

ReGroup 1/22/23

Eternity: Death and What's to Come

Last week we looked closely at God's original plan and ideal for creation, particularly pertaining to Eternal Life. Because of sin, our universe fell from God's realm and as a result we had to settle for **a limited, lesser version** of life.

Thankfully, God had a back-up plan ready to set in motion. Through His redemption, we can look forward to entering Eternity and forever being in His presence. However, for those who are not saved, Eternity will *look and feel* much differently.

Although we got a brief introduction to both Heaven and Hell last week, we will take a deeper look at both in the weeks to come, and we will look at how their current iterations may be different in the future.

We've established that it was never God's will for any of us to die, but that we would live forever. Obviously, ever since Genesis 4, death has been a common experience for all of humanity. This week our focus will be on the subject of death and we will seek to answer these questions and more:

- Dying - *Victory or Loss?*
- What happens when we die?
- What will it be like to be separated from our Bodies, and to just be *Souls*? Will we retain our *senses*? What about our *memories*?
- What about the Rapture and the Resurrection?

Take some time to **hear any questions that may be lingering from last week**. Based on the prompts above, **gather together any questions you may have about death and the transition to the next life**. Perhaps they'll be answered in our discussion - if not, make note and return to them at the end and use what you've learned to help address them.

Ready or Not?

Before we talk about what death *leads to*, it's important that we discuss what our attitudes should be with regard to death. Many fear dying, while others seem to look forward to it. What should a Christians mentality be? Ask any given believer and you may get two *vastly* different answers. Some may even criticize those who have different beliefs. Since this subject can be easily mishandled, let's look at it with grace and truth:

The reality is that depending on what stage of life your in and the condition of your life - your answer *will* differ. We are going to look at the ideal attitude that the Bible teaches us that Christian's should have about death, and work forward from there. It's likely that even in our small groups, our convictions may vary - and that's okay. Hopefully, we'll all leave with a Biblical understanding of how to process dying.

The best text to turn to for this topic is **Philippians 1:19-30**. In this passage, Paul shows us how he was dealing with his share of hardships in this life, and the struggle he initially faced internally. We'll break this passage down a few verses at a time and let him walk us through the different crossroads we may also find ourselves at:

1:19-20) Trusting in a Sovereign God: Our lives belong to God. They are for His purposes and under His guidance. If we adopt this attitude for every day, season, and situation then we will always have peace and find joy whether our lives prosper or struggle. If we are serving Him and striving to honor Him, whether we live or die, it is unto the Lord. **The key is that we never find ourselves getting ahead of God's plans for our lives.** We simply take each step at a time, trusting in His guiding, sovereign hand.

Imagine how this attitude might transform our perspectives? Perhaps you've got a story about how this attitude has helped to change your outlook for life

1:21-24) Better vs Necessary: Paul confesses that there were times where he longed to escape this life. He desired to lay down his duties in serving God and take up the delight of spending eternity with God. This is the luxury of being saved - *we know this is our future*. However, Paul makes it clear that a Christian seeking God's Will understands that "*necessary*" (v24) trumps "*better*" (v23) in this instance.

Consider also the prayer that Jesus prayed in **John 17:15-18**. The night before He died, He prayed for us - that we might understand our purpose for this life. Even as we face obstacles and difficulties, we should not see our **salvation** as an escape rope, but **a source of endurance and perseverance**. Whether we are *10 or 110*, as long as we are alive, we retain a “necessary” place in this world.

1:25-30) Eternity On Our Minds: To live a life worthy of the Gospel, we must always be aware that each day *could be* our last day. We see our experiences and situations as communicating the Gospel to those who are yet lost. We understand and interpret our daily lives through the lens of how God might be using our lives for His glory. **Whether we prosper or suffer, we live this life preparing for the next.**

Some may feel like this frustrates their desire to go on to Heaven. Others may feel like this takes away from their earthly dreams and desires. In reality though, this is where God calls us to live, *with eternity on our minds*.

You may be growing tired of this world - but is it our place to try to fast forward what God has set at His own pace?

You may be wanting to enjoy the blessings of this life at your own leisure - but is it right for us not to consider the One who gave us those blessings and means them for His glory most of all?

Let us **embrace** God as the Lord of our Earthly Lives, and **anticipate** the Eternal Life He is preparing for us. **Before moving on, take some time to sort through these different points and discuss what may challenge or comfort you.**

What Happens When We Die?

The reality for any Christian is that over the course of this life, we begin to realize that this world is **not our home**. Our earthly mission may keep us focused on the joy and purpose of living, yet naturally we possess an internal longing that will not be fully and finally satisfied until we die. In the previous text, we learned that we appease this longing through obeying God’s calling over our lives. **We serve Him now, knowing that we will see Him later.**

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 is a great summary of the transition from this life to the next, specifically for Christians. It makes it clear that a *true Christian* is thinking about Eternity and preparing for it. Salvation is not a ticket we file away for an unfortunate day to come, but it is **the taste of a greater life** and the **invitation** into it. Read this passage and discuss the following truths:

- **5:1-5)** Salvation makes dying something we aren't afraid of, but the finish line of a life dedicated to serving the Lord.
- **5:6-10)** When we die, we immediately enter into the presence of the Lord. We will be judged for how we honored Him with our lives and enter into an Eternity that reflects this judgment.

This last point can be spun off into its own full discussion. *In fact*, the Bible is full of passages that speaks to this. **Check out Matthew 24:45-47, 25:14-21, and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.**

Did you notice how each of these foreshadow our next, eternal life in the light of how we lived our earthly lives? This will cause us to ask many questions, but the Bible simply doesn't go into great detail about this beyond passages like this. **The promises are clear, yet the explanations remain vague.** While this may frustrate us, the imperative on us to make the most of us this could not be more plainly put. **What is your response to Jesus and Paul's words about the future judgment we will all face? How should that influence our daily faithfulness to God?**

To be clear, this refers to **the Judgment Seat of Christ**, which individual Christians face when they die and many will face when raptured. We don't face Him to determine our entry to Heaven, but to be rewarded for the earthly life we just completed.

The other judgment we're probably familiar with is called **the Great White Throne Judgment**. **Revelation 20:11-15** gives us a brief snapshot of this. When people die apart from Jesus, they *immediately* face separation from God in Hell. All lost people will stand before God at the end of this age to receive their final sentence into the Lake of Fire.

What Will It Be Like?

There are a lot of general promises and pictures of what life will be like in Heaven, but we will delve into this in a few weeks when we breakdown the different descriptions of Heaven the Bible gives us.

Our last focus in this lesson will be on the general idea of “being at home with the Lord” as Paul mentions in **2 Corinthians 5:8**. Throughout Church history, many have wondered if the state we enter into upon dying might be different from how things will be after this age ends and Heaven and Earth merge once again. Some have speculated that Paul referred to those who had died as “sleeping” to suggest that dying doesn’t take us straight to Heaven. It’s easy to see how all of this can become a bit overwhelming. We’ll try to break it down as simply as we can in closing:

Luke 16:19-25 paints a picture of one person dying and going to Heaven and another going to Hell. We discussed last week that before Christ’s resurrection, saved people went to a place called Sheol and how Jesus changed that going forward. *However, the general message of this parable remains true for saved people.*

The main takeaway from this passage is that when our bodies are laid to rest and our souls enter Eternity, **we retain our senses**. Notice in this passage we read about “**seeing**”, “**feeling**”, “**tasting**”, and “**remembering**”. *That doesn’t sound like a dream-state, does it?* That tells us that even without our earthly bodies, we will be **more alive than ever**. Also, in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**, Paul talks about the rapture of the Church and references those who’ve already died, as being with Jesus awaiting the rest of us to join them.

What Will We Be Like?

The biggest question we haven’t tackled so far is regarding *our appearance*. While it may not be as important as these other details, it interests us nonetheless. This is where **the Resurrection/Rapture makes a big difference**. When we die, we go to God in our spirits. **1 Corinthians 13:12** tells us that we will know and be known with more clarity than ever. We will receive glorified, perfect bodies in the Resurrection, so that we might be as God always designed and desired us to be. Will this cause some to “age up” or “de-age”? *Again, the Bible doesn’t say.* It just simply tells us that we will be glorified and made to be imperishable. In closing, read **1 Corinthians 15:50-57** and **Psalms 138:8**.

What are your overall thoughts about this subject of death and the afterlife? What questions still remain? What new questions do you have?

Next time, we’ll have full discussion about Heaven. What will it be like and what will we do there? Don’t miss it!