

The Hope of Resurrection Life
New Covenant Living Series #29

I Corinthians 15:35-49

Pastor David Sunday

May 15, 2011

We're going to read an amazing passage, I Corinthians 15, verses 35 through 50. I remember the first time this passage came alive to me. It was in the spring of 2007 when we had gone to the Bible church in Sugar Grove to attend a funeral. When they read this passage in the service, it was as if I had never heard it before and the power of it just gripped my heart. I thought that has to be one of the most powerful things I have ever heard. It is beyond my ability to explain it to you and I think it's beyond our ability to comprehend it. But the future that's spoken of here is for believers in Jesus and I'm speaking directly to those who are united to Christ through faith about the resurrection of the bodies of believers in Christ. As we read this passage, I would just ask you to be saying, "Lord, would you please impress upon my heart some of the glories, some of the beauty, some of the majesty of these words. Help me comprehend something I haven't seen yet."

I remember the first time I preached on this passage. It was Memorial Day weekend of 2009 while we were going through a series on heaven and hell at Grace Community Bible Church. It meant a lot to me then but I can honestly say now, after going through the battle with my wife's cancer this past year, this passage is a lifeline. This passage is hope. Without this truth, we would not have hope and courage to face things like disease and ultimate death. But with this truth, we can hold our heads high and we can rejoice in hope of the glory of God. So let's consider the future of believers in Jesus Christ as we read [1 Corinthians 15:35-50](#):

³⁵But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹There is one glory

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of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

God, we thank You that though [the grass withers and the flower fades, Your Word abides forever.](#) And we thank You that every Word You have spoken is given by [inspiration of Your Holy Spirit](#) and is infallible and indestructible and will come to pass. We pray Lord that today the power of Your Word will penetrate our hearts through your Spirit and I pray for help to preach that which is beyond my comprehension or my ability to articulate. May Your people hear Your living Word today and be strengthened in their faith and motivated to love, adore and lay their lives before You in confident hope. I ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.

I heard [Tim Keller](#) tell a story about a man who had a magnificent view of the Atlantic Ocean. Imagine a home along side Maine's rocky coast. As you look out you see the rugged cliffs and islands and then the vast horizon of the ocean spanning as far as the eye can see. Every morning, this man got to wake up and drink his cup of coffee looking out at that magnificent view. Of course, houses are full of trouble and there are always things that need to be fixed. So from time to time, this man would have to go down to the basement and fix the plumbing and he'd have to fix the kitchen sink and paint the garage. There was a lot of work. There was mundane, difficult work involved in keeping up this house. But every

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morning, the magnificence that spread before his eyes gave him the strength and joy to put up with the mundane, daily realities of fixing the house.

There is a magnificent vision in Scripture -- a vast panoramic landscape of hope that is spread out before the eyes of believers -- and God is saying to us through the hope that He has laid out for us in His Word, “dwell on the magnificence more often. The magnificence of it all is what will give you the strength to live through the mundane, daily realities of the Christian life, because the Christian life does involve many mundane, difficult realities. Don’t lose your vision of the magnificence. Don’t let the vision of the great hope that we have in Christ diminish before your eyes.”

Some passages are particularly suited to rekindle that vision and sharpen that focus and this hope in I Corinthians 15 is right up at the top of such passages. This passage is about the resurrection of the body of believers. We believe that Scripture teaches that actually everyone’s body is going to be resurrected to live in a place fit for their eternal dwelling. Those who do not trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will face a resurrection to judgment. But this passage is about the resurrection of believers to glory. It’s a magnificent vision. As Christians, we say in the [Apostle’s Creed](#): “I believe in...the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.” And we don’t have much more of a clue of what we are really saying when we quote those words. There is a reality that is so amazing and this passage helps us understand what we mean when we say “we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

Now I struggled to communicate this in the first service and I’ll probably struggle in the second because it’s so great. But as I was out there in the foyer, I thought of a different outline that might help us understand it better so I’m going to

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give you something different than the first service people got. If you're in Care Group and someone says, "Well, that's not what he said in my service." Say, "Well, you should have been in the second service."

There are three questions I believe this passage is designed to answer about the resurrection of the body:

1. How can this be? (verses 35-41) How can there be this resurrection of the bodies of believers and they will have bodies that will be suited to dwell in the new creation?
2. What will this be like? (verses 42-44)
3. How can I experience this? (verses 45-50)

1. How can this be?

Let's ask the first question: How can this be? I believe in the resurrection of the body. How? Because from my general observation, dead bodies don't walk. If we do see dead men walking it's a ghastly sight. We don't want to see that. How can it be? Paul is dealing with a skeptic who is asking the question, a teaching that has infiltrated the Corinthian church that is really found in Greek philosophy. This teaching was that there's no such thing as the resurrection of the body. The body is evil and corrupt. Really what we're looking forward to is being liberated from this body and maybe if there is a hope, it's the hope of living in a disembodied spirit for all eternity.

But Paul is saying, "No, that's not the Christian hope. That is not what the gospel is all about. The gospel has the ultimate hope of a new heaven and a new earth that is completely redeemed and restored -- a new creation where believers will dwell with Christ in physical, glorified bodies just like His resurrection body is now." I say we don't see dead men walking but we have seen One raised from the

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dead, never to die again – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the first-fruits of a vast harvest of those who are going to come.

So, Paul answers the question, *“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”* (verse 35). And really, this is a practical question. If you’ve ever had to commit to the ground the body of a dear loved one in Christ -- maybe a spouse or a child or an infant or a dear friend – suddenly that question doesn’t seem so speculative. You want to know what this is going to be like in the future.

We had lunch with some dear friends on Friday. They said when they are going somewhere they like to know where they’re going. They like to have a plan. Where are we headed? I think most of us are this way, right? I remember when Kate and I led the youth group at Grace back in the ‘90s, one of our favorite events to plan was what we called “Destination Unknown.” We called them “DUs.” We would just hop on the bus or vans and we were the only ones who knew where we were going. The youth were all excited because of the anticipation. That’s fun for a little trip like that but if you’re going on a six week vacation, you want to know something about where you’re going. If your husband comes home and says we’re going to sell our house, what’s your next question? “Well, where are we going? Where are we going to move? “

When it comes to death, you really want to know what lies beyond the grave. You really want to know what the destination is. You don’t want your death to be a DU – a Destination Unknown. You want to have some sense of this. *“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”* is a good question if you’re asking it simply in faith but in verse 36, Paul apparently does not think it’s a good question. He says, *“You foolish person!”* It seems like for Paul there is such a thing as a dumb question. I don’t think it’s because of the content of the question but

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because of the spirit in which it's being asked. It's being asked with skepticism. It's being asked from a position of unbelief as if there's no way human bodies could be fit to be dwell in a new creation. It just doesn't make sense. Paul says, "Well, who's to say it doesn't make sense? Who's to say how can this be? How can this be that the dead are raised and that they will dwell in the new creation in glorified bodies?"

"Well, look at God's creation right now" is how Paul answers that question in verses 36 through 41. Look at the amazing creativity of God beginning with the seeds you plant in the ground. How many of you have gardened recently and you've taken a little seed and planted it in the ground and it looks so miniscule. You can hardly hold some of those seeds in your hand but each one of those seeds has a distinctive character and life-system wrapped up in it. You take that little seed and it has to go into the ground and die. The casing has to come off. It has to be enveloped by the dirt and nourished by the soil and water. Then out from that seed comes a vastly better, more glorious creation of God.

So you wonder how can it be that I bury my believing loved one in the ground; how can it be that he will be raised? Just look at what God does in the world of agriculture every day and that should give you hope. God is in the business of taking homely, little minuscule things and turning them into something vastly more glorious and it's happening all around you in the creation. Look at verse 37: "*And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.*" Just as the new plant will not appear unless the seed dies as a seed, so the resurrection body will not appear until this body in its present form dies. Just as the seed goes into the ground the lives again in a superior form, so will the bodies of believers who die live again in a superior condition.

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There's going to be a distinctive identity to each of these bodies. We get this in verse 38: "*But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.*" I think we get a hint here of an answer to the question, "Will I recognize my loved ones in the new creation?" We get a hint that there are going to be distinctive identities but we get much more than a hint when we look at the Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection glory. He was not immediately recognizable by His disciples because of how much more glorious He appeared but then a little later He was recognizable. They did see this is Jesus in a much newer, more glorious form yet it is Jesus. And so it will be with the resurrection of believers. They will appear in a much more glorious form yet recognizable as the same person who dwelt here on earth. That's the lesson from the world of agriculture.

Now look at verses 39 and 40 - a lesson from the world of animals - the animal kingdom. God has created many different types of creatures and given them many types of bodies. Look at verse 39: "*For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans...*" Isn't it interesting when you look at all the different human beings? We are all recognizably human. You know a human being when you see a human being, yet not a single one of them is identical. You could look across this whole room and can name the different people because of the distinctive features, yet we are all human.

Then there are animals - all kinds of different animals. Then there are birds; then there are fish. When you reach over to your wife and pat her on the back of the neck, you don't say, "Oh, honey, you feel just like an alligator today." That would not be a compliment. No, you'd say "Oh, you're lovely. You've got a human beauty that is so delicate and beautiful." God has made all these different types of creatures. Paul is building a case here, answering the question, "How can this be that there are resurrection bodies?"

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Then Paul goes to the world of outer space -- to astronomy in verses 40 and 41 -- where he talks about all the different heavenly bodies God has made: “*There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.*” Stars were not created to live in the ocean; whales were not created to live in the sky. God has made all these different bodies to be fit for the condition in which He has placed them. To be fit for the environment in which they are made to dwell. And that’s his answer to the question, “How can there be a resurrection of the bodies of believers that will be fit to live in the new creation?” The answer is, “This isn’t too difficult for God. Look at everything God has made. Look at the diversity, the variety and the individual care God has put into His creation. Surely God is capable of resurrecting His people to live in a condition that is suitable for the new heaven and the new earth. God can do this.” That’s the first question and its answer.

2. What will this be like?

The second question is “What will it be like in the resurrection?” Here’s where verses 42 through 44 are just mind-bogglingly beautiful. “*So is it with the resurrection of the dead.*” And then Paul lists these characteristics of our bodies right now. “*What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 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.*” What will this be like? The resurrection? What do we have to look forward to? What’s the content of this magnificence that is spread out before us?

Well, you need to understand what life is like right now for you. Your life right now is characterized by perishableness, dishonor and by weakness. That’s not just true of the human body at death; that’s true of the human body right now:

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Perishable, dishonorable and weak. The reason we die is because that's who we are right now. Death is at work in us. The death we face in the future is simply the full manifestation of what we are right now in the present. Death is not the cause of these characteristics. He doesn't say it's just the dead body that is perishable. No, death is the fact that we are perishable, that we are dishonorable, we are weak. That's what sin has done to us but that's not the way we are destined to be in glory. Our bodies are going to be redeemed so look at the contrasts Paul explains.

a. Perishable vs. Imperishable

First of all, consider the contrast between our corrupt or our perishable bodies right now and the incorruption or the imperishable nature of our resurrection bodies. What a contrast! We have this myth currently that we're imperishable. I remember back when I was a kid, this song "Fame" was popular. It said, "Fame, I'm going to live forever!" and we believe this. We don't talk about death in our society. We think as if we're going to live forever but we know that's not true. Even in our most pristine condition, our peak physical condition (which for most of us is way back in the rear view mirror by now) death is at work in us. From the moment we're born, we're also dying. This is why babies die. Because death is at work in us. We're perishing. There's an expiration date over all of us. We have a limited shelf life and [all the days that were ordained for us were written in God's book before one of them came to be.](#) And the Bible says [our days are like grass.](#) We sang it this morning: ["We blossom and flourish...we wither and perish."](#) It happens so fast!

I used to think life was long but now I might be beyond the half-way point of my life. I look at my kids and wonder. We have a daughter who is going to graduate

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from high school in a year and I'm thinking, "Where has the time gone?" I know those of you who are older really think that.

Life is a vapor. If we are perishable we are not satisfied with that. That's not the way things are supposed to be. It's not supposed to be that every joy you experience is followed with the thought, "When is this going to end?" It's not supposed to be that every true love you enjoy in this life -- the most beautiful, the most pure love -- will end when we have to say goodbye someday. It's not the way it was supposed to be that there are people in this church right now who are mourning the loss of their spouses or their children. That's not the way it was supposed to be. Imagine living in a body that has no expiration date; in a world that will never die. Imagine the glory of being corruptible then becoming incorruptible, imperishable, never able to die again. What a beautiful thing that is!

I've had one of my most enjoyable experiences as a father in reading the [Chronicles of Narnia](#) with Ruth, my younger daughter. We just finished reading [The Last Battle](#) and one of the joys of reading with Ruth is that she's been training my imagination again. Because I've gotten to where I read some things and they go right over my head. I don't remember what I just read and don't comprehend what I just read. Ruth will say to me things like, "Dad, did you see..." Or I'll have to stop and say, "Ruth, I just read three pages, what did he say?" And she'll catch me up on the story because she has a good imagination. It reminds me of what Jesus says, "We need to have [faith like a child](#)."

We read in [The Last Battle](#) this week, how Aslan turned to his creatures at the end. They had come into the new creation and he says to them,

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"You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.' Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often."

They were afraid this life was going to come to an end. We're used to everything perishing. We're used to corruptibility. We can't get joyful yet because we don't know if this is going to end. Then Aslan says to Lucy,

"No fear of that...Have you not guessed?' Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them. 'There was a real railway accident,' said Aslan softly. 'Your father and mother and all of you are - as you used to call it in the Shadowlands - dead....'"

And here in our Shadowlands, we think this is a bad thing. But in the new creation we realize we've just entered into glory." And Aslan says,

"The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.' ...they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before."

That's what we're looking for too. Sown a perishable body, raised imperishable; never to die again in a kingdom of glory and light that will never be taken from us. It will not perish; it will not be destroyed; it will not fade away.

b. Dishonor vs. Glory

The second contrast is in verse 43: "*It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.*" The word [dishonor](#) refers to the loss of the rights of citizenship. Dishonor is when you don't belong in the country any longer. That's what sin has done to us; sin has made us fugitives in God's world. Sin has made us displaced refugees. We just don't fit in the world that God has created. Sin has ruined everything that God had made to work together in such beautiful harmony. Our lives are marked by this dishonor.

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When we die, we especially see this dishonor because now they lay us in a box and put clothes on us -- we can't even dress ourselves. They carry us away and bury us -- the ultimate dishonor. But Paul says that's not the end. *"It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory."* The body is going to be transformed like Christ in awesome splendor. [Philippians 3:20-21](#) says: *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."* We are going to be radiant with the splendor of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And Jesus says, *"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father..."* ([Matthew 13:43](#)).

I really think that's the key to loving one another in the church. You look at each other and instead of seeing all your faults and flaws, you look at your brother in Christ and say, one day he's going to *"shine like the sun in the kingdom of his Father."* You look at your sister in Christ and realize that one day she is going to be like Jesus. That's what we're destined for. That's our hope. And when we realize that hope -- when we come into the fullness of that hope -- this little life that we've lived here is going to seem so fleeting and faint in comparison to the glory that we will enjoy then. [C.S. Lewis](#) says, "He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us...a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine." *"Sown in dishonor, raised in glory."*

c. Weakness vs. Power

Verse 43 states, *"It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power."* Right now weakness is part of our lives. We can not walk very far without getting tired. We need to sleep every night. We can't lift weights that are too heavy. And the closer

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death approaches, the more helpless we become. But in the resurrection, we are going to be raised in power, so mighty that [Anselm](#), one of the medieval church men, kind of imagined what it would be like and I like his imagination. He said, “the saints shall be so strong when they are raised from the dead, that if they chose they could shake the world; they could pull up islands by their roots, or hurl mountains into the air.” We are *sown in weakness* but we’re going to be *raised in power*.

[Joni Eareckson Tada](#) looks at this truth, then looks at her quadriplegic legs and the paralysis that she suffers and she says: [“I’m convinced if there are mirrors in heaven \(and why not?\) the image I’ll see will be unmistakably ‘Joni’ although a much better and brighter Joni.”](#) *Sown in weakness, raised in power.*

d. Natural vs. Spiritual

Then the last contrast is in verse 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.*” Now don’t think of the natural body and spiritual body as physical or non-physical. Don’t think of the body in the new creation as being like a ghost. That’s not what Paul is saying. We’re going to have physical bodies in the resurrection. Jesus had a physical body - you could touch Him and feel Him. But the difference between natural and spiritual is that right now we deal so much with the weight of indwelling sin and the weakness that sin brings into our lives. In the new creation, we’re going to have spiritual bodies that will be totally filled by the Holy Spirit. Totally controlled by Him.

So the greatest characteristic of that spiritual body that is totally under His control is these three words: No more sin. No more impatience. No more anger.

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No more greed. No more jealousy. No more suspicion. No more wishing you were someone else. No more lust. And on and on the list goes. No more sin.

We will be saved to sin no more. We will have spiritual bodies that will be perfectly fit for communion with God. Right now, we have the spirit indwelling us but we battle to keep our focus on things of God. We struggle in our fellowship with one another because we cannot adequately share our truest thoughts. We struggle to really love one another because of all the wrestling we still have with indwelling sin. But in the spiritual body, there's not going to be any inhibition in our communion with God or in our communion with one another. We'll be able to fully express our thoughts. We'll be able to totally trust one another. You'll never need to worry that someone is going to stab you in the back or betray you or try to be better than you. You'll be able to commune with your Lord with perfect liberty. That's what it will be like. What a beautiful, beautiful picture.

Imagine a world in which flowers never die. A world in which strong animals don't prey upon the weak. A world in which earthquakes, storms and tornadoes no longer wreak havoc and destruction. A world in which the word cancer strikes fear into no body's heart. A world in which children never die and old people never leave us. Who can imagine a body without weakness, without infection, without tiredness, without sickness, without death, without sin? Nobody can. Alistair Begg goes on to say, "this takes us into a realm for which we have no picture except one, Jesus Himself." That's what Jesus is like now.

3. How can I experience this?

So the last question we need to ask is how do we get into this hope? How do I receive this hope? How do I enter into this resurrection? The key is bound up in

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verses 45 through 49. Right now we are united with Adam in his humanity. Every single human being is united with Adam. When Adam fell, we all fell with him.

You've probably heard the story about the climbers on the mountain. They are all connected with one another. The one down at the end of rope falls and is hanging over the chasm. Then he pulls the next one down and the next one down and the next one down - that's a picture of how we have all fallen in Adam. But there is another Climber Who has conquered sin and death and hell - our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are in Christ, He takes us over death and conquers sin and we become [more than conquerors through Him](#).

That's the picture that's being described for us here in verses 45 through 49 - the first Adam and the last Adam. We share in the image of the man of dust. Look at verse 48: *"As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust..."* Now answer this question: Who is the man of dust? Answer: Adam. We are all of Adam. We're all united with him. Death comes because we have fallen in sin with Adam. He is our federal representative. Just like Randy Hultgren is our representative in Congress, Adam is our representative man. But, there is a second Adam -- the Man of Heaven - Jesus. He came from heaven to earth to redeem sin-infested humanity and to lift us out of death and destruction and bring us with Him to glory. Look at verse 49: *"Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."* Those who are connected to Christ will be like Christ in glory. That's what Paul is saying here. His last point is driving it home in verse 50: *"I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."*

At some point, you've probably had your mom say to you, "Go get dressed for the wedding." Maybe you've come down as a teenage with jeans that have holes in



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them and a shirt that's a little bit ripped. And your mom says, "I said get dressed for the wedding. You can't go like this into that event. You need to dress appropriately." That's what Paul is saying in verse 50. He's saying in these bodies that are united with Adam, that are clothed in dust and sin and filth, we can't get into the new creation in these bodies. We need to be dressed appropriately for the occasion. We need to be clothed in Christ, in His perfect, righteous glory. That's the beauty of the gospel. When you repent of your sin and put your faith in Jesus, you are united with Him in His resurrection and the glory He now enjoys. You get to share with Him when you die and enter into His glory. When He returns all the saints will be raised in glory with Him. So the key question is: Are you united to Christ? Are you connected to Him?

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.