giving up our worry, and living life now in the glorious expectation of eternity!
 - freed from fear, from self-consciousness, liberated to live content and productive lives for him now!

Let's pray!

- thanksgiving!