

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-50
BEING LIKE THE MAN FROM HEAVEN

Who is your hero? Is your hero someone that you want to be like? You wish you could do what your hero does! You wish you looked like your hero! Was there someone who as a teenager you had a poster on your bedroom wall and aspired to be like this person, to do what they do, to wear what they wore... We think that it is only young people who have heroes and aspire to be like someone else, but I don't think that this is just for young people! Or do you want to be yourself but different? You aspire to be a different version of yourself! You are happy to be you, but there are characteristics you'd want to change if you could – to be more patient, to be more compassionate, to be more willing to take risks, to find it easier to make choices? The whole industry around food and diet is based on our desire to look different, to lose weight or to be fitter. The whole fashion industry is built on our desire to achieve a look that is attractive and smart, with the clothes we wear, hairstyles, or shoes... To be ourselves but better? That desire for transformation and change is somehow built into the way lots of people think!

There is something deep inside us as human beings that has this aspiration to be better than we are. We look in the mirror and we see ourselves as we are and there are things that we like and are happy with, but there are also things we wish we could change. Nobody's perfect! How do we get the balance between knowing that it is OK to be me as I am and for me to be comfortable in my own skin on the one hand, with the desire and aspiration to be better on the other? We live in a world that constantly reminds us of how we need to change and be better, but that's not an aspiration, that's a way of doing us down and making us want to buy the product that will make us look better. Jesus said "*Follow me*" and part of being a disciple is spending time with Jesus (we do that by reading Bible) and learning from Him; the Spirit creates a desire in us to be more and more like Jesus in the kind of people we are, to have that sense of aspiration to be like Jesus in way we think, speak and behave. Today we think about how we will be changed and how we change now!

The key to understanding these verses from 1 Corinthians 15 is towards the end and is the title of this sermon: "*We bear...*" (1 Corinthians 15:49) The question is how: how do we bear the likeness of Jesus? How do we become like Him? Surely, He is unique, a one-off, nobody would ever be like the Son of God? That's just a silly idea! Well, it may seem a silly idea, but it is a Bible idea! It comes along in the Bible in two ways, that we will be like Jesus. One will happen to us and the other we will work at for ourselves, but both ideas are about transformation and change, that we aspire to be different, and aspire to be like Jesus.

"*We will...*" (1 Corinthians 15:51) This whole piece about resurrection is about the change that takes place because God raised Jesus, the change that took place in Jesus Himself and the change that will take place in us as a result. Contrast what we are now with what we will be! This is how we are now in our flesh and blood: our body is perishable, we will die one day; it is a sinful body, full of dishonour, we make mistakes, we get things wrong, we rebel and we can't really argue with that either; weakness – all sorts of things make us aware of our weakness, the times in our lives when we find it hard to cope, the questions to which we can't find answers, the paths we find it hard to navigate and the weakness that we feel. All of that is simply part of being human; this is our human nature and we are all like this; do we find that depressing?

Paul takes right back to the start, to the story of Adam, the first man, created by God from the dust. "*the first...*" "*Just as...*" (1 Corinthians 15:47,49) The Creation story tells us that God made Adam out of the dust of the earth; "*all come from dust and to dust all return*" (Ecclesiastes 3:20) is the sort of pessimistic realism of the Bible when it looks at human life. We are not happy to be reminded of it at times, but this is part of human nature; this is part of what it means to be human, bearing the likeness of the "earthly man". The other legacy we

have from Adam is our sin: Adam and Eve lived in the garden, in their perfect relationship with God, but they spoiled all of that when they rebelled against God, refused to listen, and turned their backs on Him; and ever since then human nature has had to deal with the capacity to make mistakes and get things wrong and think, say, and do things that we shouldn't think, say, or do. This too is our inheritance from the "earthly man". If we stop there, it is all despair; there is no hope. We die, we die in our sins; black darkness rules our soul.

But the gospel doesn't end there. Let's go to the Easter story. On Good Friday, all is black; Jesus has died and there seems now no hope. This life in which many people had put their hopes, has perished; Jesus is dead; crucified in dishonour, shown to be weak, gone the way of every other human being before Him. Black darkness rules the world and rules the souls of His friends. But what do we say of Jesus now? Easter tells us that God raised Jesus and now He is full of glory and honour and power. Jesus is raised from the dead. He will never die again but will live forever. The body that was crucified in dishonour and weakness, now lives and rules in heaven full of glory and power, a different body but still Jesus. The Gospel for us is that we will share what Jesus has, that what is true of Him now will one day be true of us also.

We need some help from other Bible pieces to finish this story. *"In my Father's house are many rooms... I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:2f) *"Since we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings that we may also share in His glory."* (Romans 8:18) *"We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* (1 John 3:2) *"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 13:14) Put all of that together and we have some idea of this hope; this is our Christian hope, that we will be where Jesus is, heaven, the presence of God; that we will share His glory, whatever that means; that we shall be changed to be like Jesus, perfect, free, fully human with nothing to spoil such a life. Here's Paul's new list: we will be imperishable – we will live forever; the transformation will be permanent; glory is such a magnificent word, even if we struggle to define it and whatever glory Jesus has we will share; we will have power; it will be us but differently us, recognisable but... So *"Shall we..."* (1 Corinthians 15:49) Everything that is true of Jesus now, will be true of us one day.

Hope is such a marvellous quality! Having this hope in our hearts inspires us to serve Jesus now; this hope inspires us to work hard to be more and more like Jesus in the life we live now. We know that we are not perfect and there are still dishonourable things about us, weak spots, that we are perishable goods. But having this hope of being with Jesus and sharing His glory inspires us to learn to be more and more like Jesus now, to think in the way Jesus thinks, to speak in the manner Jesus speaks, to shape our behaviour around Jesus' teaching and example. To be more and more like Jesus – that is our aim; that has to be our aim, inspired by the hope that one day we will be with Him, we will share His glory and be changed to be like Him. This hope helps us deal with our fragile times; helps us deal with the frustrations of our sinful self; helps us navigate our way through the storms and difficulties of life. This is who we are in Christ; the man from heaven has left His mark on us and would make a greater and greater mark on us as days go by.

Here's a foretaste of that transformation. The story of Joseph is story of one man's transformation. At the start of the story, Joseph is a young man, full of himself, full of fact that he is his dad's favourite over his brothers; he has the coat to prove it; he has the dreams to prove it and all the others will one day bow down to him. He tells tales on his brothers! But then he is sold as a slave and ends up in prison, the lowest point in his life, alone, forgotten, in despair, greatness seems a million miles away - until God rescues him. In Genesis 45 we read of him now as the governor of Egypt, second only in power to Pharaoh, responsible for giving out grain. His brothers come for food and bow down to him, not knowing who he is until he tells them. The boy who was nothing, a clipe, a slave, has become a man with the glory, honour and power of Egypt, one before others bow down. Something of that is a picture of the

foretaste of our hope; multiply it a thousand times over and you get some idea of the glory, honour and power that belongs to Jesus now and that one day will be ours. What a transformation!

What do we see? We see bodies that are fragile, perishable, giving out! We see lives in which we have made mistakes, got things wrong, have grieved God and hurt other people! We see weaknesses, battles lost, we've just not been able to do the good that we want to do and know we should do! What do we see with eyes of faith? Do we see the hope of life eternal, that we shall live forever? Do we see the hope that we will be with Jesus, not as pie in the sky, but as something Jesus has promised us? Do we see the hope that we will be changed to be like Jesus, perfect, full of glory and honour, with power and might? Here's the thing: both are true! This is us now and this is us on one day yet to come. Both pictures are us; these are two parts of our identity: this is us as we are and this is us as we will one day be in Christ. We are all too aware of the first, but the eye of faith sees the second, sees that one day we will be different, transformed, changed and we shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven, we will be like Jesus. He is with His Father, full of glory and honour, the perfect man – this is how we will be; this is His promise; this is our hope and our glory. It is marvellous!