

REST

Freed, not Extinguished

LESSON 2



REST : Freed, Not Extinguished

The Reality of Death

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: 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. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 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. 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. 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

We don't like to think about death; yet, worldwide, 3 people die every second, 180 every minute, and nearly 11,000 every hour. If the Bible is right about what happens to us after death, it means that more than 250,000 people every day go either to Heaven or Hell. - Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

What Happens when we die?

The best we can hope for in this life is a knothole peek at the shining realities ahead. Yet a glimpse is enough. It's enough to convince our hearts that whatever sufferings and sorrows currently assail us aren't worthy of comparison to that which waits over the horizon.

Joni Eareckson Tada

Perspectives on Death

Within a one-month span in 2018, two world-renowned figures passed away, two people who incredibly impacted the way that millions look at the world, but in very different ways.

On March 14, 2018: Stephen Hawking passed away. About death, he said, **“I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail,”** Stephen Hawking told the Guardian. **“There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.”**

On February 21, 2018, Billy Graham, about his death, he said: **“Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.”** **“Death for the Christian is the doorway to heaven's glory. Because of Christ's resurrection we can joyously say with Paul, ‘Where, O death, is your victory?’”** (1 Corinthians 15:55)

The Eternality of the Soul

The modern, secular worldview says that we cease to exist at death.

I'm 62 years old. Over the last decade I've had more and more evidence of my mortality. ... And I am reminded that all of us, and I, are material beings. Our consciousness and our self-awareness create an illusion that we are made out of some special substance, that we have some kind of special ego power, some I-ness, some unique existence. But in fact we are nothing but bones, tissues, gelatinous membranes, neurons, electrical impulses, and chemicals. We are material, we are stuff. ... Coming to terms with our materiality is the most difficult challenge we have in our existence. - Alan Lightman, atheist physicist and professor at MIT

This is extremely difficult for people to swallow because, as we will see in a moment, the idea that we simply cease to exist runs counter to our natural instinct that life goes on. Why is this becoming more appealing?

And now we are witnessing a transformation. A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death—the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged...[but] all religions recognize that our deeds are imperishable. - Czeslaw Milosz, “The Discreet Charms of Nihilism.”

(I)t's strange to think that you accumulate all this experience . . . and it just goes away. So I really want to believe that something survives, that maybe your consciousness endures.

- Steve Jobs

There seem to be some Phenomenological reasons to say that our souls and bodies can be separated, substantiating claims that our lives are more than gelatinous membranes and bioelectrical impulses.

Our almost universal, natural instinct is to think that life continues after our physical deaths.

The sense that we will live forever somewhere has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was an island in the faraway east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death.

Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is.

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

Stephen Hawking thought that our sense that life must go on was nothing but a *fairy story for those afraid of the dark*. But we think that the resurrection of Jesus substantiates and informs this deep, almost universal instinct.

1 Corinthians 15:16-20 - For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

But how do we know? We talked about this a little last time, and I would be glad to get you some resources, but in a nutshell, we believe because of the inward testimony of God's Spirit, of the Bible, of the eyewitness testimony recorded in the Bible, and historical evidence.

The fact that the Christian fellowship, founded on belief in Jesus' resurrection, could come into existence and flourish in the very city where he was executed and buried seems to be compelling evidence for the historicity of the empty tomb." – William Lane Craig

Whoever reads the New Testament seriously, or gives thought to the impact which the apostles made upon their generation, must acknowledge that one outstanding historic event alone spurred that small band of 11 ordinary men to an amazing task of evangelization in their generation. Defying every obstacle, loss of home, persecution, even death itself, they evidenced the supreme relevance in their ministry of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- Erling C. Olsen

What the Bible Says about Our Eternal Souls

The Bible teaches that we were created from nothing but do not cease to exist upon our deaths.

1. You are a unique person created by God. You as you really exist as a unique individual person. It is not an illusion of biochemical processes.
2. You as you are not just a body but a body and a soul, with these two aspects of your self interrelating. You were created with these two vital components to your humanity. Both are good.
3. At Death, we retain our individual personhood and our consciousness, but our bodies and souls are separated. Our physical existence here ends for a time, but our consciousness continues on. The Bible teaches the permanence of the soul even after physical death.
4. The souls of the departed enter into one of two places upon death: those who believe in Jesus Christ immediately enter into his presence, called heaven, and those who have persisted in unbelief are held somewhere else, called Hell, for the day of final judgment.

We were not created to die. We were created to live. And though we die, yet we still live on. We do not continue in these bodies as they are now, but we exist elsewhere. The Bible describes death for the Christian as a departure. This is what we read:

- Philippians 1:23-24 - **My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.**
- Revelation 6:9-11 - Souls under the altar ask Lord, How Long? They are still waiting for something
- Luke 23:43 - **Today, you will be with me in paradise.**
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which we read earlier.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 - **For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.**
- 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 - **So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.**

Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room I shall be able to see.

Helen Keller

What the Bible Says Happens When We Die

The Bible speaks of our heavenly destination in two different ways:

The Intermediate State

The New Heavens and New Earth

What is the Intermediate State Like?

A Place of REST

1. Removal of Influence of Sin

Isaiah 57:1-2 - **The righteous man perishes,
and no one lays it to heart;
devout men are taken away,
while no one understands.
For the righteous man is taken away from
calamity;
² he enters into peace;
they rest in their beds
who walk in their uprightness.**

2. Recovery from Effects of Broken World

3. Rest and Restoration.

Revelation 13:14 - **And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"**

If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.
Aristedes, 125 AD

4. Reunion with Believing People We Love

There would be no point in these words of consolation if they did not imply the mutual recognition of saints. The hope with which he cheers wearied Christians is the hope of meeting their beloved friends again. . . . But in the moment that we who are saved shall meet our several friends in heaven, we shall at once know them, and they will at once know us. - J. C. Ryle, Speaking of 1 Thessalonians 4

5. Rejoicing – Worship in the Presence of God

To come to Thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labour, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes. - Charles Spurgeon

What will make heaven to be heaven is the presence of Jesus, and of a reconciled divine Father who loves us for Jesus sake no less than He loves Jesus Himself. To see, and know, and love, and be loved by, the Father and the Son, in company with the rest of God's vast family, is the whole essence of the Christian hope.... If you are a believer... this prospect satisfies you completely. - J.I. Packer

What is the essence of heaven? . . . [It is the] beatific vision, love, and enjoyment of the triune God. For the three divine persons have an infinitely perfect vision and love and enjoyment of the divine essence and of one another. And in this infinite knowing, loving and enjoying lies the very life of the triune God, the very essence of their endless and infinite happiness. If the blessed are to be endlessly and supremely happy, then, they must share in the very life of the triune God, in the divine life that makes Them endlessly happy. E. J. Fortman

A Place of ANTICIPATION

You can grieve for me the week before I die, if I'm scared and hurting, but when I gasp that last fleeting breath and my immortal soul flees to heaven, I'm going to be jumping over fire hydrants down the golden streets, and my biggest concern, if I have any, will be my wife back here grieving. When I die, I will be identified with Christ's exaltation. But right now, I'm identified with His affliction.

R.C. Sproul

I'm standing on the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She's an object of beauty and strength and I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and the sky come down to mingle with each other. And then I hear someone at my side saying, "There, she's gone."

Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side. And just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says, "There, she's gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!"

And that is dying.

Variously attributed to Henry Scott Holland and Henry Van Dyke
source uncertain