



Everlasting life

Job 19:25-27

A most comforting confession of the church is the confession "I believe ... the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." It is a confession of hope that gives comfort to the living in the face of death.

But what if we did not have that hope? What if there was no resurrection of the body? What if this life was all there is? What if the Preacher was right, that "all is vanity"?

We live in a fallen and a broken world. We are often faced with disease, disorders, deformities and death. Some of us also have experienced the pain of a pregnancy that did not go as hoped. Miscarriage and death are all too common – not to mention the pain of the inability to have children. Others among us have wept as our children were wheeled in – or out – of the operating theatre in the hospital. Physical disabilities, mental illness and degenerative diseases often cause grief that goes on for years. Indeed, life is often a vale of tears, an existence where suffering and sadness is no more than a medical test, no more than a phone call, no more than a missed heartbeat away.

And for that reason we feel that we can relate to the man Job. In our minds we can see him there, sitting on an ash heap with a piece of a broken pot in his hand, trying – but failing – to find relief from the painful boils that covered his body from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. We wince at his cries of pain. We are shocked when he appears to blame God for his suffering. We grieve at his lament of isolation, of being abandoned by all those around him.

In the book of Job we also get a glimpse of the prospect of death through the eyes of one who is suffering. In his discussions with his friends, Job reflected on the nature of death and on what lies beyond it. And in the middle of that suffering there were times when things appeared to Job as being very bleak and he questioned both the meaning of life and the point of death. (See Job 7:6-10, for example, and chapter 10:20-22. and 14:7-12.) Reading the book of Job we get the impression that death is something that suffering Job both longs for and fears at the same time.

On the one hand with death comes the end to earthly suffering. But on the other hand, if death is all there is, where is the comfort in that? If death is all there is, then there would be no vindication for Job, no opportunity for wrongs to be made right, for suffering to turn to joy. If death is all there is, then we too would despair of life itself, and at its end would sob a bitter, twisted cry of 'Goodbye' to this cruel world.

And for us as Christians, there is something else also that could cause us to despair about this present life and this present body. For we know that it does not work for us to simply point our fingers at this cruel world and say it is all someone else's fault. We grieve because we know that this world was created good and that mankind was created very good, reflecting the very image of God. But it was the sin of the human race, a sin that we collectively bear responsibility for, that has caused the grief and the sadness of this present life. It is the sin of the human race that has caused the world to be in the bondage of corruption and to groan and labour with birth pangs. And that sin still clings to us today. Although we confess in answer 58 of the Catechism that *"I now already feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy"* this joy is often clouded by the reality of the sin that still clings to us, the sinful nature against which we have to struggle in all our life. We want

to grow in godliness, we want to grow closer to God, we want to enjoy that sweet communion with Him, but it so quickly seems to happen that we fail and it is as if we are back in the gutter. Our body, the apostle Paul exclaims in Romans 7 is a body of death!

And all this has caused some people to hate the body, to hate this life, to hate themselves. And then they might say, "I can't wait to be done with this body forever!"

But in the Apostles' Creed we confess, *"I believe ... the resurrection of the body!"* And this is a confession that gives us great comfort. Comfort not just for the future, but comfort for today! Comfort even in the midst of pain, in the midst of sin and in the face of trouble. Comfort in the fact of death. We confess that *"Not only shall my soul after this life immediately be taken up to Christ my Head, but also this my flesh, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul and made like Christ's glorious body."* (Lord's Day 22)

And the comfort in this is that it demonstrates to us how far reaching the redeeming work of Christ is. Since we, body and soul, were created in the image of God, He is not willing to leave any part of our salvation undone, but has redeemed us so that with body and soul, both in life and in death, we may belong to our faithful saviour Jesus Christ. We may look forward to the time when this body of ours will be redeemed, will be made perfect, will be like the glorious body of Christ. This earthly tent, created in the image of God, will once more reflect His glory! The effects of sin that we still experience so strongly today will be completely removed.

It is going to happen! One day our bodies will be completely redeemed, they will be renewed and made glorious, free from sin and the effects of sin. Our physical and mental scars, our diseases and disorders, our addictions and anxieties will plague us no more. And that was the comfort that Job also could look forward to. In chapter 19:25-27 he looked beyond his suffering and in faith he lifted up his head and in a shout of triumph declared,

- 25 *For I know **that** my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;*
26 *And after my skin is destroyed, this I **know**,
That in my flesh I shall see God,*
27 *Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!*

Job was not yet out of his suffering, he was not able to make sense of what was happening, he still asked where God was in all that he endured, but confessed that even then he had a Redeemer. And His Redeemer would see to it that everything that was wrong would be made right. And more, he confessed that his present suffering would come to an end, and he confessed that the grave was not the end. Yes, Job would die and be buried. From dust he came and to dust he would return. But the time would come that his Redeemer would at last stand on the earth and then in his flesh Job would see God! Job could look forward to the time when he would see the One who would redeem him from his suffering and pain, who would restore to him the fullness of life.

The comfort we may live in today is that we believe the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. We believe that even though we die, in our flesh we will see God. And so we will say goodbye to sin and sickness, disease and disorder. We will say goodbye to chaos and confusion, suffering and sorrow. But we will live again to see a new day and a new world. It will be the same world and we will have the same body. The same but better. The same but perfect. The same but glorified, like Christ's glorious body. And so we live in the joy and the comfort that we may know that in our flesh we will see the full benefits of the redeeming work of Christ, our Saviour and our Redeemer. O how my heart yearns within me!

S 't Hart