

HEAVENLY BODIES
The Book of Philippians #29
(Philippians 3:20-21)

Today is the first day of Daylight Savings Time. The days will now be shorter and the nights will soon grow longer. The weather is starting to change and soon the winter holidays will be upon us when most of our time will be spent indoors. It is during this pre-holiday time that I like to sit down and watch some of my favorite holiday movies. There are several I like to watch like Bing Crosby's "White Christmas", "The Preacher's Wife" with Whitney Houston and Denzel Washington, "Family Man" with Nicholas Cage, "Mrs. Miracle" with Doris Roberts, and "The Polar Express" with Tom Hanks. But the one I try to be sure and watch every year is "It's A Wonderful Life" starring Jimmy Stewart.

This is the story of George Bailey and his desire to leave the small town of Bedford Falls. But due to his compassionate nature and the circumstances surrounding his family and his town he is forced to stay and work to help others. But one day, through the manipulation of a dishonest banker who owns most of the town, George and his business is in danger of financial ruin which will affect many of the poorer folks in town. George is in despair and contemplates suicide by jumping off a bridge. But his guardian angel Clarence intervenes and jumps instead, forcing George to rescue him. The rest of the movie deals with Clarence attempting to show George all the lives he has touched and how different life in Bedford Falls would have been had he never been born.

This movie has great moral lessons and shows the hidden impact each of us has on another human being. Sometimes the choices we make feel like they matter very little, but put together over a lifetime they can amount to a great deal. And though we may not know until a crisis occurs how much we are loved, it is the little things we do each day that causes love to grow.

But I do have one serious theological issue with the movie because it presents a theory of life after death that has been prevalent for centuries. In the movie Clarence is sent to look after George Bailey because Clarence is a deceased man who, after death, has become an angel. Only he has no wings. And in order to get them he has to earn them. So Clarence is looking to earn his wings by helping George out of his current predicament. Clarence tells George that "every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings." And sure enough, at the end of the movie the bell on George's Christmas tree rings to assure him that Clarence has fulfilled his mission and earned his wings.

But do we become angels when we die? We are told that we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52) but what will we be changed into? Is becoming an angel a possibility? And if so will we be "wingless" and have to earn our wings? Or will we, like some believe, be reincarnated in another form such as an ant or a butterfly depending on how good we had been in our previous life?

And whatever form we inhabit after death will we be recognizable to those who knew us? Will we still have to eat or will food not be required? Will we sleep or not need it? Will we fly or walk, run or ride? And will bells ring when we accomplish whatever our purpose is in heaven?

We may never know the answers to all of these questions until we actually experience life after death. But we can gain some insight from Scripture to help us catch a glimpse of what awaits us "on the other side".

Many years after my grandfather died my cousin mentioned that she had seen our grandfather

appear to her in his old bedroom one night. I had experienced supernatural things myself in that room before I became a believer so I was not surprised that she saw something. But I did not believe my grandfather actually appeared to her and I told her so. The Bible speaks of many lying spirits who seek to deceive us. Even Satan himself appears as an angel of light for the purpose of deception (2 Corinthians 11:14-16).

But my cousin was curious about life after death. So she asked me, “What do we become when we die? Do we become animals or angels or something else? What kind of body will we have when we die?” This was a natural question to be asked from someone who had no knowledge of Scripture. And it’s something even Christians wonder about because some say and, as we’ve seen many movies depict, that when we die we will become angels, having wings and halos. Some even believe we will remain a spirit - free from any type of physical form.

There are several Scripture passages that describe the appearances of those who have died or were taken to heaven. So let’s start with these to see what we can determine about the form we will take after we leave this earth.

Raised From The Dead (1 Kings 17:17-23; 2 Kings 4:32-37; John 11:38-43)

There have been several instances where people have been raised from the dead. In the Old Testament we read of Elijah raising the widow’s son after he became sick and died (1 Kings 17:17-23). Elisha raised another woman’s son from the dead after he complained of a headache and died. (2 Kings 4:32-37). And of course in the New Testament we know of Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead after he had been dead for four days (John 11:38-43).

These were all people who had died but were raised to life again; but it was a life that was the same as they had experienced before. They inhabited the same body and were subject to the same conditions in life as they had previously experienced. All of these would die again, be buried again and await the coming of Christ before they rose from the grave for the final time.

Scripture also records the appearance of deceased saints who came out of their graves after the resurrection of Jesus, entered Jerusalem and appeared to many (Matthew 27:52-53). We have no more information on who these saints were or what they did after entering Jerusalem. But since there is no indication they ascended into heaven like Jesus would soon do, most likely they, like Lazarus, died again before their final resurrection.

But these scenarios do not help us in our determination of what type of body if any we will have when we die. For these people were all raised up to inhabit this life in their earthly temporal bodies and will all die again. They had not yet received their spiritual bodies.

So we need to look for any recorded instances in Scripture of people who were raised from the grave but were not resurrected yet appeared to the living. Are there any such instances? Yes there are. There are three such recorded instances in Scripture where those who have died with no recorded resurrection appeared to the living. The first is one who died, was called up from the grave, and then went back into the grave. The second involves one who was taken directly to heaven, by-passing both death and the grave. The third involves one who died and came down out of heaven. We have no recorded instance in Scripture of any of these saints experiencing a physical resurrection.

Called Up From the Grave (1 Samuel 28:7-20)

The first one was Samuel, a prophet and the first Judge of Israel. He is the only recorded person who came out of the grave and spoke to the living. He was “conjured up” by the witch of Endor at the request of a disguised King Saul. Upon seeing him the witch cried out and said that Saul had deceived her. Why? Because she was not expecting the real Samuel. She was expecting the lying spirit she was used to conjuring up. This spirit was not a vague shape. She described him as “a god coming up out of the earth whose appearance was of an old man wearing a robe”.

We know this was the real Samuel because he asked Saul why he had disturbed him and brought him up from the grave (1 Samuel 28:8-18). He then stated that the Lord would give Saul and his sons into the hands of the Philistines and the next day they would be with Samuel in the land of the dead. This prophecy came true exactly as Samuel had foretold. This was not a lying spirit. This was Samuel the prophet himself sent by God from the dead to pronounce judgment on Saul. And he was recognizable by those who saw him.

Why God allowed this to occur is a mystery for He expressly forbids anyone from calling up the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-11). But perhaps the issuance of the final prophecy and judgment upon Saul for his continued disobedience was reason enough. God knows those who are His, both dead and alive, and can use them in any way He sees fit. He is Lord not only of the living but also of the dead. He forbids us to call up spirits but He does not restrict Himself from doing so. All souls, in the land of the living or the land of the dead, are subject to His will.

Transported Directly To Heaven (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11)

But what about those who did not die but were taken directly to heaven? There are two recorded instances of such a thing happening. The first happened to Enoch, whom Scripture says walked with God and was no more, for God took him. The second happened to Elijah who was taken up in a whirlwind to heaven. We hear no more of Enoch and there is no recorded instance of his appearing to any living being after his departure from earth. But we do see Elijah again. He reappears in Scripture along with Moses at the transfiguration of Jesus.

Sent Down Out Of Heaven (Mark 9:2-8)

Scripture tells us that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to a high mountain. While they were there Jesus was transfigured before them. To be transfigured is to be transformed or to have your appearance changed. The disciples saw the garments of Jesus become radiant and exceedingly white. But along with Jesus they also saw two other figures.

The other two had the appearance of men and Peter, James, and John instantly recognized them as being Moses and Elijah. Scripture says that Moses died and God buried him in an unknown location in the land of Moab (Deuteronomy 34:5-6) yet Moses appears over 1,000 years later with Elijah and is recognized by the three witnesses to this event. And they hear them talking with Jesus. Like Samuel, the appearance of Moses is the second instance of someone who died with no recorded resurrection who has appeared to the living.

What we can glean from the transfiguration is that both the saints that have died (like Moses) and those who were taken directly to heaven (like Elijah) were recognizable. How that was possible by those who had never seen them before is unknown. Did Jesus call them by name? We don't know. What we do know is that they were undeniably recognizable and they were able to communicate with others.

So we have seen that all those who died in the Lord – both those who were in the grave like Samuel and those who were in heaven like Moses - were all recognizable by those who saw them, even by those who had never seen them before. And they had a body like the one they had while alive on earth. They did not have the shape or form of a spirit nor did they have the body of an angel or a bird or some other created creature. This is not only confirmed by what we have seen from these Scriptures but is also confirmed by what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-49

“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own...

“All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory...

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

“So also it is written, ‘The first MAN, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.”

And this is what Paul reminds us of in Philippians 3:20-21 when he says that

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

“For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 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.”

When Paul refers to the body of our humble state he is referring to the earthly body we currently find ourselves in. It is the habitation of our soul while on earth. But he tells us this natural body will be changed into a spiritual body. Though we now bear the image of the earth we will be transformed in death to bear the image of the heavenly. And this will occur by the energy and force of power that Jesus has to make whatever has been created bend to His will.

When Paul says our body will be “transformed into conformity with the body of His glory” he is referring to the resurrected body of Jesus. So what was the glorified body of Jesus like and what could He do with it? To understand this we have to look at the different times that Jesus appeared to His followers after His resurrection and see what He was able to do. For after all, this is the body that ours will be like - this is the one that our bodies will be conformed to.

The first thing we notice is that **He appeared in different forms at different times.** Mark tells us that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in one form and to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in a different form (Mark 16:9-12). Mary thought He was the gardener until He spoke her name and revealed Himself to her (John 20:14-16). And when Jesus first approached the two disciples on the road to Emmaus Scripture says their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. But after He took bread and blessed it and gave it to them their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. John also tells us that when Peter and six of the other disciples were fishing on the Sea of Tiberius Jesus stood on the beach and spoke to them but they did not know at first that it was Him (John 21:1-6).

Whether they saw a person other than Jesus or whether their eyes were simply prevented from seeing the real Jesus is unknown. All we know is that Scripture says He appeared in different forms. The people who saw Him saw and conversed with Him as a person but they did not recognize Him until He opened their eyes and revealed Himself to them.

The second thing Jesus was able to do in His resurrected form? **He was able to appear suddenly without going through doors.** After the death of Jesus the disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews. Scripture says that after the doors to where the disciples were hiding had been shut Jesus came and stood in their midst. He did this not once but twice (John 20:19, 26). I'm sure there have been times in the life of every parent where they wish they could have appeared suddenly in their children's rooms to see what they were up to. No footsteps or squeaky doors and floors to announce their arrival. Just "poof" and they were instantly inside their child's room. This ability might have saved a lot of guesswork and heartache on the part of the parent later on.

The third thing we notice is that though Jesus could appear out of thin air **He was not a spirit. His body was solid and could be touched by others.** After appearing suddenly in their midst behind closed doors the disciples were rightfully afraid. So Jesus told them to look at His hands and feet and touch Him to prove He was not a spirit. Then the Scripture says they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him (Luke 24:36-42; Matthew 28:9b). Though He could appear suddenly He was not a spirit. He was clothed in flesh and bones.

The next thing we notice is that **He could eat regular food.** After convincing them He was not a spirit He asked His disciples if they had anything to eat. They offered Him a piece of broiled fish which He took and ate before them (Luke 24:41-42). Spirits cannot eat food but evidently resurrected bodies can.

What we also notice is that resurrected bodies have the appearance of our earthly bodies. We know this because **the wounds in the hands and feet of Jesus were still visible and touchable.** Thomas was not in the room when Jesus appeared to His disciples the first time. Understandably doubtful He said unless He could touch the wounds in His hands and feet and side He would not believe. So Jesus appears again to His disciples and tells Thomas to "*Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving*" (John 20:27). This was further proof that the real Jesus stood before them. Even doubting Thomas was convinced as He replied, "*My Lord and my God*".

We can also attest that He was able to do in His resurrected body the same routine things that we do while in our earthly body. We know this because while they were out fishing on the Sea of Tiberius **Jesus built a charcoal fire and cooked breakfast for His disciples.** After calling out to them where to cast their nets after a fruitless night of fishing the disciples were not able to haul it all in because of the

great number of fish. It was then that they recognized Him. Peter immediately swam to shore leaving the others to row the boat in. Once they were all on dry land Jesus called them to come and have breakfast with Him (John 24:4, 9, 12) and they conversed over a meal. A resurrected body can cook and eat, speak and reason, and converse.

The last time we see Jesus on earth before His ascension is when He tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem where they will soon be baptized in the Holy Spirit. After saying these things **He was taken up to heaven. And as He was ascending two men in white clothing told His disciples that Jesus would return in the same manner as they had just watched Him go** (Acts 1:9-11). Resurrected bodies can not only suddenly appear in rooms with shut doors, they can also be received by a cloud and ascend into heaven.

These are the things which have been recorded about what Jesus was able to do after He was resurrected. But will we too be able to do all that Jesus did after His resurrection when we, as Paul says, are transformed “*into conformity with the body of His glory*”? To find the answer to that question let’s go back through the list of what Jesus was able to do in His resurrected body. Keep in mind that all of my answers will be based on Scripture but some will be speculation – based on, but with no definitive answer found in, Scripture.

(1) Jesus was able to appear in different forms, or at least to keep Himself from being recognized by others until He revealed Himself to them. Will we be able to do the same?

Probably not. We do not have the ability to transform ourselves. We are transformed by the power of God. And all those who were seen after their death were recognized as themselves and not someone else. So I do not think it likely that we will have the ability to look like someone other than who we are or to hide our true selves from others

But angels are heavenly beings and they have appeared as strangers for a period of time (Hebrews 13:2). When Jesus ascended angels appeared to the disciples as two men dressed in white clothing (Acts 1:10-11). So it may be possible for us to do the same. But what use would it have? At the final resurrection all are saved, all are transformed. What use would it have to appear as something other than we are?

Throughout the Biblical record God chose to appear in different forms to men. He manifested Himself in a cloud, as a pillar of fire, even as the Angel of the Lord. But when He calls us to our heavenly home we will see Him as He is. He will not hide His form from us so I see no reason we would hide from others. Jesus had a purpose for His different appearances but I don’t think we will have that same purpose.

So I think the ability to appear as something other than who and what we are is probably not something we would do. We are told that we see in a mirror dimly now, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then we will know fully just as we also have been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12). Once the big reveal happens I don’t see that there is any need to continue wearing any type of concealment.

(2) Jesus was not a spirit. His body was solid and could be touched by others. Will we be able to do the same?

Moses and Elijah appeared as men in solid forms and not as spirits. The resurrected body of Jesus

was flesh and bones and we are told our body will be like His. So I believe we will inhabit bodies with substance and will be touchable by others.

(3) Jesus could eat regular food. Will we be able to do the same?

Yes, I believe we will, and here's why. In Revelation 19:9 we are told that Jesus is preparing a marriage supper for us. If we are invited to a supper prepared especially for our resurrected selves, I strongly suspect that we will be eating food just as Jesus Himself ate food after His resurrection. It may not be what we could call "regular" food (we might call it "heavenly delights") but whatever it is it will be edible. Jesus would not call it a supper and a feast if it were not something that could be eaten. And since Jesus Himself ate in His resurrected body I believe we too will do the same.

(4) Jesus was able to appear suddenly without going through doors. Will we be able to do the same?

Moses and Elijah both appeared with God the Father and Jesus at the transfiguration. They appeared suddenly and disappeared just as suddenly. They appeared outside on a mountain and not inside a locked room as Jesus did. But they were able to appear suddenly. So perhaps we will too.

But I ask again, what is the purpose? I can see why Jesus appeared suddenly in a locked room. That is where the disciples were hiding. But what rooms will be locked to us after we are resurrected? And if they are locked why would we be allowed to enter? And why would anybody be hiding? All things will be laid bare to God; nothing is hidden from His sight. So whatever may be hidden from us will most likely be forbidden to us.

But this is pure speculation. There is much we do not know about heaven and what awaits us there. So we can only speculate on much of what we will and will not be able to do once we get there. And this is certainly one of them.

(5) The wounds in the hands and feet of Jesus were still visible and touchable. Will ours be visible as well?

Scripture makes no mention of the scars of Moses or Elijah. Perhaps they had none as none are recorded. But they were recognized for who they were with or without scars.

For Jesus it was obviously important to maintain His scars. They were the proof that He was the One who was pierced and nailed to a cross. He was not a ghost but the actual resurrected Jesus. Even in the book of Revelation Jesus is referred to as having the appearance of a Lamb standing, as if slain (Revelation 5:6). So there is something about the slain Jesus that remains visible even in heaven.

Does that apply to us as well? Will we need this same proof or will those who knew us recognize us even if our scars are healed? I don't know. But I don't believe our scars will be as important to our recognition as it was for Jesus. All we really know is that we will be recognizable.

I personally believe the imperfections of life placed upon our bodies by living in this sinful world will be done away with. For if God physically healed on earth all who were "oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38) I believe He will also heal all the physical and emotional results of sin once we attain heaven. Just like those who are quadriplegic have the hope of walking again in heaven, those who

carry physical scars also hope that their scars are a temporary condition. And once they reach heaven and see the face of Jesus their hope is that all their scars will have been removed in their transformation into their heavenly body. If out of His great love He healed blind eyes, why would His love be any less in heaven?

But ultimately what difference does it make whether our scars remain or are taken away? The scars that were visible on the resurrected body of Jesus did not change that glorified body into something less than perfect. The important thing is not whether or not we will have scars in heaven. The important thing is that we will be with Jesus for eternity. All the vanity of earth will dissipate in the presence of the One who formed us in His image and reshaped our bodies into the body of His glory. Who really cares if we take our scars with us as long as the One whose scars bore our sin is living among us for all eternity?

(6) Jesus built a fire and cooked breakfast for His disciples. Will we be able to do the same?

After He was resurrected Jesus could do routine things. He not only appeared as a solid being he was also able to do things that only solid beings with substance could do - routine things like make a fire and cook breakfast. Will we make breakfast after we are resurrected? Perhaps, but there is no way to know what our lives will be like in Heaven. We know we will worship the Lord. We know that we will be rewarded for our righteous deeds. We know we will eat supper with the Lord and all those who have been redeemed. But beyond that we do not know what we will do there.

We are also told that there will be a new heaven and a new earth and that God will bring the Heavenly Jerusalem down to the new earth where He will dwell among us (Revelation 21:1-3). So we will live our lives, at least in part, on the new earth. Will we do what we have always done on earth - eat, sleep, work, play, create, manage and worship? Will we cook breakfast over a charcoal fire when we go camping? Will we go camping? Who knows?

But what we do will not be nearly as important as Who will be living among us. And what does it matter what we will be doing when God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and there will be no longer any death, mourning, crying or pain? Whatever we do will not be done in vain and we will not regret doing it, even if it is something as routine as cooking someone breakfast.

(7) In His resurrected body Jesus was taken up to heaven with angels saying He will return in the same manner. Will we be taken up to heaven in the same way?

We will certainly be taken up to heaven in our resurrected bodies. Will we do so in a cloud? Yes we will. How do I know this to be true? The Bible tells me so.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17

“But the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

Much of this has been speculation based on what we know Scripture has already revealed. We truly won't know what we personally will be able to do with our resurrected bodies until we experience it firsthand. But we can at least glean some information from the things Jesus was able to do after He

Himself was resurrected from the dead.

In Philippians Paul tells us that Jesus “*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.*” He then goes on to say, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.*” (Philippians 3:21-4:1).

Knowing that our earthly body will have the same form as the resurrected body of Jesus should be comforting to us. We will have a spiritual body, imperishable, raised in glory and power, bearing the image of the heavenly realm and not the earthly realm. They will be immortal and they will never die (1 Corinthians 15:35-49).

When will this happen? It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet shall sound and the dead are raised, at the moment Christ is revealed and we are adopted as sons and death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:50-54; Colossians 3:4). To think that the temptations of earth will have no impact on a spiritual body is thrilling enough. But to also know that we will never again know death or suffering or pain is cause for rejoicing. For this reason alone who wouldn't want a new body? And in the minds of most of us it can't come soon enough.

ROMANS 8:22-23

“For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”

We may not know everything about heaven or about our resurrected bodies but what we do know should have an effect on us. It should cause us to stand firm in our conviction and determination to remain holy in our behavior. Complete knowledge is not necessary but faith and trust are. Let me close with the words of John who was called the one whom Jesus loved (John 21:20).

1 JOHN 3:2-3

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

Even if we take Scripture and speculate as to what our resurrected bodies will be like one thing is certain – those who believe and persevere ‘till the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13). And those who are saved will have resurrected bodies. But if we have this hope then we must purify ourselves while in this mortal shell. We cannot allow this body to cancel out our order for the next one.

In the meantime, while we long for release from our sinful nature, let us remember the power that currently resides within each believer. The same power that raised Christ from the dead resides now within us (Romans 8:11). May we allow that same power to keep us pure and prepared for that moment - that twinkling of an eye - when the dead in Christ shall rise from their graves and those of us who are alive when He returns will also ascend and meet them in the air. And so shall we be forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

AMEN