

VI. Eternity in Biblical Perspective
If I Should Die Before I Wake...
“The Final State: the New Heavens and the New Earth”
Selected Texts
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We will start this study by looking at Romans 8. Our Sunday evening worship is different than our Sunday morning and we look at in such a way as to how we can encourage you as you are coming out of week serving Christ in a broken world. We know you will experience spiritual warfare and that is not a season in the life of a Christian but it is the life of a Christian. If you're not in spiritual warfare that's the unusual thing. Jesus has won the war but we're still in battles. We are to walk carefully with the whole armor of God. At this facility we want you to sense the love, security, strength and peace of Christ because of the grace of Christ in the Lord Jesus. We want you to be lifted up in the transcendence of this God who is incomparable. He is the One who has saved you and dwells within you. We don't want you to see God small enough to be in you but we want you to be amazed that this God who is glorious, and beyond our comprehension for there is none like you, is the One who saves you and indwells you. This time is to help you to be equipped and encouraged and to be the salt God wants you to be for the coming week. The main delivery system is for you to be in a small group for discipleship but one of the main things God uses in discipleship is the large group in worship and the cannonade of God's Gospel to break down our heart and then the balm of Gilead of Gospel preaching that builds up our heart, encourages us, exhorts us and equips us to step into a life.

So in this study we will go to passages of Scriptures that deal with the believer's death and everlasting life. We have already seen that death is not a part of life but is an intruder and an enemy. According to Romans 6:23 the wages of sin is death and there is no death in Genesis 1 and 2 for it only comes in Genesis 3. Death comes with three dynamics – physical death (separation of body and soul), spiritual death (separation of the sinner from a personal saving relationship with Christ unless He saves you) and eternal death (separation of the impenitent sinner under the judgment of God for all eternity). God's solution to that is His saving grace in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

We will be looking at what happens when we die as believers. I only know of two situations in the Bible where people who have lived and not died and beyond those as far as I know it's one hundred percent mortality rate. The two who did not see death was Enoch and Elijah. There are not just two glorified bodies in heaven with Jesus – Enoch and Elijah – for there are three because the book of Jude tells us Michael the arch angel secured the body of Moses. So the body of Moses precedes the resurrection with the own individual resurrection. This is helpful to explain something – why is it at the Mount of transfiguration when Jesus is lifted up two other glorified bodies – Moses and Elijah – are lifted up beside Him. There bodies were not in the grave for the body of Elijah had already been taken up and the body of Moses had been secured by Michael the arch angel.

Everyone else, our bodies will go ashes to ashes and dust to dust and then God has promised the resurrection of them. We believe as the Apostles' Creed points out that we believe God will raise this body for eternity, but when I die and my body is in the grave what happens? A body will come under the curse of sin and the body can be killed but the soul cannot be killed

– so you can't. The only One who can kill a soul is the Lord Himself. So you will continue to live at death. Your body is laid aside but absent from the body is present with the Lord. Now, where are you present with the Lord? You are present with the Lord in the immediate blessing of heaven for an intermediate period of time. You are spiritually perfected in your soul and you are in the presence of the Lord. That place is called heaven, paradise, and Abraham's bosom/side. There is also an intermediate state of judgment for the impenitent and that place is called the abyss, hades of torment but as a believer you are in the place of heaven being comforted by the Lord. This is what we looked at in the last study.

That immediate heaven is not the final state but the intermediate state. The final state is not simply a spiritual state but an eternal state with a glorified body. This physical body you have will be resurrected into a glorified body. That glorified body will be so effectively transformed by the Lord so that it will know no ability to sin, no consequences of sin and you will be able to enjoy that everlasting existence in a place the Bible calls the new heavens and the new earth and this will be the final state.

Do you remember the beatitudes in Matthew 5? Matthew 5:5 says [5] *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Is He talking about the earth we currently live in? No, believers will inherit the new earth and the new heavens. God even now is bearing witness of this to us. In this study I want to bring a distillation from a collected amount of Scripture that give us an understanding of the final/ultimate state of the believer for all eternity. Have you ever stopped to think about "all eternity" and what that means? I have been redeemed and hell's gates are shut. I have been saved and the presence of the Lord is mine forever. If I die before Jesus comes, I go immediately into His presence with a perfected soul in the heavenly Jerusalem according to Hebrews 12. But when Jesus comes again, the body is raised and joined to that soul I won't be in a heavenly Jerusalem for Jerusalem will come down and the dwelling place of God will be with His people on the earth that is a part of a rejuvenated universe – new heavens and a new earth. So let's start with Romans 8.

Romans 8:18–19 says [18] *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* [19] *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* The creation groans because of what Jesus has already warned us about – wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, droughts, nations rising against nations etc. In the next study we'll deal with the doctrine of the eternal state of the impenitent sinner, the doctrine of hell and then we'll come back to some things I didn't have time to cover in the last study and this study. We will look closer at the second coming of Christ and the judgment seat for the unbeliever and how it effects the believer in a few studies from now. In that study I will tell you when the Lord will return. So in this passage the creation (the old heavens and earth) will keep groaning until its delivered and it won't be delivered until all of those who are the sons of God have been revealed. Another way to say this is, until the elect has been saved. Let's continue in the passage.

Romans 8:20–23 says [20] *For the creation was subjected to futility (vanity/emptiness due to the curse of sin so it will not accomplish its original purpose – things won't work like God had intended it, not from any inadequacy of God but because of our sin), not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* [23] *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits (believers) of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our*

bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

This creation was subjected to the curse of sin to be delivered by the hand of God as the place where those sons and daughters of God will reside for all eternity. When all of His creation, His elect are saved, this creation will be ushered into and transformed into a new creation – a new heavens and a new earth. Jesus has told you in Matthew 24 and 25 that from the day of His ascension until He comes again the convulsions of this groaning earth will be with you. He calls all these things that are happening birth pangs but that is not the sign of His coming. The birth pangs tell you He is coming and like a woman's birth pains until He comes these things will come, be repetitive and they will intensify until He comes. Let's continue in the passage.

Romans 8:26–28 says [26] *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. [28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*

If you have been keeping count in this Romans 8 passage we are up to three groanings in this cursed world. The creation is groaning. We are groaning, our bodies are groaning to be delivered and the Spirit is groaning on our behalf as He intercedes for us. We know these groanings are taking place because He has subjected the creation, us and our bodies to the consequences and curse of sin in this world. In this groaning we know there is something to come. We know these bodies were not made to die and that's the curse of sin. We know they weren't made for those groanings, aches, sin and pains.

Paul tells us something else and that is that God has given us the Holy Spirit. His grace is such that we are the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit is groaning for us. He is interceding for us beyond what we can imagine or think. He is the One that is working in us. With those facts in place I'd like to give you some passages in I Corinthians starting with I Corinthians 2. This is a passage my grandmother used to read to me all the time. Remember that Holy Spirit who knows you and is praying for you? It's wonderful to know you have two who are interceding for you – the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

I Corinthians 2:6–9 says [6] *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. [7] But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. [8] None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. [9] But, as it is written,*

***“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love Him”—***

It is here I have somewhat of a disagreement with some of my dear brothers who declare what the new heavens and the new earth are, is the reclaiming and the recapturing of the Garden. I think that is true but I think it's even more than that. In the Garden you couldn't sing Amazing Grace but you will in the new heavens and the new earth. I believe there is another whole dimension because of God's sovereign plan in the allowing of sin, the ordering of our sins in this world and then the authoring of salvation for us. That will be known in a way it wasn't known in

the Garden. There are a couple of passages that come to mind as I read ‘what God has prepared for those who love Him.’

Jesus says in John 14:1–4, [1] *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father’s house are many rooms (mansions). If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. [4] And you know the way to where I am going.”* What God is preparing for us through Christ is a new heavens and a new earth. It’s a place, not a thought. It’s not just a concept and eye has not seen nor ear has heard nor have you imagined. This is the Father’s house, it’s a home.

Recently, I was back in Charlotte for some family business and when I was there I rode by the house I grew up in from age 8 to age 12. I think someone threw water on that house and it shrunk. There was a Greek family who lived across the street who I played football, baseball and basketball with – Harry, George and Chris Pappas. As I recently drove by I saw that Chris was still living in that house across the street so I stopped to say hello to him and he said to me “Harry, I thought you were dead.” I said “No I’m not dead but I think you’re talking about my dad.” He said ‘Oh yeah, you’re Ike.’ So he thought I was dad even though he wasn’t looking too good either for he had some serious groaning going on as well.

As we were talking, the man who had been living in the house I lived in came up to us. Our conversation was amazing but it just wasn’t the same house. He really hadn’t done anything to it except raise nine kids in it. I know why it wasn’t the same house, it was because my mom, dad and three sisters weren’t in there, but in the house the Lord is preparing it will be a home because it’s our Father’s house and we’ll be with Him. It’s also called a new heavens and a new earth, where Jerusalem has come down and there is no temple there because God’s dwelling place is with you and you with Him. Man can’t even imagine what God has prepared for him but God has given us a few insights on what He has prepared for us and how He will prepare us for it. So now let’s look at I Corinthians 15.

I Corinthians 15:50–57 says [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 (some will be alive when Christ returns), 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 (speaking of our bodies), and we shall be changed. [53] For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality (but it’s still a body). [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.” (Christ has already defeated death but when He comes He’ll destroy it.)*

[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.*

In the next study you will find out that death as well as impenitent believers, Satan and the fallen angels will be cast into hell. It will be swallowed up in the victory of Christ and the evidence is your body will not be held by a grave but God will bring that dust back, but now that body will be imperishable, immortal and equipped for this new heavens and new earth. Now let’s look at verse 35.

I Corinthians 15:35–49 says [35] *But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”* [36] *You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.* [37] *And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.* [38] *But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.* [39] *For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.* [40] *There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.* [41] *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.*

[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 (that is one, equipped for all eternity). If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.* [45] *Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.* [46] *But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.* [47] *The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second Man is from heaven.* [48] *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.* [49] *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

This is a way for Paul to tell you what he says a lot more simply in Philippians 1 that when we receive our new body it will be like the resurrected body of Jesus – the transformed, incarnate body of Jesus. This means it will be recognizable and it is not governed by the things of this world, but is governed by the laws of a new heavens and a new earth. It will bear no effects of sin, no consequences of sin nor will there be any ability to sin in that body whatsoever. That is what God has prepared for us. So how to get to this new heavens and new earth. Let’s look at II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:1–13 says [1] *This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,* [2] *that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,* [3] *knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days (the last days started when Jesus ascended) with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.* [4] *They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”* [5] *For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,* [6] *and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.* [7] *But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

[8] *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* (This is not a formula, it means God is not governed by time.) [9] *The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* [10] *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

[11] *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,* [12] *waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,*

because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! [13] But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Jesus is coming again and we'll be with Him for all eternity so where are the scoffers? They were there over 2000 years ago. All is as it has been. What's our answer? No, it hasn't. God made the heavens and the earth and all isn't as it has been for He brought a catastrophe of judgment by water, a deluge. That earth and its inhabitants perished except for those whom by God's grace with His own hands were sealed in His ark. Then they were deposited in this new heaven and earth. Then God said 'I will never destroy the earth again by water (Genesis 9:12) but one day by fire.' When He comes a second time it will not be water but fire and it's not a fire of destruction, but a fire of dissolving and purification. Then He will roll it back out as a purified heavens and earth. When will Jesus come? He is patient for He will not come until all His elect are saved.

When He comes He will bring those who are with Him in the intermediate state for their bodies will be raised. We who are alive will be caught up and be together in Him. Then comes this conflagration and then comes a rejuvenation and then comes what He has prepared for us – new heavens and a new earth that eye has not seen and ear has not heard. You will have a new body to be in that new heavens and that new earth forever and ever with the Lord in all of its glory. This is what Paul is describing here.

Can you see this parallel? Here God was grieved that He had made man upon the earth (Genesis 6:6) and He brings a judgment of water upon it as His grace sovereignly takes hold of Noah and his family that found favor. God provided an ark so that as the judgments fell Noah and his family were secured in the ark and God Himself shut the door as He sealed them in it. Then when He purified with water the heavens and the earth, He then opened the ark and deposited His people and told them to be fruitful and multiply.

Now Jesus is coming again and when He comes it will not be water but fire. He has a people, chosen by His sovereign grace through salvation and they are sealed in the ark of redemption, Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of God. When He has purified it and rolls it back out – a new heavens and a new earth – He will deposit us in it with that new body for the new heavens and the new earth, where we will be with Him and He with us forever. I'd like to end this study by reading this from Revelation 21. Can you imagine the glory of that? We actually can't because He just told us we couldn't in I Corinthians 2:9, yet here is what He wants us to know about it from Revelation 21.

We see in Revelation 20 His second coming and the judgement to come and we'll look closer at that in the coming studies. For now Revelation 21:1–7 says [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 (In Hebrew cosmology the sea represents evil—redemption is pictured as a water of life, a river.) 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 (that He built for us) 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."*

[5] *And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."* Also he said, *"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* [6] *And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will*

give from the spring of the water of life without payment. [7] The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Those who conquer are those in Christ who makes us more than conquerors in Him. This is Immanuel's land, the Father's house for you who are in Him. It is the place of your Sabbath rest. It's the place for your work for eternity. We will have work for work is not evil but you will have work to do without the curse of sin. There will be no more thorns and thistles. There will also be animals but in beautiful symphony and harmony – the wolf and the lamb. They all are together. There will be no more of this futility and violence. Now with Him, in the glories of this symphony, our rest in Him is complete, our work for Him is forever and the greatest privilege will be our gathering to praise His Name forevermore.

The angels will be there also and doing what they were made to do. They were made to serve, first God, then you and you will then rule and reign over them and for eternity they will enjoy hearing you sing Amazing Grace but they will never know what you know when you sing it. In fact, they will long to understand it and you will be able to sing it for all eternity. Come quickly Lord Jesus. I see now why John says this often in the book of Revelation. The suffering of this age for Christ are not worthy to be compared with the glory yet to be revealed. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Would You bless Your people as they contemplate, reflect and meditate? As we see where we are headed may it renew our commitment to be faithful to You and seek to be fruitful for You until we get there. Thank You O Jesus that You are preparing that place for us, preparing us for that place and we give you praise, glory and honor now and forevermore for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

WHAT'S NEXT?

Q. 38 What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A. At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgement, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.