Happy Mothers Day! May the Lord richly bless the moms who are here with us, and all our mothers who couldn’t join us this morning -- including Msn. Paul Choi’s mom, who celebrated her 90th birthday last week.

Mothers give birth. As Christians, we celebrate life as given by God in the human body. We have a “theology of the body” that recognizes God’s sovereign design in creating all life, with humans created distinct from other species: God spoke the earlier species into being, but created humans, male and female, in his image. Gen 2 describes how God personally “breathed life” into Adam’s nostrils, and created Eve from one of his ribs.

Last week Michael led us through the first part of 1 Cor 15 with an excellent message about how the resurrection teaches us to live with hope. Today we continue through the second half, to see how our bodies are to be redeemed from death, to be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual -- so we can stand firm in this hope and persevere with meaningful work in the Lord.

Let’s look at vv 35-38: **35** But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” **36** How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. **37** When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. **38** But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

Here Paul explicitly anticipates questions and objections to his message; it’s one of the characteristics of his writing, and probably reflects his scholarship in logic and rhetoric. The Bible scholars who study the New Testament include many skeptics, who don’t recognize all of the Pauline epistles as genuinely written by Paul of Tarsus, who studied under Gamaliel and was dramatically converted by an encounter with Christ as he was persecuting Christians. First let me mention that 1st and 2nd Corinthians are universally regarded as Paul’s personal letters. Second, skeptics have made great contributions to Bible scholarship; furthermore, doubts and challenges can be quite helpful to the work of God. These questions about authorship make me eager to understand Paul’s writing style, and better understand the human authors that God has used to record his revelations in scripture.

Paul vigorously addresses such questions as foolish, intended to obscure and deflect the main point. Nevertheless, I believe such questions can also be asked sincerely and humbly, and his answers can teach us more about life after death. For instance, we know that seeds do not actually die, but they are planted in the earth -- we will never again see them in their seedy form once they germinate. Jesus used the same illustration when he said in John 12:**24** Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

One point I glean from these verses is that my current body, even in its best possible state, is just a shadow of my future body, as an acorn is just a kernel of a glorious oak tree. Jesus was still recognizable in his resurrection body but could navigate through locked doors, could appear and disappear before his disciples, and could defy the force of gravity as he left the planet.

Next, when Paul says, “to each kind of seed he gives its own body,” he is not intentionally addressing Darwin’s theory of evolution, but he does make a statement that explains the amazing diversity of life we find on earth. Behind the complex code of DNA, we find the work of a sovereign Designer, who intended to create distinct species with distinct characteristics. This provides a more robust explanation than an undirected process depending on random mutations to encode new proteins in strands of DNA, which then must then pass the error-checking process and be folded into a helpful shape when instantiated in the ribosomes of cells. For Gemechu and anyone else working in life sciences, I don’t recommend torching your career by becoming an outspoken creationist. But I do recommend tapping into Paul’s general point -- you’ll do more successful science if you pursue the hypothesis that God has sovereignly designed this universe and every creature in it for his purposes, so that billions of humans could come to know him and enjoy him forever.

With this in mind, let’s read together v **39** Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. Paul’s mention of humans, animals, birds, and fish reflect in reverse order the creation of species on days five and six, as described in Genesis 1. God seems to really love diversity, doesn’t he? I appreciate having millions of species on earth, and I want to be a good steward of this creation, to protect species from extinction, and preserve wildlife so future generations can learn from it things that I can barely imagine.

But what’s the point that Paul makes from this diversity? Consider vv 40-44: **40** There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. **41** The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. **42** So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; **43** it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; **44** it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I think the main point is the same as the distinction between an acorn and an oak tree: my resurrection body will be much better than my current body, even in maximum physical health. We have a great, glorious hope: the state of death is temporary, and will lead from “seedy” to glorious, from perishable to imperishable, from weak to powerful. Let’s be honest -- it’s sad to lose loved ones when they die. Jesus taught us, “Blessed are those who mourn”; Paul instructed us to “weep with those who weep”; Jesus went to Mary and Martha after their brother Lazarus died, and he wept with them for their sad loss. He was a “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief”, as Isaiah prophesied -- he shed tears of empathy even while planning mansions and feasts for us in the heavenly realms.

So let’s continue: **45** So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+cor+15%3A35ff&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28764a)]; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. **46** The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. **47** The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. **48** As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. **49** And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

I conclude from these verses that our current natural or “earthly” state is just a warm-up for a much better “spiritual” state that God has for us in heaven. Furthermore, our current condition is tied to the dust of the earth, so I am frail and brittle compared to the robust existence prepared for me by Christ. Finally, I won’t just be a better version of me; I will be more like Jesus, as promised in I John 1:**2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Humans often want to extend their lifespan; it’s just as natural as wanting to stay up past bedtime. I don’t want to hasten anyone’s demise, but I want to have Paul’s attitude expressed in Phil 1:**21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **22** If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! **23** I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

He makes a similar point when writing to Corinth: **50** I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. **51** Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— **52** in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. **53** For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

I personally find this very encouraging (so I paused when writing this to play piano and sing about the trumpet in the last verse of *It Is Well With My Soul*). I want to encourage others with this message, as Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica: **13** Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. **14** For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. **15** According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with **the trumpet** call of God, and **the dead in Christ will rise** first. **17** After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

I believe it requires great sincerity, humility, and compassion to comfort those who are mourning. But those are exactly the traits I want to learn from my Lord Jesus. We must, of course, be mindful that death leads to the judgment of what we have done during this life, and we will be measured by the standard of God’s holy justice. I know I could never meet that standard through my own merit; my sin condemns me to a terrible sting: I have misused my time, uttered foolish words, and offended in countless ways -- not only does my conscience convince me, but the holy law of God shows me exactly the same. So where can I find a victory over death, and release from the punishment I deserve? Let’s consider this question as we read together vf 54-57: **54** When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

**55** “Where, O death, is your victory?
    Where, O death, is your sting?”

**56** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, we have received grace -- the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who bore our penalty as he suffered death, who then rose from the grave in glorious victory, proving his divine success in our salvation. As we read last week, earlier in this chapter: **22** … as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... **25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

I consider it a humbling privilege to present this concluding paragraph before the hard-working missionaries and shepherds of UBF. In UBF they speak of “co-workers”, which is a term I’ve read in Paul’s letter, but rarely hear in other Christian communities. I know it’s often difficult to pursue our Lord’s Great Commission, but let me read Paul’s conclusion about how the resurrection affects our lives as a key verse for this passage. There is treasure in heaven, an eternal meaning and value for every effort we make in Christ. **58** Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm; let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. For you  know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.