

Advent 2022, study 2

Phil Bailey

Theme: Jesus is not ashamed to share our flesh

Aims:

- See that Jesus is doubly unashamed to have a complete human body, because he was incarnate *and* resurrected in one
- Be encouraged that the incarnation affirms the basic goodness of our bodies, even if they are not particularly attractive, able or healthy. How? Because the human body is good enough for God! God the son was not ashamed to add one to his divine nature, which confirms that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139).
- Be reassured that the incarnation affirms our fixed value as God's image bearers, regardless of how useful, strong, intelligent or beautiful we are. How? Because God's image is something conferred on us from outside ourselves; it does not depend on our abilities or merits. His image is inseparably linked with our commission to rule creation, filling it, subduing it, bringing under our dominion and tending/caring for it (Genesis 1-2). This commission is given to no other creature. So we can be good image bearers or bad image bearers, depending on how faithfully we obey God, but we are always image bearers. And the incarnation confirms that God treasures his image in us and is committed to restoring it, through the life, death, resurrection and reign of Jesus.
- Be convinced that our bodies form an essential part of our identity – part of the real me, not less than it. We cannot separate our emotions, intellect and desires from our bodies. Everything we think and feel is mediated through the physical senses and affected by our biology (e.g. hormones and other brain chemistry). Moreover, Scripture teaches that every aspect of our humanity is fallen – not just our bodies, but our intellect, emotions and desires too. So if we feel trapped or let down by our bodies, we should question those thoughts as much as our bodies themselves. The incarnation shows that God is committed to restoring *all* aspects of our humanity – Jesus didn't just adopt a human body, but a human mind, spirit and will too. As Hebrews 2:17 says, he was made fully human in *every* way. If he left out any part of our humanity, he wouldn't be able to heal and restore it. And the general pattern of the New Testament shows that his primary focus for restoration in this life (sporadic miracles aside), is our *inner* selves (e.g. a renewed mind as key to transformation in Roman 12:2, the heart as source of all impurity in Mark 7:20-23 and the heart as the focus of the Spirit's work under the new covenant in 2 Cor 3:3-6, 4:16). Therefore, perhaps our greatest problems in this life stem *not* from our bodies, but our fallen intellect, emotions and desires! So we should accept the bodies God has given us as a good gift (he planned our bodies and every day of our lives in them before they came to be, Psalm 139:16). We should also see struggles with our bodies as means of grace - opportunities for us to grow in repentance, faith, trust and patience – as we wait for our full and final restoration at Jesus' second coming (e.g. 1 Peter 1:6-7, where 'all kinds of trials' needn't be limited to persecution).

Questions:

- 1) In the sermon, we heard how the incarnation affirms the goodness of our bodies (you may like to look back at Psalm 139:13-16).
 - Were you encouraged to see your body in a more positive light? If so, how?
- 2) We also heard how the incarnation affirms our value as God's image bearers – simply because we are human and not because of our usefulness, beauty or intellect.
 - How do you/we normally tend to measure our own worth and other people's?
 - How might you see yourself and others differently in light of the incarnation and God's commitment to restoring broken humanity?
- 3) We also heard how the body is an essential part of our identity and not less important than the intellect, emotions and desires.
 - Can you think of ways we tend to prioritize the inner self over the body?
(An obvious example is separating felt gender from biological sex and prioritizing feelings, but perhaps you can think of other examples – e.g. prizing intellectual pursuits and knowledge based professions more highly than manual labour)
 - What might it look like for us to have a higher regard for the body as an essential part of human identity?
 - How might we view ourselves differently if we saw the intellect, emotions and desires as equally fallen and in need of restoration? (N.B. the incarnation and resurrection promise this restoration!)
- 4) Lots of passages (e.g. Romans 5:1-5 and 8:22-30, 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, James 1:2-18, 1 Peter 1:6-7) show that trials and suffering are opportunities for us to experience God's grace and to grow in faith and godliness.
 - How might we see struggles with our bodies in this way?
 - How does the promise of complete restoration (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Rev 21:3-4) help us to wait patiently?

N.B. in 1 Corinthians 15:44, when Paul says the body will be raised as a spiritual body, he does not mean it will simply be a disembodied spirit. He still uses the word body! As verses 45-49 go on to suggest, he means a body that belongs to a different, higher order of existence - to heaven, rather than earth. In the same way, the risen Jesus and angels have bodies, but aren't necessarily constrained by the current, visible world in the same ways as us (e.g. Jesus could appear in the middle of a locked room!). The word spiritual may also suggest that our resurrection bodies will be more completely empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit.