

# The Life of a Stiff

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## *1 Cor 15:3-11*

### I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Behind the University of Tennessee Medical Center is a lovely little woodlot on a hillside where people can be seen lying in the sun or reclining in the shade as squirrels and other forest creatures play in the trees.
1. There is where Arpad Vass, a scientist at UT's Anthropological Research Facility, sees dead people—every day.
    - a. All those folks spread out there in the Tennessee heat are lying down because they're all very much dead—they're cadavers sprawled out intentionally as a way of studying modes of human decomposition.
    - b. Vass's job is to evaluate how the human body decomposes under various conditions: buried in shallow graves, stuck in car trunks, wrapped in plastic bags, submerged in a man-made pond, just to name a few—all the different ways the human body can be dumped by a murderer.
    - c. Those bodies have been graciously donated by their once-living inhabitants so that science can do a better job of catching the bad guys.
  2. In this morning's text, we read of One who graciously donated his body.
    - a. As you go back and read the Gospels, you find that Jesus died, he was buried, & he was expected to rot.
      - "When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?' (Mk 16:1, 3).
        - Bodies were typically anointed with spices prior to burial, but Jesus' anointment had to be postponed because he died so close to the Sabbath.
        - Spices were placed on bodies to keep them from smelling quite so bad during decomposition.
      - These women fully expect to find Jesus' body in a state of decomposition.
        - You know, however, as Paul writes in this text: those expectations did not become reality.
        - The women arrive at that tomb to find that the stone has been rolled away & that the tomb is empty except for a couple angels.
    - b. The women go to the tomb without one bit of hope, but they quickly learn that morning that hope is just beginning.
- B. Hope began early that morning because Jesus donated his body.
1. Just as those bodies at the University of Tennessee have been donated to help humanity learn how to defeat crime, Jesus donated his body that humanity might defeat sin.
  2. "The Life of a Stiff." This morning, we want to see what Jesus' body does as a stiff. His body is DEAD, DISCERNABLE, & DIFFERING.

### II. JESUS' BODY IS DEAD, vv 3-4.

- A. The bodies behind UT's Medical Center are dead. The same thing happened to Jesus.
- B. Paul delivered to the Corinthians of primary importance that Christ died.
1. So what? How is the death of any man of primary importance?
    - a. Unless Jesus comes again, everyone is going to die: "It is appointed for man to die once" (Heb 9:27).
    - b. How many countless people died in Jesus' era that history has forgotten?
      - Go to the Indian mound in South Charleston and tell me the names of those buried inside of it—Tell me what they accomplished in their lives.
      - You can't do that because history has not recorded their names or achievements.
    - c. If the world stands for another thousand years, how many of our names and achievements will be remembered? We will simply be dead.

2. In a very real sense, it's not important that Jesus died, because everybody else has or will: What is important is the purpose & plan of his death.
  - a. The purpose: "Christ died for our sins."
    - There's the importance of Jesus death: His death was so that I could have the forgiveness of sins.
    - No man in the history of mankind has died for my sins & no one in the future of humanity will be able to die for man's sins, except one—Jesus Christ!
      - "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).
      - Praise be to God that Jesus died *for our sins!*
  - b. There is also a plan in Jesus' death: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."
    - I learned just this past week that Brother Rex Turner, Jr., passed away.
      - Dr. Turner was president of Southern Christian University where I did my graduate & doctoral work. He was a visionary who took the University to a new level that made my education possible.
      - Brother Turner went in the hospital for a routine operation, he was recovering nicely, but he developed a blood clot that proved to be fatal.
      - His death was totally unexpected & unplanned.
    - Not so, the death of Jesus. His death was in accordance with the Scriptures.
      - The OT prophets spoke of Jesus' death: "Dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Ps 22:16-18).
      - Jesus' death was no accident; his death was no surprise; God planned for him to die for our sins.
- C. Christ was also buried.
  1. Christ's burial stands here as evidence of his death—You bury the dead, not the living.
  2. Jesus as a stiff was dead!

### III. HIS BODY IS DISCERNABLE, vv 4b-7.

- A. The bodies behind UT's Medical Center are discernable—they are visible.
- B. We find that Jesus' body was also seen after his death, but his body was seen in a vastly different manner than those bodies at UT. For, Christ "was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures," v 4.
  1. Therein lies the central truth of Christianity: Jesus Christ walked from his tomb on the third day.
    - a. There is no other religion that could ever make such a claim for its leaders.
      - About David, a great OT leader, Peter says, "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29).
      - Muhammad died on June 8, 632, and pilgrims flock to his tomb inside the Mosque of the Prophet.
      - While the Buddha became violently ill & died after eating pork, there is no claim whatsoever for his resurrection.
    - b. David, Muhammad & Buddha are more than stiff—they've been dead so long that there's nothing left; they have rotted to nothing.
  2. Jesus Christ, however, did not have time to turn to dust, for he was raised on the third day.
- C. Just as his burial was proof of Jesus' death, so his Post-Resurrection appearances are evidences of his Resurrection.
  1. Paul begins to list the people to whom Jesus appeared after his Resurrection:
    - a. Jesus appeared to Peter & then to the rest of the apostles.
      - Jesus appeared to Peter before the other apostles.
      - The only reference we have to that in the Gospels is the report the eleven & those with them gave the two on the Road to Emmaus: "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (Lk 24:34).
      - It is likely that Jesus appeared to Peter before the other apostles, for Peter would be the first witness of the Resurrection to Jews at Pentecost and then to Gentiles at Cornelius' home.

- b. Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time.
    - Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians who are doubting the resurrection: "If you don't believe what I say, go ask these 500 brethren who saw Jesus at the same time."
    - Paul does not tell us who these five hundred brethren were, except that at the time of his writing most of them were still living.
      - Because of the way Paul structures this list, many scholars believe that Paul provides a well-known list of those who saw the Resurrected Christ. If that's the case, the Corinthians would likely have readily known the identity of these 500 brethren.
      - Even if they didn't readily know who these 500 brethren were, it would not have been difficult for them to have found out and to ask them if they truly saw the Resurrected Christ.
  - c. The Lord then appeared to James and to all the apostles.
    - The James mentioned here is undoubtedly the brother of Jesus, for Paul has already mentioned the twelve.
      - The interesting thing in singling out James, the brother of Jesus, is that James did not believe that his brother was truly the Christ.
      - "Not even his brothers believed in him" (Jn 7:5). Yet, Jesus appears to James after his Resurrection, and James becomes a pillar in the church (Gal 2:9).
    - Because Paul has already mentioned the twelve, "apostle" here likely does not refer to that same group.
      - The term "apostle" simply refers to a messenger & the NT uses the term "apostle" to refer to others besides the twelve: "I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:19).
      - It would seem, therefore, that "apostle" here means "missionary," those who went about preaching the Word of God.
2. What we must glean from this text is: JESUS CHRIST IS **NOT** IN HIS TOMB!
    - a. Jesus was raised on the third day by the glory of the Father.
    - b. Tourists in a museum exhibit were passing dinosaur bones.
      - One of the tourists asks the guard: "Can you tell me how old those bones are?"
      - "They are 3 million, four years, and six months old," says the guard.
      - "That's an awfully precise number," says the tourist. "How do you know their age to the month?"
      - "Well," says the guard, "the bones were 3 million years old when I started working here, and that was four and a half years ago."
    - c. The bones of Jesus Christ could never be put on display, could never be dated, for they are not in a tomb!

#### IV. HIS BODY IS DIFFERING, vv 8-11.

- A. The bodies behind UT's Medical Center are differing bodies.
  1. Those bodies change greatly in the length of time they are exposed to the elements
  2. They are also differing bodies in that they change forensic science & the techniques used to capture evil people.
- B. Paul here recounts how Jesus' body is differing—how the body of Christ wrought a great difference in Paul.
- C. The apostle refers to himself as "one untimely born."
  1. The Gr term refers to an aborted or stillborn baby.
    - a. You get that sense from the KJV where we read: "Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."
    - b. Speaking figuratively, Paul says he was born before his mother's due date.
  2. The image here is that Paul doesn't fit with the others. He doesn't belong with the twelve apostles; he doesn't belong with James who saw Jesus & became a pillar in the church; he doesn't belong with those missionaries who saw Jesus & went forth as witnesses of the Resurrected Christ.
- D. Why doesn't he fit with the others? Because he persecuted the church of God.

1. "Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3).
  2. Paul said of himself: "Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent" (1 Tm 1:13).
  3. Paul was a horrible, horrible man.
    - a. It was at his feet that those who stoned Stephen laid their garments.
    - b. When he encountered the Risen Christ, Paul was on his way to Damascus in an attempt to destroy the church there.
- E. But, Paul continues, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain" (v 10).
1. Paul had once been a persecutor of the church of God, but by the grace of God he was an apostle.
    - a. God's grace refers to the goodness & kindness of the Lord.
      - 1) The Gr word "grace" itself refers to kindness.
        - a) When writing to the Corinthians about contributing to the needy saints in Jerusalem, Paul writes, "We urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace" (1 Cor 8:6).
        - b) The act of grace was the kindness the Corinthians were showing in sending their brethren in Jerusalem support.
      - 2) We know that God is so very gracious toward us: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).
    - b. God demonstrated his riches toward Paul in that he changed who Paul was—he was once a violent opponent of Christianity, but he ended up being a witness to Jesus' resurrection.
      - 1) Because Jesus appeared to Paul, Jesus' body for Paul was a differing body—allowing Paul to change.
      - 2) Because Jesus Christ has conquered death, he has the power to help us conquer the dead works in our lives.
        - a) "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in *newness of life*" (Rm 6:4).
        - b) We are "to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24).
  2. Jesus Christ has the power to change lives.
    - a. Everyday lives are changed by the grace of God.
      - 1) Peter's life was drastically changed. He once denied he even knew who Jesus was, but shortly thereafter he praised God that he was permitted to suffer for the name of Christ.
      - 2) John's life was drastically changed. He once wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village because its residents had rejected Jesus, but he became known as the "Apostle of Love."
    - b. How is it that the grace of the Resurrected Christ changes lives?
      - 1) I'm sure that some of you are extremely concerned that I have said that the Resurrected Christ changes lives.
        - a) Some of you might have understood me to say that I don't have to do anything to be changed by grace. God's grace just overtakes me & "poof" I'm a different person. I trust know better than that.
        - b) Some of you might be concerned because you still struggle with sin & you're wondering, "If I haven't completely changed, maybe I'm not really a Christian & thus God's grace isn't on me." I hope you know that's not the case either.
      - 2) To be perfectly honest, I'm convinced God's grace changes us in several ways.
        - a) The word of God, given through his great grace, changes us:
          - i. "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Tit 2:11-12).

- ii. It is in the word of grace that we can renounce this world & live above it.
- b) The God of grace changes us as we spend time with him.
  - i. It is the natural occurrence that children tend to imitate their parents—the saying is: “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”
  - ii. The same is to be true spiritually: “Be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph 5:1).
  - iii. As I spend time with God in prayer & in Scripture, I cannot help but be transformed by his marvelous grace.
- c) The God of grace also transforms us as we spend time with his people.
  - i. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7).
  - ii. You become like those with whom you associate—as we have mentioned before, we become more & more like our spouses. As we spend time with our good brethren, we will become more and more like our good brethren.
- 3) If we had the time this morning, we could continue to talk about the many ways God uses his grace to transform us into his likeness.
  - a) There is an important point we need to notice about the three ways we’ve mentioned this morning—God changes, but I have to allow him to do so.
  - b) I saw Dr. Tierney this week & he had a couple interns with him, and he said, “Fellas, this guy was miserable when I first met him, but this device I put in has changed his life.”
    - i. He was so very right: I didn’t change my own life; that little device he implanted has allowed me to do things that just a few years ago were unthinkable.
    - ii. But, what if I had stayed home the morning I was supposed to have surgery? What if I didn’t sign the consent form?
    - iii. Would that device have changed my life? Absolutely not! I had to work with the doctor.
- 4) So it is with God!
  - a) He can change me through Scripture, but if I never open my Bible, it ain’t gonna work!
  - b) He can change me as I spend time with him, but if I don’t seek to spend time with him & seek to learn his character, it will not happen!
  - c) He can change me through association with his people, but if I remove myself from the people of God, I shall not change!
- 5) The body of Jesus changed Paul drastically.
  - a) Has the body of Jesus changed you?
  - b) Do you need to come and be changed by his body this morning?