I Corinthians 15:42-54; Phil. 3:20-21; HC LD 22; The Comfort of Eternal Life

I. Physical Life II. Everlasting Life

 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes we can catch a clear picture of the world’s lack of hope. This took place recently at the funeral of former president Carter- where Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood sang “Imagine.” Now remember this was at a funeral- and the words sung were this. “Imagine there's no heaven; It's easy if you try; No hell below us; Above us, only sky.” It is easy to see the lack of hope in these words written by John Lennon. No heaven or hell- death is just the end- what a hopeless existence. But praise God, there is a future to be found after death. As we have been considering the subjects that have been raised by the Catechism, we have seen the constant theme of comfort. This comfort is very counter cultural- we live in world that dismisses the eternal. Is it true that death is just the end- you fade away into nothing we are told. Or is it true that this life is not all that there is- there is a day when Christ will return. What do we look forward to- which things do we long for? This life is filled with groaning as we long to be clothed with eternity- that what is mortal may be swallowed up in life. For us, we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord at II Cor. 5:9 says. But as good as the intermediate state will be- as good as it will be for us to dwell with Christ immediately after death- the true and lasting source of comfort is found in our eternal life enjoyed physically. So, can we have comfort in this life that seems to be filled with death? Yes, because not only my soul, but also this very flesh will be raised and will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ’s glorious body. Today we are going to consider the comfort of eternal life brought by the Son of Man.

1. **Life in the Body**

 So first, we begin to consider what it means that not only my soul, but also my body will enjoy the blessings secured for us in Christ. Jesus is the resurrection and the life- and this applies to both our soul and our body. Of all the blessing that we have from Christ- that we enjoy through the Spirit- one of the most precious is life. And the life we have from Christ- and the fellowship we have with Christ- is one that cannot be broken. The certainty of a spiritual resurrection immediately after death is taken for granted- and is the starting point. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, today you will be with me in paradise. It is certain that our soul will be taken immediately to our Lord in heaven after we die- meaning that there is no interruption but rather continued fellowship by way of our souls- but what of our bodies? Will they enjoy the benefits of Christ’s work? Our passage from I Corinthians 15 in verses 42 speaks of the resurrection of the dead. A seed is used to illustrate this. When seed or a body is placed in the ground- or in the grave if you will- they are dead. They are small and corruptible- seemingly only able to decay and rot. But then, by the power of God a transformation takes place. That seed that was placed in the ground begins to sprout- what was once dead begins to grow and develop and take on life through the work of the Holy Spirit. From the seed, comes this great and majestic plant that grows and flourishes. For those who die before Christ returns, their bodies will decay and rot like seeds placed in the earth. But when Christ returns, those bodies will sprout- they will be raised to become something better and greater. What was once natural, finite and fallen will become spiritual, heavenly, and perfect. Here, spiritual does not mean without substance. Rather spiritual means free from earthy impurities and defilement. Like Jesus more than like the first Adam. Our eternal state will be one in which we will be both body and soul- one in which we will fully enjoy God’s blessings with every part of our being. It will not be some airy floating or spiritual existence- rather it will be enjoyed by our spirit and flesh rejoined as God had created. As Job 19:25-26 prophesied, I know that my Redeemer lives and at last will stand upon this earth; and after my skin has been destroyed then from my flesh I will see God! Our bodies were made to be temples of the living God- so they must be raised as a part of our salvation.

 So children, this is important to remember. That Jesus Christ will return one day. When He does, He will give new bodies to those who have already died, and as verse 51 says, those who believe and are still living will also be changed. Believers will be given bodies that are imperishable. These bodies will be new- and they will be the same bodies that we had before. They will be our bodies- now raised. But also better- new bodies- because they will be glorified like Christ’s body. This current flesh is weak- our present bodies are racked with sin. But we will be made like Christ’s body- after His resurrection. Christ could be identified and even displayed the scars from the crucifixion, but yet His body was no longer weak. Before He rose from the dead, Christ hungered, thirsted and wept. But now, He is and we will be freed from physical frailties or wants. Being incorruptible means that they will be free from disabilities, sickness, and limitation based on weakness. No, we will not be all knowing or all powerful. But we will not have to suffer with pain, sickness, nor will we have to struggle against sin since it will be impossible for us to fall- make like Christ’s glorified body- Phil. 3. Since we will no longer be able to sin, we will no longer be able to die. We will be transformed, made glorious. In Phil. 3:21, we are told that Christ will transfigure or transform our bodies- the very same word used to describe what happened to Christ’s body in Matthew 17 on the mount of transfiguration will be done to us- made bright and glorious!

 How do we know that we will have the same body and not something all together different? Well, Paul here says that we will be changed- and even with the body of Jesus- When Jesus was raised, He did not receive a different body and leave His old one behind because the tomb was empty when the women and Peter looked inside. There is a continuity- Jesus has one body that both suffered, died and was raised. Well, you may ask, what about those who are burned or drowned- how will God gather together the particles that are separated or evaporated? We must not try to be smarter or wiser than God. Rather we should trust God- and remember that He created all out of nothing- He has also raised us up to new life now already spiritually and will one day raise this very body physically as well. Our bodies are called temples of the Holy Spirit- and God will not allow His human temples to remain in disrepair. We will enjoy the blessings of new heaven and new earth with our physical bodies. Now we see dimly- but then we will see clearly. We must take comfort from this truth, that even though we live in a veil of tears, the time is coming when that veil will be lived. We have been freed from all death. Remember that this is an article of faith. I believe! I believe that my loved one who have died in the Lord will be raised! That they will not miss out on eternity! I believe this about my own body as well- that this flesh which has tasted corruption shall taste perfection! That my body that is not like the first Adam will one day be like the last Adam! This is what I believe!

1. **Life Everlasting**

 But where will these glorified bodies be- where will we live? Well, Rev. 21 says we will live in heaven- but heaven will come down to earth. Not only will we be raised physically and be made perfect and good, but we will enjoy this perfect blessedness for all eternity in a blessed environment. Already now we live, and we will continue to live for all eternity! Under this second point, we will consider what life will be like after Christ returns. What things can we expect and longingly look forward too? The Bible uses various pictures to describe what heaven will be like. It is home that Jesus is preparing for us. A heavenly city coming down. A garden of joy and delight- brimming with life. As I Cor. 2:9-10 states, the glory of the gospel and for those in Christ is beyond what any eye has seen or any mind comprehended- but God has revealed these things to us by His Spirit. This same Spirit searches out the deep things of God. So by the Spirit, we can consider what that inheritance will be like in part. As terrible and dreadful as hell is described as, the opposite of greatness and delight is reserved for those who are joined to Christ. As great as the fall has affected this earth- even greater the return of our Lord will make all things new. Our vision of the future tends to be very bland- we view heaven as all white and airy- and boring. But it will be very concrete and colorful- we won’t lose any of the beauty of this world we currently have- it will be a garden like paradise better than Eden! Christ is not less powerful to save- than Adam was able to destroy. In making all things new, Christ will make this world better than even before the fall! In its fallen state, it is still the same world that God created and called very good. Because of sin, God has in the past cleansed the earth of sin by sending a great flood that covered the earth and wiped out sin. But as the rainbow promises, the world will never be covered with water again. So, the final time of cleansing will be carried out with an intense fire. This fire will serve to cleanse the world and wipe out any remnants of sin. This is a cleansing that the creation itself is longing for- so it stands to reason that creation would not be longing to be wiped out- but rather that this very creation is longing to be cleansed along with the cleansing of God’s people as Rom. 8 say. In the center of this new creation will be a new Jerusalem. Rev. 21 describes it as having of great pearls made into gates- streets of gold and walls made of precious stones. It is said that the heavenly Jerusalem will be lowered down and will be established on earth- the temple dwelling in the midst of God’s people- the tree and river of life- with no more sun and moon needed because the Lamb will be our light. Our eternity will be lived on this earth- an earth that has been purified and made a fitting place for God to dwell with man. We will be able to see God- specifically seeing Jesus face to face as Job prophesied -and enjoy unhindered fellowship with the Triune God. This river, temple and tree all point to the life and health that we receive in Christ- who is the living water, the temple of God’s presence, and the tree of life which heals all our infirmities. What a great and awe-inspiring picture that is placed before our eyes! This is why QA 58 so confidently asserts that life everlasting isa comforting truth. Who wouldn’t want to live forever in a place like this?!

Some have asked the question, well- what will we do all day? Well- our desire will be gaze on the beauty of the LORD! We will be enraptured with His loveliness! It is clear that we will be glorifying God- in many different ways and with both our bodies and our souls. There will be a vast nation of people- innumerable host- all praising God in all that they do. Lion and lamb sleeping together- angelic host crying out- the elders and apostles singing the song of the Lamb- where this is no more sickness and no more pain. Never will we run out of ways and reasons to tell of His glory- to marvel in His presence. Many good things in this life end too soon- our joy turns to tears. But then, every tear will be wiped away and we will never sigh or cry again! If Christ is our greatest desire- if His glory is our delight- then He will give us the desires of our hearts! As Romans 8 has promised, nothing can separate us from the love of our God- not death- not judgment day- and not all eternity. Even our sinful flesh will be purified to make it fit to dwell with God- and this very earth will be renewed and refreshed- lifted out of the bondage that man has placed upon it. Remember the Holy Spirit who gathers the church- this same Spirit dwells in us as a guarantee of our resurrection- and a down payment for our future glory. The application of this truth is three fold; first – what you do in this life, with this body, and in this creation is important. Death is not the shedding of some prison- it is a separation that will be undone when Christ returns. God created all things good, and to good they will be returned. Second, it is a calling for us to look forward and pray for Christ’s return. It is good for us to look forward to these things, and long to have this very body be with Christ. Come Lord Jesus is the prayer of the church that waits for this day. Third; this truth gives great comfort in this life as we all face death. It is very possible, that our last breath could be near for all of us. But there is hope in tomorrow and purpose for today. As Jesus said in Matthew 22, God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Those who die in Christ today live today. Those who are living when Christ returns- will continue to live. And together all of His people will be raised and reunited with their glorified bodies. The joys of this life are fading- but the joy and bliss of eternity will never fade or perish! Instead of imagining or pretending that there is no heaven or hell- let us live our lives in light of this truth! Heaven and hell are real- and we will spend eternity in one of these. So by faith, be prepared for the return of the King. Amen- come Lord Jesus!