

The Drama of Scripture: Restoration (#1)

This morning we are continuing our sermon series on the Drama of Scripture. So far we've looked at the first three acts in this Drama. Creation describes God's design and the way things OUGHT to be. The Fall describes how the world actually IS due to sin. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, humanity and creation are marred. Redemption describes the way things CAN be because of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation.

Today, we come to the last act in the drama: Restoration. Restoration describes the way things WILL BE. Restoration is the returning of something or someone to its original state. And since we know the first Act in this drama, we know that the original state of creation was something that God declared over and over again to be good. And when He made humanity, the pinnacle of His creation, God declared that it was VERY good. But that's not what creation is now. And that's not who we are now. All of this needs to be restored, which is exactly what God will do for humanity and all of creation at the return of Christ.

Understanding Act 4 is incredibly important, because when we know our ultimate destiny, when we know where we are heading, affects how we live now. This morning, we are going to look at the restoration of humanity; next week Steve will look at the restoration of the rest of creation.

I. Restoration of Humanity

When God restores humanity, the restoration will extend to our moral/spiritual nature as well as to our physical bodies. I want to look at these two things to help us get a picture of our destiny.

Scripture teaches that when Jesus returns we will be given a **Restored Body**. In Philippians 3, Paul says this:

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Paul is looking ahead to restoration. He makes the point that when Jesus comes, the one for whom *we eagerly wait*, our bodies will be transformed. Now, he says our bodies are in a *humble state* (NIV – “lowly”). But when Jesus returns, our bodies will be transformed *into conformity with the body of His glory*. We will receive glorified bodies that are appropriate to those who are children of God. They will be like Jesus' glorious body.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives his fullest explanation of what this transformation of the body means. The full context of this passage starts back in verse 35 where Paul mentions that there

are those who are raising questions about the nature of how the dead are raised and what kind of body they will have.

In the context of this passage, Paul is using the imagery of a seed. A seed that is sown dies, but in doing so it gives birth to something new, something better. I grew up on a farm and every spring dad planted corn, but what came up was never just a seed but a whole plant. Paul is saying a very similar thing happens with our bodies.

I want to pick up his argument starting in verse 42. Paul writes:

⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

When Jesus returns, the bodies that we now have are going to be either transformed (if we are still living) or resurrected (if we have already died) to be a very different thing. Paul says that the physical body that we have now is perishable (v. 42), dishonorable (v. 43), weak (v. 43), and natural (v. 43). But once restored, our bodies will be a very different thing.

Paul says that it will be *an imperishable body* (v. 42). A perishable body is one that is wearing out. For many years I ran a lot. Two years ago I logged nearly 1400 miles running. But then last year my right knee started bothering me and I had to back off a lot. In January of this year, I had an MRI that revealed deterioration of my kneecap. The ortho doctor told me that knees are sort of like tires; they only have so many miles in them. And so this year, I'm still walking, but I probably have not run more than 10 miles. My body is perishable. It's breaking down. And I know that his body will eventually die. And that's the kind of body you have as well. But the body that you and I will be given in our resurrection will be imperishable. It will not wear out. It will not grow old. It will not die.

In restoration our body also will be *raised in glory*. This is the idea that Paul talked about in Philippians. Paul says that now our bodies are *in dishonor*. This has the sense of shame or disgrace. There is a lowliness that was never meant to be the state of our bodies. Our bodies experience this because of the effects of sin. But we will be *raised in glory*. We will have a body that conforms to the glory of Jesus's body. Glory has a sense of radiant beauty, brilliance. We will fully and completely reflect God's glory in ways that we were intended to.

Our restored bodies will also be powerful. Now, we have bodies that are weak (v. 43). Two weeks ago I got a flu shot because my body is subject to sickness. Some of you this morning, you don't feel good. Some of you are tired. Your body is tired. We lack strength and vigor in our bodies. But our resurrected bodies will be powerful. We will have the strength that God intended us to have. It will not be unlimited power, but it will be strength that is sufficient to do all that conforms to God's will.

And finally, Paul says that we will have *spiritual* bodies (v. 44). By calling our resurrected bodies, *spiritual*, Paul does not mean non-physical or immaterial. Rather, our bodies will be like Christ's resurrected body. We know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus' resurrected body was physical. He bore the scars of his crucifixion. People could touch him. He ate food. And yet, his body was changed. His body wasn't subject to the normal limitations of earthly bodies. He could enter a room even when the doors were shut (John 20:26). He had the same body, but it was a different kind of body. And that's what God will do for us as well. We will be given glorious resurrection bodies that are fully fit for eternity and life in God's presence. This is a great hope that we have - the restoration of our bodies. Imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual bodies!

Second, we will also experience **full spiritual transformation**. Once we trust Jesus (i.e. experience Redemption) we are forgiven for our sin and we begin a process of transformation where we seek to put to death sin and live in obedience. This is not something we do alone; we have the good gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us helping with this spiritual transformation. But in this life this transformation will never be complete. We will continue to battle sin until the day we die. We will continue to struggle to fully obey God. But when we experience restoration, struggle with sin will be fully and completely gone, because we will have experienced full spiritual and moral transformation.

In 1 John 3:2–3, John says:

² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

John is looking forward to restoration. And he says that on that day, when Jesus appears (i.e. when He returns), he says that *we will be like Him*. Now, in what way will we be *like Him*? He is not talking here about our bodies, but about our moral nature, because he says that when we have this hope of being like Jesus that spurs us on to purify ourselves as Jesus is pure.

Jude 24 says it this way:

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

How often we fail in this life, right? Sometimes we waver in our desire to please God, but even in times when we are fully resolved to please Him we still find that we live in ways that don't please God. We sin in thought, word, and deed. We are not morally blameless.

But when God accomplishes our restoration, our moral nature will be *blameless*. Through Christ's redemptive work, God will make us stand in his presence in a state of blamelessness. We will not feel any shame or a need to hide from God. No! We will feel joy! Unspeakable joy! This will be ours when we experience full spiritual transformation.

And so we have the hope of restored bodies. And we have the hope of full spiritual transformation. These are things that we WILL experience when restoration is complete. I want to look at one thing that we WILL NOT experience once restoration happens.

The Scriptures also tell us that once we experience restoration there will be **no more tears, death, or pain**. In Revelation 21, we read this:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

When we experience Act 3, redemption, and find salvation through Jesus Christ it is an amazing thing. But as amazing as redemption is, we still live in a world broken and marred by sin. And because it is broken, even though God loves us and is for us and we are in relationship with Him, we still experience so much of the effects of sin. We experience suffering and pain and loss. We experience the separation of death.

But in the restoration all of this is gone! In the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no more of this. God, Himself, will dwell among us and all that is sad or painful or broken will be gone. They will *have passed away*. And our Father will *wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning or crying, or pain*.

This is an amazing picture of our future, right? A restored body; fit for life in the God's kingdom. A moral nature fully transformed; able to stand in God's presence blameless. A life full of joy and not sadness and loss. And the news is actually better than this. Next week Steve will talk about how God is going to restore the rest of creation. And so we will dwell with a restored body and a fully transformed nature in a place made perfect in the new heavens and the new earth. This is what we will experience when God's kingdom comes. This is final act in the Drama of Scripture.

Now, I'm not sure why, but for some reason of all the Acts in the Drama of Scripture, this is the one about which I've thought the least. It is the one that has been the fuzziest in my mind. Maybe I've thought I don't really need to think much about it because it is all going to work out well in the end. And yet, it has been to my detriment that I have not contemplated this Act very much. It is to the detriment of all of us if we don't contemplate this final Act in the Drama of Scripture because the truth of our full restoration has implication for life in this world. I want to look at a couple of these implications.

II. Implications of Our Future Restoration

First, you can know that **something better lies ahead**. Growing up one of the favorite things was getting to go on vacation to Colorado. Since I grew up in Nebraska that meant a long drive through western Nebraska and eastern Colorado that wasn't too interesting to me. Now, I know that there is a kind of beauty to those flat lands, but part of the reason I didn't mind the "boring" part of the drive was that I knew that something better lies ahead. We need to remember as we move through this life that something better lies ahead.

Sometimes this life is great. We can hardly imagine something better. But something much, much better lies ahead even if you are experiencing a great life right now. On the other hand far too often this life is really hard. It's not great. We suffer. Loved ones suffer. We experience devastating losses. This is exactly where some of you are right now this morning. Act 4 in the Drama tells you that something better lies ahead. No more tears, or death or pain.

Knowing that something better lies ahead gives us hope and hope helps us live with endurance in the present time no matter how difficult our circumstances.

Secondly, restoration means that there will be a day when **you will be everything God wants you to be**. How often this life is filled with the sadness of disappointing God. We know that we fall short of what He wants us to be. Of course, because of Act 3, redemption, we know that through Christ's death and resurrection, God now looks at us and sees us as having the righteousness of Jesus. He credits Christ's righteousness to us. That is our spiritual standing with God, but we know that we don't always live righteous lives.

When you are restored, you will be everything God wants you to be. Your moral nature will be fully changed and you will have a body with strength sufficient to do all that conforms to God's will. You will be blameless in every way. Can you imagine the joy of being everything God wants you to be; of being fully pleasing to Him? Again, knowing this truth gives us hope as we struggle in this world.

Here's another implication. In light of our destiny **we should strive to live righteous lives in the present age**. In fact, the reality is that when we rightly understand our destiny it creates longing in our hearts for living a righteous life.

Earlier I read 1 John. Remember what John said?

² . . . We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Do you see the connection that John makes? When we understand our future – that when we see Jesus we will be like him – it causes us to long for purity, to long for righteousness. Everyone who has this hope fixed on Jesus purifies himself.

I said earlier that it is to our detriment if we don't contemplate and understand this final act in the Drama of Scripture. This is one of the reasons why. God calls us to live righteous lives. We see that over and over in the Scriptures. And yet, without a deep understanding of restoration, we will lack a core motivation to pursue righteousness.

Many of you know about Joni Eareckson Tada. Back in 1967, as an 18-year-old girl she dove into shallow water and became a quadriplegic. If there were one person whom you would think would long for a restored body more than anything else it would be Joni. And yet here is what she said some years ago:

People say, "You must be looking forward to Heaven," thinking I'm looking forward to getting my new body. And after more than twenty-five years in a wheelchair, it's true that I am. But more than I am looking forward to my new body I am looking forward to a heart without sin.

(Quoted by Whitney in *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, 126)

Joni understands that the best life is a life without sin. Because when our hearts are finally free of sin, we will experience unhindered communion with God. And that is where our deepest longings will be fulfilled. A heart without sin IS the life we will have once we are restored. And when we understand that it presses back into our experience now and creates longings for righteousness. It helps us do the work of purifying ourselves just as he is pure.

Finally, the last implication of restoration is that we should **live in a state of readiness**. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, what I just talked about – seeking to live a righteous life – is how you live in a state of readiness. But for those who have not yet trusted in Jesus for salvation, what does this mean for you?

If you have been here for this whole series, you've heard the drama of Scripture. You've seen the meta-narrative that explains all of our lives. There is a Creator who made this world; who made us. Creation was good. We were good. We had a relationship with God that was unhindered by anything.

But then through the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, sin spread to everything and corrupted and marred everything. That includes all of us. We fell. We lost our relationship with God. And no amount of living a good life or anything of the sort can solve the dilemma.

But God didn't leave us in that hopeless condition. There was an Act 3: Redemption. He sent His Son into this world to live a perfect life; to suffer and die for our sins and then to be resurrected to life again. He did that for you and for me that we might be forgiven and be given spiritual life.

And so here's the deal. There is redemption. It is found in Christ. It is a free gift. But for those who do not received the forgiveness and life that God offers us through Christ, Act 4 will look

very different for you. It will not be about restoration; it will be about eternal separation from God.

Each of us must humble ourselves and acknowledge that we are sinful; that we have experienced the fall. By nature and by our own choices we are guilty before a holy God and in need of redemption through Christ. And so in our humility we call out to God to save us. We ask Him to forgive us on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection. That's what you need to do to live in a state of readiness.

Have you done that? If not, I want to give you an opportunity to do that this morning. I want to offer a simple prayer that expresses faith in Jesus and what he did on the cross. If you are ready to receive the gift of salvation that is offered on the basis of what Jesus did, you can just pray this prayer silently in your heart to God.

God, I acknowledge that I have sinned against you in my thoughts and in my deeds. I confess that I am guilty and, God, I am sorry for my sin. I acknowledge that I need Jesus. This morning I choose to place my faith in Jesus and what he did on the cross for me. I believe that he paid the penalty for my sin. And so today I open up the door of my life and I receive Jesus and I give my life to you. Father, thank you that because of Jesus you forgive my sin and you declare that I am righteous. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer in genuine faith, God has forgiven you. He declares that He sees you with all the righteousness of Christ. You may feel something; you may not. That doesn't matter. What matters is faith. God always responds to genuine faith. Let me encourage you to tell someone if you made that decision today. Tell a friend or come up and tell me.

Father, for all of us, we thank you for the hope of our restoration. We thank you that better things lie ahead – a restored body and a heart free from sin. Help us to deeply understand what we are going to experience when all is restored and may these truths press into our daily life and help us to obey you fully in the here and now. Amen.