

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHRISTIAN DIES?

Key Truth

Death is the beginning of a fantastic adventure for the Christian

My dear 85 year old mother suffers with deep dementia; her capacity to remember is greatly diminished. For instance, she has lived with us for five years but cannot remember her seat at the table nor her bedroom. She worries what is going to happen to her though we assure her we will care for her until she goes home to be with the Lord. My father set up a trust out of which we are able to provide for Mom but no matter how many times I assure her she has ample finances she frets she doesn't have enough money.

We recently placed Mom at the Ramona Senior Manor; a wonderful care residence just a mile from our home. She is surrounded by caring staff and several friends she's made over the last several years. The food is top rate, there are daily activities to enjoy and just this week, my sister, her daughter, started working there as an RN. So Mom is in a wonderful place with all her needs met, surrounded by family and friends, safe and clean with daily activities to enjoy, but every evening she sits in her room teary and anxious thinking she is alone. Without her memory, she can't picture tomorrow. The future essentially doesn't exist for Mom except as a dark, scary place. She is unable to derive joy or hope from the good things tomorrow will bring.

If we can't picture the future, how can we face it with joy and hope?

God wants us to face our future with joy and hope. He has revealed much about the afterlife, enough to make us realize that death for a believer is the beginning of a fantastic adventure.

Let's think about the future God has for us.

First, what happens to a Christian who dies?

AT THE TIME OF OUR PHYSICAL DEATH, OUR SOUL GOES TO BE WITH JESUS (2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10)

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (ESV)

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

There are only two options in this passage: our soul is at home in these earthly bodies here on earth and away from God geographically or our soul is away from our earthly body and at home with the Lord in heaven.

For many Christians, that is the end of their understanding of the afterlife. For most Christians, what they have been taught about the afterlife does not bring them a lot of joy or excitement about the future. That's because they are not being properly taught the Bible. Far from being the end of the story, our going to be with Jesus at the

moment of our death is just the beginning of our great adventure. After all the people who are going to believe in Jesus during the Church Age come to faith, then Jesus is going to gather His Bride, the Church, at an event we call the *Rapture*.

AT THE RAPTURE WE RECEIVE OUR RESURRECTION BODIES

The Rapture Event (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

¹ Thessalonians 4:13-18 (ESV)

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Through the Rapture, Jesus is gathering His Bride, the Church, to be purified and wed to Him. His Bride, the Church, includes Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus for salvation from Pentecost 33AD to the last believer who trusts in Jesus prior to the Rapture event.

Jesus will bring with Him the souls of all believers who died before the Rapture (those who have *fallen asleep*). They have been with Jesus since their physical deaths (2 Corinthians 5:1-10). At the Rapture, their souls will inhabit their resurrection bodies and they will be the first to rise and meet the Lord Jesus in the air.

If we are still physically alive at the time of the Rapture, we, too, will receive our resurrection bodies, but the process will be different. Our physical bodies will be transformed *in the twinkling of an eye* (1 Corinthians 15:52). After we receive our resurrection bodies, we, then, will follow those who precede us.

I like to put this in terms of the three R's of our blessed hope: the *Resurrection, the Rapture and the Reunion*.

The Rapture begins the third aspect of our salvation through Jesus and that is our *glorification*. As human beings, we are a soul / body combination. The Apostle Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 that we do not wish to be *unclothed*. That means we do not wish to be souls without bodies. That is unnatural. We are not fully human without a body. As we studied in Romans, these present bodies give us a lot of trouble for two reasons. One, our physical bodies are under the curse of the Fall and therefore suffer decay, disease and ultimately death. Second, our physical bodies, in which sin dwells, continually seeks to control our lives and move us to live for ourselves rather than God. God's solution to deliver us from this body of sin and death is not to do away with our bodies, but to replace these bodies with resurrection bodies free of sin that will never die!

At the Rapture we will receive our resurrection bodies. And what bodies they will be!

Our resurrection body will be amazing (1 Corinthians 15:42-44; 50-57)

¹ Corinthians 15:42-44 (ESV)

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Elsewhere the Bible tells us that our resurrection bodies will be like the resurrection body of Jesus. If anyone doubts these bodies will be real just think about what Jesus' resurrection body was like? It was touchable, it ate food, it walked and talked. It had supernatural abilities, but it was real nonetheless.

So, at the Rapture we all will receive our resurrection bodies whether we're coming up out of our graves or we're being changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Notice Paul concludes by encouraging us to be steadfast in our work for the Lord here on earth. This is because our work here for the Lord is going to be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

After the Rapture when we receive our resurrection bodies, we will all be purified and rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST WE WILL BE PURIFIED AND REWARDED

The Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (ESV)

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

What is little understood is that how we live as believers has eternal ramifications. We do not work for our salvation; we rely on the works of Jesus Christ who lived a sinless life, died as the perfect sacrifice and rose again on the third day to make us right with God. But as Paul writes, we are saved by grace through faith to do works which God has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Do you remember the parable Jesus told about a master who was going away and gave three of his servants money to invest while he was away (Matthew 25:14-30)? We usually call it "The Parable of the Talents". The

point of the parable is that when Jesus returns He will reward those who faithfully served Him and rebuke those who did not. This will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ following the Rapture.

Jesus loves us unconditionally whether He rewards or rebukes us. But I think all of us would rather be rewarded than rebuked. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus has given each one of us at least one spiritual gift by which to build up the church family. All our assets such as our homes, our skills and talents, our finances we can be using to love people to Jesus. Because of the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Millennial Kingdom it matters very much how we live now for Jesus.

Crowns rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ

The New Testament reveals five crowns that will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. These crowns come with authority to lead in the Millennial Kingdom. The five crowns are:

The Imperishable Crown (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

This crown is given to those believers who exercise self-control and gain victory over the old man.

The Crown of Boasting (1 Thessalonians 2:17-19)

This crown is for those who do the work of evangelism and win souls for Jesus.

The Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

This crown is for those who have kept the faith doctrinally and morally in spite of adversity.

The Crown of Life (James 1:12, Revelation 2:10)

This crown is for those who endure trials and martyrdom.

The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:2-4)

This crown is for Elders who faithfully care for the church.

When the Judgment Seat of Christ is complete, we, the Church and Bride of Christ will be purified and arrayed in the white linen of our righteous deeds. We will be the radiant Bride of Christ prepared to be wed to Jesus for the rest of eternity.

WE WILL BE WED TO JESUS (REVELATION 19:6-9)

Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Once wed to Jesus we will return with Him to this earth to reign and serve Him in His Millennial Kingdom.

WE WILL REIGN WITH CHRIST IN HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH (REVELATION 20:4-6)

Revelation 20:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

We don't have time to plumb the depths of how interesting it will be serving in Jesus' administration during His earthly reign. We will be serving alongside mortals who will be born to the Millennial Kingdom and need to trust in Christ to be saved. We will see how Jesus will lead the nations to restore the economy and environment wrecked by the Tribulation. We will finally experience justice administered fairly and swiftly. We will experience national and international peace and prosperity. It will be a truly awesome experience to serve in Jesus' kingdom.

When the Millennial Kingdom comes to an end we will then enter the New Heaven and the New Earth for all eternity.

WE WILL DWELL WITH GOD IN THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (REVELATION 21:1-4)

Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

This is our future in Christ.

And there is so much more we didn't have time to study.

So be comforted my brothers and sisters. Death is not the end, but the beginning of a fantastic adventure for those of us who love Jesus!

Chronology of Eschatology

Law



