

What Happens When a Christian Dies?

Selected Scriptures

90-311

Well tonight we're going to have a little Bible study together and I trust it will be greatly encouraging to all of you. This will be our second look at the subject of glorification in our prolonged study of the key doctrines of Scripture, particularly doctrines related to our salvation. And the doctrine of glorification is for us, of course, the end of everything and the purpose for everything and the goal of everything, and the objective of everything that God is doing, has done, and will do in redemptive history. We're like Abraham, really, we are as Christians vagabonds on the earth. This is not our real home, not our real place. We are rather looking for a city whose builder and maker is God and a city that has eternal foundations. We are looking for heaven. This should be an all-consuming passion for us, strangely and sadly I think. So-called Christians today seem to have a rather diminished interest in heaven, if they have any interest in it at all. And I suppose that goes with the sort of self-esteeming, Narcissistic materialistic man-centered approach to the Christian faith with a low view of God and meager understanding of the glories of Jesus Christ and a minimalist understanding of all that is prepared for those who are God's, ignorance of the eternal wonders of heaven. All that would contribute to a meager interest in the life to come and preoccupation with the life that is here. There is so much Christian emphasis and energy and effort made to make life here as comfortable as we can possibly make it, both individually and socially. Professing Christianity I don't think has got a grip on the wonderful demand that's laid upon us in Colossians 3 to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. Not only is hell missing in our evangelical curriculum, but so is heaven...amazingly.

But we were saved, the Bible says, in hope. From the very beginning we have not received what was promised us in salvation. That's why we still live in hope. We have been saved, Romans 8:24 says, in hope. Hope that is seen is not hope. Why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see with perseverance, we wait eagerly for it. We were saved in hope and we should live eagerly in anticipation of the fulfillment of that hope. That, of course, is referring to our heavenly hope. We should be pursuing, as Paul did, the upward call and the prize that awaits us in the upward call. But very few Christians, it seems to me, or very few professing Christians seem to live this way. They become consumed with this world.

But when you stop and think about the reason we were saved, it's all about the world to come. If you think about heaven, our Father is there, our Savior is there, our redeemed family is there, our names are written there, our life is there, our inheritance is there, our citizenship is there, our reward is there, our treasures are there, our eternal peace is there, eternal satisfaction, eternal joy...that's all there. I've written a lot of books through the years and some of them have had a great interest, and that's good. One of the books that has had a somewhat small interest, I think it's the only one where I'm sort of still upside down with the publisher in all the books that I've written and that's the book on heaven. There just doesn't seem to be a lot of interest in heaven. How strange is that?

People are called to believe in Jesus today in order to relieve anxiety...to believe in Jesus in order to escape emptiness...to believe in Jesus in order to be delivered from loneliness...to believe in Jesus in order to find a measure of happiness in this world...to believe in Jesus to have a better life with the people around you...to believe in Jesus to diminish your problems...to believe in Jesus to get a healing...believe in Jesus to get wealth. But the issue is to believe in Jesus to escape hell and enter heaven. There really is no promise that when you believe in Jesus you will never again have anxiety, emptiness, sorrow, or trouble. In fact that's not at all the case. And it seems to me that the unconverted people in our world seem to have more fascination with the future that they don't even know about and don't have any information about and certainly don't want the Bible to be the source of that information, but the unconverted seem to have more interest and more curiosity about whatever comes after death than believers do. Books on the afterlife, by the way, are best sellers in the secular world, even if they are not good sellers among Christians.

In 1 Peter chapter 1, let's go back to 1 Peter chapter 1, this is kind of where we were last time. I want to talk about it a little bit again and then sort of launch off into helping us to understand our glorification. I want to be pretty basic because after the last message, a number of people came up to me and said, "You know, I'm kind of new and I'm not sure I understand all this, how all this works and what happens?" So I want to give you sort of a...this is sort of Glorification 101. It's the basics.

First Peter 1:13, this is where we were last time, where in the middle of the verse, "Fix your hope...that's a command...fix your hope, set your hope completely." Pretty strong language. "Set your hope completely," don't put your hope on anything in this world. If you have hope in this life only, you're out of all men most miserable. This is not where you want to put your hope. "Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Upon the appearing of Jesus Christ or your meeting Him when you have died, when He is fully disclosed to you in the next world, you will at that point be given the greatest gift of grace and that is eternal perfection in heaven. So fix your hope completely on that future grace, that grace which is to be brought to you when you enter into the presence of the Lord. Future grace you can call it, final grace. And we pointed out last time that it's grace. It's just as much grace as your justification was grace, as your conversion was grace, as your redemption and your regeneration were acts of God's grace...it's just as much grace as your sanctification is grace as God continues to shape you through the Spirit of God into the image of His Son Jesus Christ even though you're sinful. It is His grace that does that. And your future glorification is the greatest and consummate act of grace.

Now you notice it says, "It is being brought," present tense. It's in the process of coming about. It's in the process of coming about. One way to look at that is that in John chapter 14 we hear the words of our Lord Jesus as He was preparing to leave this world, when He said to His disciples, "In My Father's house there are many dwelling places, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again and receive you to Myself that where I am there you may be also." And so Jesus is saying I'm leaving this world to get the place ready for you to come. God is in the process of getting heaven ready for every individual believer. That is in a sense another way to view the grace that is being brought to you, present tense. God is working that plan out even now, preparing you for your final grace and preparing heaven for that final grace when you arrive. This grace is our promised glorification. And we said salvation is really broken down into three parts, justification-the time when you have believed and were saved from the penalty of sin, sanctification-the ongoing process by which God delivers you from the power of sin, and the final element of salvation, the third one, when you are delivered forever from the presence of sin. And Paul in the book of Romans says, "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed."

When you believed, you didn't receive your full salvation, you received the first part, deliverance from the penalty of sin because the righteousness of God was imputed to you, you are now being systematically delivered from sin's dominion in sanctification, the power of sin has been broken and one day its very presence will be forever eliminated.

Now let's then look at this for which we should have constant interest and affection and desire and earnestness and eagerness, this future glorification. Let's be real basic. What are the components that bring this about? And I'm just going to give you some things to think through. Number one, death. You have to die to get this. Okay? You have to die to get this, that's why the Apostle Paul says, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, or death, where is your victory?" That, the sting of death and the victory of death has been removed like a bee that stings and loses its stinger, he goes away to die, death has lost its sting. It has been stripped. It buried its sting in Jesus Christ and He conquered death both for Himself and for all who believe in Him. And therefore the sting of death which is sin is removed. And so we do not fear death, we anticipate death, we may have a reasonable fear of the way in which we might die. None of us wants an excruciating or painful approach to death. That's kind of a normal thing to resist that. However, in God's wonderful purposes those times of very great difficulty, people dying that way, are often the times of the most marvelous dispensation of God's grace. Nonetheless, you enter into this glorification through death. The wages of sin is death and we will all die physically who bear sin, we all died in Adam, we all died spiritually in Adam and we all became susceptible to physical death because of Adam's sin. Death is the penalty for sin. It is every man's penalty for sin. It is appointed unto man once to die, Hebrews chapter 9. We all die. It is the penalty for sin. It is not only the penalty for sin in the sense that it's a divine act, it is the effect of sin in the fact that sin creates corruption and corruption continues to spiral down until we finally all die.

Now what happens when you die? It's obvious what happens to your physical body. It stays here. We all know that. When somebody dies, we send the body to the mortuary or we take the body to the morgue or we put the body in some kind of crematorium and it's reduced to ashes, buried in the ground, whatever it is, we know the body stays here. The soul goes on into eternity because the soul is eternal. Once God creates a living soul, that soul lives forever. There's no such thing as anyone, believer or non-believer, righteous or unrighteous, going out of existence. All whom God has ever given life live forever. That is true of even angels. Fallen angels are doomed to an eternal Lake of Fire and holy angels are to enjoy the bliss of heaven forever. The wicked will live forever in hell and the righteous will live forever in heaven. But when a person dies, the body stays here and the body decays, dust to dust. The body is mortal, it is corruptible, and it decays. The soul then is the question. What happens to the soul of someone who dies? Well immediately that soul consciously goes into eternity in the condition that will never change. There's no remediation going on. There's no place where you can go and kind of make up for your sins. There's no place where you can go and people can sort of pray you out of that place into heaven. There is no limbo, there is no purgatory, there is no intermediate kind of environment in which you are sort of kept. There's no holding tank for God to give you another chance or maybe to make up His mind as to what He wants to do with you. I will show you from Revelation how clear it is that the way you die is the way you stay.

In the book of Revelation, turn toward the very end of Revelation, chapter 22 verse 11. "Let the one who does wrong still do wrong. The one who is filthy still be filthy. Let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness. Let the one who is holy still keep himself holy." The language in this verse is really saying, "Whatever you are when you die is what you're going to be forever. If you are filthy, you're going to be filthy forever. If you're righteous, you're going to be righteous forever." That's how

it is. Nothing will ever change. This is a condition that is perpetuated forever.

In Revelation 14:13 it said, "I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on that they may rest from their labors but their deeds follow with them.'" Whatever you are in life is exactly what follows you forever in eternity. So when a person dies, the body goes into decay, stays on the earth and the soul is released. And nothing will ever change. If a person dies as a non-believer, they will remain that way, filthy and wicked and unredeemed, forever. Those who die redeemed and righteous will remain that way forever. The death of the unsaved is horrific. It is described that way all throughout the Bible, not only in the New Testament but all throughout the Scripture. The death of the wicked is a tragedy because it is eternal, that is why the Bible says God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Proverbs 11:7, "When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish and his hope will perish." That's it. There's nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for, perpetual sin and wickedness without relief.

Now in Proverbs 14:32, the wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing. But the righteous has a refuge when he dies. When a righteous person dies, there is a refuge, that refuge, of course, the presence of God. The death of the wicked is called the second death in Revelation 21:8. The death of the wicked is described in this kind of language, eternal punishment, Matthew 25:46 and elsewhere. Eternal destruction from the face of the Lord, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, eternal sin. You can actually say that the death of the wicked perpetuates them into eternal sin. Mark 3:29, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin." An eternal sin? A sin that perpetuates itself everlastingly. The death of the wicked is described as casting them into an eternal Lake of Fire, Matthew 25, Revelation 20, casting them into an abyss or a pit, casting them into outer darkness, Matthew 8:12, torment in Revelation 14. The death of the wicked puts them under the wrath of God, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 2:5, where the anguish will produce everlasting weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, back to Matthew 8:12. It's a horrific thing. And there's no probationary period and there's no waiting period at all anywhere taught in the Scripture. This is then physical, spiritual and eternal death.

Now, on the other hand, the death of the righteous is only physical. It's not spiritual for they have spiritual life permanently. And it's not eternal for they have eternal life. And so when the Bible describes the death of the righteous, it calls it eternal life, eternal rest, eternal glory, eternal peace, eternal joy, eternal communion with God in a state of ever-expanding bliss. In fact, the death of the righteous catapults them into what the Bible calls paradise. Now just saying the word paradise in English, we understand what that means. When we say something is a paradise, we mean by that that it's everything that you could ever imagine anything to be. It's a kind of perfection. It's a kind of longing. It's something that we would love to see. We would all love to live in a paradise. Well we will. The thief on the cross, Luke 23, Jesus says to him, "Today you shall be with Me in...what?...in paradise...in paradise." That was Jesus' way of saying in the place that is the best that any place can be. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:4 says, "I was caught up in to paradise." It isn't some kind of temporary place that went out of existence. The thief went into paradise. The Apostle Paul went into paradise after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's just a term to describe the glories of heaven. He went there, heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak. It was a place of indescribable glory, joy and satisfaction. In the book of Revelation chapter 2, in the letter to the church at Ephesus, verse 7, he says, "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to believers, to Christians, I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the paradise of God." So in the paradise of God is where people go who believe in the Lord. The paradise of God is where the thief went, where the Apostle Paul went and where everyone

goes who believes in Christ and therefore overcomes. The overcomer is the one who puts his faith in Jesus, John tells us in the fifth chapter of his first epistle.

We also learn from Revelation 2:7 that in the paradise of God is the Tree of Life. Now that's a good hint because if you follow that to chapter 21 in Revelation, you're going to run into the Tree of Life again...or rather chapter 22. You're going to run into the Tree of Life again. Chapter 22 verse 1, "He showed me...this is heaven, this is a glimpse of the final heaven, the new heaven and the new earth, the final glorious heaven of heavens...he says it has a river of the water of life, clear as crystal coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street on either side of the river was the Tree of Life." So, we just read in Revelation 2:7 that the Tree of Life is in the paradise of God. Here the Tree of Life is in heaven of heavens, the holy city, the capital of the eternal state. Therefore the paradise of God is just another term for heaven that describes heaven as a paradise. This to express the delight is to express the joy and enjoyment of heaven.

And so for the wicked, death is horrific loss, eternal loss. For Christians it is glorious gain, eternal gain. And that is why the Apostle Paul says a very normal thing, not a bizarre thing, not an over the top comment. It's just basic foundational Christianity 101, he says this, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is...what?...is gain." He said, "I would rather depart and be with Christ for that is very much better, yet I'll remain here if it's necessary for your sake." This is just basic Christianity to want paradise.

What is it like? What is it like? Well, the Bible describes it as deliverance from all sin, all trouble, all pride, all lust, all temptation, all care, anxiety, disappointment, fear, labor, suffering, sorrow, weariness and I could go on. On the positive side, that's sort of what you get delivered from, on the positive side it is perfect holiness, perfect purity, perfect happiness, perfect satisfaction, perfect honor, perfect dignity, perfect freedom to enjoy everything that God has prepared. And especially, perfect love given to God and to all who are in His presence and perfect love received from God and all who are in His presence, therefore perfect fellowship with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the holy angels and all the saints. And it's even more than that, it's to be made like Christ, as much as glorified humanity can be like incarnate deity we will be like Christ. First John 3:2, "When we see Him we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."

Even after having said that, we have to remember that the Bible says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for them that love Him." We've never seen it. We've never really heard the heavenly sounds. Paul was uniquely given that experience. We don't have any report on it that we can comprehend. It's really incomprehensible.

So the first thing to understand about our glory is, you have to die to get there. So we don't fear death because death is not the end, it's the beginning. Death is not a sad event, death is a joyous event because this is what ushers us into that which God has prepared for us to enjoy forever.

Now, let me just say as a footnote. A few people don't die...a few. I mean, really a few. Enoch didn't die, he took a walk with God one day and walked right into His presence, so says Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5 comments on it as well. Elijah didn't die, a chariot came out of heaven, picked him up and took him to heaven. Pretty rare. Now apart from those, there will be some others who will not die and they are described for us, look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4...1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Familiar passage of Scripture, we'll pick it up in verse 15, "We say this to you by the Word of the Lord

that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord..." What if you're alive when the Lord comes? Do you die? No. If you're alive when the Lord comes, it says, "If you remain until the coming of the Lord you will not precede those who have fallen asleep, for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, with a trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Okay? Somebody said, "That's because they have six feet further to go." In don't think that's really the idea. But when the Lord comes, the first thing that's going to happen is the dead bodies are going to come out of the grave and then, verse 17, "We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus shall we always be with the Lord." So the people who are alive when the Rapture event, the catching away of the church occurs will not die. There will be a vast number of people. This is the church of Jesus Christ alive at the time when the Lord raptures His redeemed church. He will gather the bodies of those who have already died and then He will collect those who are alive and take them to heaven.

On the way up there will be a total transformation...a total transformation. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15, here again it's referring to the very same event in the future. Paul says, verse 51, "I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep." Sleep is a nice way to refer to death and it's appropriate to refer to death this way. It softens it and for a believer it's not a harsh reality at all. It's like falling asleep. We shall not all fall asleep, we shall not all die, "But we shall all be...what?...changed." When the Lord comes to Rapture His church in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...by the way, that doesn't mean a blink, that means the time it takes for light to bounce off the pupil, in a nano second at the last trumpet, the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, or incorruptible, same thing as in 1 Thessalonians 4, and the ones who are alive, we shall be changed. And this perishable will become imperishable, and this mortal will become immortal. And those will not even experience death but be taken into the presence of the Lord. So with the exceptions of those few in the Old Testament and those who are alive when the Lord Jesus comes to take His church, everybody else dies. There is no other way to receive the final installment of your eternal salvation than to die. We don't escape death.

You say, "Well what about the people that Jesus raised from the dead? Oh, they had to die again.

They had to die again. He raised Lazarus, so in his life his family had two funerals for him at two different times. Death is the way one enters into glory.

Now, okay, we've reached death. Then what? Body and soul are separated. So let's talk not about death but let's talk about...well let me call it the separated state, okay?...the separated state. The body's in the grave and the soul or the spirit, the inner person, soul and spirit meaning same thing, the inner person, the outer person, soul and spirit is with the Lord for the believer. The body to dust and the spirit to God. Stephen, Acts 7, is being crushed under the stones of those who are murdering him, had his theology right. As Stephen was being stoned he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He knew there was no intermediate state. There was no limbo, purgatory, waiting place. He knew that his spirit was going immediately into the presence of the Lord Jesus. He knew that. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1, "Far better to depart and be with Christ," there's no gap. Second Corinthians 5:8 he said, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." No middle place. So when a person dies, instantaneously they are in the presence of the Lord forever, spirit, body in the grave, the ground, the ashes, whatever, so that until the resurrection which hasn't happened yet, the soul exists without a body. Look at Hebrews 12 for a minute...Hebrews 12 verse 23...Hebrews 12:23 helps us with this. It says that in heaven, talks about the general assembly in the church of the firstborn, the firstborn, the *prototokos*, the premier one, Jesus Christ. "The church of Jesus Christ

who are enrolled in heaven and to God the judge of all and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect."

When you come to Mount Zion, verse 22, when you come to the city of the living God, when you come to the heavenly Jerusalem, you're coming to myriads of angels, you're coming to the general assembly and the church that belongs to Christ, you're coming to God and you're coming to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. So all who die in Christ, their spirits, the inner person, the real person goes immediately into the presence of the Lord, absent from the body, present with the Lord, depart and be with Christ. Heaven is the place of the spirits of righteous men made perfect. And so they are there without bodies up to this point...up to this point. In fact, Revelation 6:9 pictures the Tribulation, it says, "Under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and they were crying out with a loud voice, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true will You refrain from judgment in avenging our blood?'" So here you have souls praying, spirits occupying heaven, the bodies are not yet there.

So there is a separated state. And though the spirits, the souls, the inner person are now in heaven, the bodies haven't been joined to them and that is true, beloved, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, that is true that the bodies haven't been raised either for the Old Testament saints or the New Testament saints because the resurrection hasn't happened because the resurrection doesn't happen until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the time of His coming. So heaven right now is filled with the spirits of the just who have been justified by faith and are now perfect in the presence of God. You say, "Do you think they're kind of hanging around saying...when are we going to get our bodies?" Well, first of all, you have to understand that in the dimension of heaven there is no time...there is no time. I don't think anybody waits for anything. Whatever it means to live in an environment where there is no time, I really don't understand. But they're with the Lord, today with Him in paradise, depart and be with the Lord, absent from the body, present with the Lord.

So the third element that we have to talk about, we talk about death, we talk about separated state, let's talk about resurrection. The spirits and the souls now in the presence of the Lord, enjoying all the full perfection that a spirit can enjoy are still not complete because they don't have their bodies. Romans 8:23 says that there's a groaning among us, waiting for the redemption of our body. There will actually be a body. And it's...I don't know if I can go any further than this, except to say, it will be you and it will be me and not some alien form because Paul says, "This corruptible shall put on incorruption. This mortal shall put on immortality." And by the way, there will be a resurrection for the wicked and the righteous. Right now the wicked are suffering in their spirit and in their soul without their resurrection bodies. But Jesus said in John chapter 5 and verse 28, "Do not marvel at this, an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice." Jesus had the power to give life to the bodies of all who have died in the history of the world and all will come forth. Some to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of judgment. Verse 29, all who have ever lived will be raised. There are bodies fit for hell and bodies fit for heaven. Bodies in which the souls that are damned will dwell and bodies in which the souls that are glorified will dwell. In fact, if you look at the twentieth chapter of Revelation, the same thing is described there at the Great White Throne which is the final judgment of the wicked. Verse 11, "Saw a great throne," says John, "Him who sat upon it from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them," there's the uncreation of the universe as we know it, it goes out of existence and all that's left is a great throne in the vacuum where once there was a creation. "And brought before that throne," it says, "are the dead, the great, the small, that's the significant, the insignificant, standing before the throne, books were opened, another book was opened, the Book of Life, and the dead were judged from the things

which were written in the books according to their deeds, the sea gave up the dead which were in it." All the bodies that have ever died into the sea, they're coming back out. They will have to be newly created obviously by God, Hades, the grave, all the graves of this world gave up the dead which were in them and everyone was judged according to his deeds and, of course, they were all thrown into the Lake of Fire. There will be a kind of glorified human body to go along with the damned soul so that the tortures of hell are fully felt for the unregenerate. The Lord Jesus will raise all who have ever lived from the dead. For some, a resurrection to life, for some a resurrection to damnation and judgment. In Acts 24:15, Paul said, "There shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." Both the righteous and the wicked. For the righteous, this is a new body, a new body fit for glory. For the wicked, it's a new body fit for suffering. For the righteous, it's a body fit for joy and righteousness. For the wicked, it's a body fit for remorse and sin.

The Old Testament saints new about it. Go all the way back to Job who lived in the patriarchal period. He said, "Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God whom I shall see for myself and not another." He knew that....he knew that. In Daniel chapter 12 there is a wonderful prophetic promise of the coming resurrection of the Old Testament saints and many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. There's an Old Testament text that says the same thing that I read you from the words of Paul in Acts 24, and the statement of Jesus in John 5. Everybody comes to life, some to everlasting life and joy, some to everlasting contempt.

Now in the New Testament we get a bit of a description of what the body is going to be for the righteous, we have no description of the body for the unrighteous, it will be a body suited to the suffering. But for those of us who are believers, we find out what our resurrection body will be like, turn to Philippians chapter 3...Philippians chapter 3. Here we read in verse 20 that, "Our citizenship is in heaven," that's what I was saying earlier, "From which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." And again, that word eagerly is put in there because I think it's so easy for us to lose sight of this. One could wish that we lived in a more depressed, deprived, painful, difficult, burdensome world than we live in because the level of our comfort gives us such satisfaction that we lose that eagerness for the life to come. But our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, look at verse 21, who will transform the body of our humble state. It will be the body of our humble state transformed, metamorphosed into conformity with the body of His glory. And He will do this by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. So the way to understand the body of our glory is that it will be like the body of His glory, it will be like His resurrection body. It moved around, it went through walls and through doors that were shut. He could speak, He could move, He could be touched and even the scars that He had from the cross could be seen and felt. He ate. This is the glorious body of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is coming, that is coming. No one has that resurrection body yet. The Old Testament saints are still waiting for it. The New Testament saints are still waiting for it.

Now the Bible describes this as the first resurrection. And the first resurrection actually has four components. First of all is the primacy of the resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "In Him we live, because He lives we live." The resurrection that we receive comes through the power of Christ demonstrated in His own resurrection and of all who would ever be raised, He is the *prototokos*, the premier one. So the first phase, the first feature of the first resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Secondly comes the Rapture of the church. This is imminent...imminent...i-m-m, this is imminent, this

could happen at any time, no prophetic things need to take place before this. We live in expectation, we live believing the doctrine of imminency that Christ could come at any moment to Rapture His church. This is what I read you, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4:13 to 17, and John 14:1 to 6. If you want more detail on that, you can get the book I wrote called *The Second Coming* which has just come out in a new paperback edition. The Rapture of the church, that's the second. At that point, the dead in Christ in the church will be raised and they will receive their glorified bodies and those who are alive at that time will be metamorphosed on the way up in a nano second.

The third aspect of this first resurrection, the third component will be at the end of a period called the Great Tribulation, a seven-year period of divine judgment in the world that follows the Rapture of the church. At the end of that seven-year period will come the resurrection of the Old Testament saints as prophesied in Daniel chapter 12. It comes at the end of the time of Tribulation and it comes immediately preceding the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. If you follow the flow of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, you know that the resurrection of the Old Testament saints is in preparation for the glory of the Messiah which will be revealed in the world. At that time also Tribulation saints will be resurrected, who died under the reign under the terror of Antichrist. And any who are alive will go in their physical body right into the final element, the millennial kingdom...the millennial kingdom. And anyone who dies in the millennial kingdom would be instantly metamorphosed, instantly transformed. There will be no resurrection to wait for.

So the first resurrection is launched in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second even that makes up this first resurrection is the Rapture of the church. Followed later by Israel's salvation by the resurrection of the Old Testament saints at the end of the Tribulation along with the Tribulation saints and there will be a sort of private personal immediate kind of resurrection or transformation for anyone who dies during that thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation chapter 20. After that at the end of the millennial kingdom there's a rebellion by Satan. Satan's rebellion is eliminated immediately by the Lord Himself and all the wicked are judged and Satan and his hosts and all those who followed him are cast into the Lake of Fire and God at that point destroys the creation, the Great White Throne takes place and then God creates a new heaven and the new earth, the final dwelling place of the glorified embodied righteous spirits. This is the final grace. This is the future grace.

And when you stop to think about heaven and you ask...what is going to be the dominant thing? I keep going back to this with you and I've told you this before, the dominant feature of heaven is joy. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells the story that's familiar to all of us about a man who gave his servants responsibility and when they did what they should have done, he said to the men, enter into the joy of your lord, enter into the joy of your lord. And you remember from Luke 15, right?, the joy of heaven over the redeemed. When any sinner repents, one sinner is enough to set heaven off in a great paean of joy. The characteristic of heaven is joy. The worship of heaven is consummate, everlasting, undiminished and ever-increasing joy. There will be a level of happiness there that we can't even comprehend and it can never and will never diminish.

So to find our joy in this world is to live at a very low level. The only place you can find joy really in this world that's real joy is to find joy in the grace that God gives you, to find joy in the fellowship of other believers, to find joy in Christian family, to find joy in serving Christ, to find joy in living for His kingdom, His glory and His gospel. To embrace the sinful world, to idolize the sinful world is to spurn the comfort of hope and the joy of hope and the fulfillment of hope. And it's to seek what you can't find and to forfeit the joy of hope's anticipation. All it does is aggravate earth's miseries. But if you go

through your life and don't expect much, then you'll have less disappointment. To wish for heaven is to love God above all. To wish for heaven is to desire Christ above all. To wish for heaven is to long for pure fellowship. To wish for heaven is to hate sin and the weakness of the flesh. To wish for heaven is to resent Satan and his world system. To wish for heaven is to long for perfect holiness and perfect joy. Set your affections on things above, certainly not on things on this earth, and you will say with John, Revelation 22:12, "Behold, I'm coming quickly," Jesus said, "behold I'm coming quickly," verse 20 again, "I'm coming quickly." And John says, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus." From my perspective John is saying, "You can't get here fast enough."

Some practical applications and we'll talk more about this next week, I want to talk about what heaven will be like. But some practical things just to think about. If you live with a hope of heaven, if you live with an eagerness of heaven, it is evidence of genuine salvation...it is evidence of genuine salvation. It means that your heart is truly God's. It means that it's aflame and alive and exuberant with hope. Secondly, to live with eagerness for heaven is...is to be motivated to the highest excellence of Christian character. To live for what is to come for that future final grace is to be motivated at the highest excellence of Christian character. First John 3 says, "He that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure." It has a purifying effect to live in excited anticipation that you're going to see Jesus face-to-face knowing that He knows everything about you. That kind of accountability, that kind of expectation causes purification, purging of sin.

Furthermore, to live with a heavenly hope, to be eager for the presence of God is the truest path to a life of joy. It is the truest path to a life of joy. Because, look, the world is going to be full of trouble, but listen to what it says in Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with...what?...the glory that is to be revealed to us." That's how you approach life. If you live with a heavenly hope and a heavenly anticipation, and you begin to understand the fullness of all that that means, nothing in this world that goes wrong that brings about suffering can be really debilitating. The truest path to life, to a life of joy, to real joyful endurance through very trying times is to have such a shining hope for heaven and to understand that nothing that happens here can be compared with what is waiting for you there.

A live eager hope for heaven, number four, is a preservative against temptation. It is a preservative against temptation. Very much like the second point motivating us to the highest level of Christian character, but listen to the testimony of the Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, we have as our ambition whether at home or absent to be pleasing to Him for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and there we will be recompensed for what we've done whether it's good or useless, our works are going to be burned up as wood, hay, stubble, or they're going to be preserved like gold, silver, precious stones. A heavenly mind doesn't stoop to the sensual life cause it knows it's going to face a judgment and a time of reward, not condemnation but one who lives in the anticipation of heaven and the coming of the Lord Jesus knows that he wants or she wants the full reward for His glory and His honor and for the love of Christ.

I think also that this hope when it shines bright in the heart of a believer maintains the vigor of spiritual service. I think it really makes the difference in how diligently you serve and how you endure. Second Corinthians, this is a great, great text, verse 16 of chapter 4, "We do not lose heart," we're...if anybody could lose heart it would be Paul, just hammered. We don't lose heart. Why? "Even though our outer man is decaying," why don't we lose heart? "Because the inner man is being renewed day by day." How do you do that? "Because momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." The more they do to me, the bigger the weight of glory

becomes. The more I am faithful and the more I am persecuted and abused and the more I suffer for the gospel, the greater will be my eternal glory. We look not at the things which are seen but at the things that are not seen for the things that are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen are eternal. This hope, this shining anticipation of glory is evidence of true salvation. It is a motive to the highest excellence of Christian character. It is the truest path to life and joy. It is a preservative against falling to temptation and it maintains the vigor of spiritual service. If you run slow and you work little and you offer the Lord a meager offering of service, it's probably because you have very little regard for the heavenly prize. If you don't endure, it's because you don't understand the things that are not seen. If you're not living a godly and faithful and honorable life before the Lord, it's because you don't have a vision of the value of an eternal weight of glory. And so I certainly wish with all my heart that we could live with this hope.

Living in the light of heaven, I think, honors God above everything. It honors God above everything. And it keeps its gaze fixed on His glory. In fact, David said it this way, "I will be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." It was as if nothing here ultimately satisfies me. There are many wonderful things in this life, many blessings that we enjoy, but I will be fully satisfied only when I awake in Thy likeness. A wonderful old hymn, "The bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegroom's face. I will not gaze at glory but on my King of grace. Not at the crown He giveth but on His pierced hand, the Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land." If you lose yourself, as we said last week, in your gaze on Jesus Christ, then heaven really becomes more precious.

Well next time we'll talk about what we're going to be doing when we get there. Let's pray.

We're staggered and stunned again, Lord, by this great immense profound far-reaching grace. We don't deserve anything, we are sinful and helpless and hopeless. Left to ourselves we have nothing to commend ourselves, nothing to earn our salvation and You've given it to us by grace and it is grace upon grace upon grace to a staggering level, culminating in this final grace, this future grace, this everlasting grace that is being brought to us and awaits the revelation, the unveiling of Jesus Christ in the time when we enter into His presence. Help us to live in the light of that so that it affects every aspect of our lives, to Your eternal glory and our eternal blessing. Your Word is light, that light has shined into our hearts now, may it illumine us so that we see the way things really are and are drawn to a new and afresh obedience and to consider that glory which awaits us with great anticipation. In Your Son's name. Amen.

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