

SERIES: Life After Death

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: Is There Life After Death? Pt. 2

Release Date: Thursday 03/05/20

*“Now, if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, and your faith also is vain.” (*NASB, 1 Cor 15:12-14)*

He goes on:

Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God because we testified against God that he raised Christ whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless. You're still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (Vs.15-19)

He goes on to say, if there is no *resurrection of the dead* then Jesus is still in the grave, and if Jesus is still in the grave, then we are liars. We are deceivers. We've told people stuff about God that just simply isn't true. We said that God's a God of grace and God's a God of mercy and God has provided us Salvation, but we've made it all up. We're misrepresenting God. We're deceivers, the worst kind of deceivers. He says, if Jesus is still in the grave, then *your faith is worthless. You're still in your sins*. It was nice to believe that Jesus somehow did this for you and you could have relief from your guilt and know that your sins are forgiven and have an opportunity to stand before God without the condemnation of your sin. But if Jesus is still in the grave, nice try. But it's not true. *You're still in your sins*, therefore you are condemned, and you stand condemned before God. Welcome back to your guilt. Not only that, *those who have fallen asleep in Jesus have actually perished*. It may have made you feel better when you stood at that grave side and believed there's got to be something more and I'll see my loved one again, but if Jesus is still in the grave, the reality of it is they have perished, gone forever.

No. When the Bible talks about *fallen asleep*, it's always in reference to believers, always in reference to those who have trusted Christ as Savior. And what falls asleep is not the soul, what falls asleep is the body. It's the imagery that for the Christian, the body goes in the grave - it's like a sleep state - but eventually will be resurrected, will be awakened with the return of Christ, so it's this imagery that asleep, but one day to be awakened versus the unbeliever who never really awakens from this state of death and doesn't experience the Resurrection power of Jesus. Finally he says, if all we have is this life and if religion for us, it was just some way to feel better about the stuff of this life, we are a sad, pitiful people.

Sigmund Freud and many others through the years have sought to make the case that religion is really just our attempt to find some way to deal with the stuff of life, to make us feel better, to

get through the hard times. What Paul is saying is if Jesus is still in the grave and this life is all there is, then we're just a pitiful bunch, a weak, pitiful, sad, deceived, sinful bunch.

Isn't it interesting that Paul lays this all out not only for the Corinthian believers but for all of his opponents to read. Basically, what he is saying is to his opponents, to his enemies. We know in the first century there were many, many, many who wanted nothing more than to stop the movement of Christianity and while they're in a back room trying to figure out how do we do that, Paul tells them: I'm going to tell you right now, this is the jugular. It's the Resurrection of Jesus. Show me the bones, and it all comes crashing down. This is roughly 17 years after the Resurrection, well, within the lifetime of anyone who witnessed the event, and Paul is putting it all on the line and saying, in case you didn't know it, the Christian jugular is the Resurrection - disprove that and we've got nothing - and he's putting it in writing.

Have you ever seen that commercial on TV with the guy who was selling a product that deals with identity theft and on the side of his van, he's got his social security number and he's standing on the street corner with a bullhorn and he's calling it out. And the statement he's trying to make is his product is so safe that he's putting his social security number on the side of the van, and saying to people who steal identities, give it your best shot because you can't do it. And you have to admit that's pretty impressive. That's a guy that believes in his product. That's pretty much what Paul's doing. Paul is putting in writing: If you want to stop Christianity, I'm going to tell you right now the jugular is the Resurrection of Jesus. And if you can prove that Jesus is still in the grave, I'll tell you right now we've got nothing. We'll close up shop and we'll go home.

Even though we know in the first century there were many, many, many opponents to Christianity, rather than Christianity folding, it flourished. Paul had seen the resurrected Jesus and did not hesitate to say, that is the basis upon which we stand.

It's also interesting when you go back and read the creed that the creed identifies witnesses to the Resurrection by name, identifies over 500 at one time, and then he says some have died, but most of them are still alive, clearly implying if you don't believe me, talk to them. And again, the evidence was overwhelming to these people.

Well, that's clearly what Paul believes, and identifies that then in verse 20:

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death by a man also came the resurrection of the dead for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.” (Vs. 20-22)

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have every reason to believe that there is a literal physical, bodily *resurrection from the dead* to those who believe. He conquered sin. Therefore He conquered the state of death. Therefore, He offers that to those who believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. When the text says He's *the first fruit*, they're taking an Old Testament, old covenant concept, in this case, identifying Jesus was the down payment. Jesus was the pledge. He was the promise of more like that to come. What is being said in that is absolute evidence from Scripture that we will not be a disembodied spirit that floats around the universe. We will not be reincarnated back into something else. We will not be assimilated into the energy of the universe, but rather we will one day at the coming of Jesus be literally, physically, bodily resurrected like Jesus.

Now, if we look at Jesus as the prototype, we see that Jesus in his resurrected state was the same but different. That clears it right up doesn't it? But He was. He was the same in the sense that He could talk with His disciples. He could sit down and eat with His disciples, He could walk with them, He could interact with them, and to some degree they recognized Him. He still had the scars of the nails in His hands and His side. But on the other hand, they struggled to recognize Him for some reason. On the other hand, He walked through walls, so He was the same but different. But it's as close as we get to understanding what we will be like someday in our resurrected state. But the fact is, the Bible is very clear on that idea.

We sing songs like *I'll Fly Away*. But it's very important that we understand that we don't leave our body behind and go on to some kind of a mysterious, soul-less existence for eternity. There is an intermediate time period that we're going to talk about that's very hard to define. If you were to die tomorrow, I have no question that you would immediately go into the presence of Jesus, but in a state, that's a little bit hard to define. It's kind of an intermediate state. Theologians struggle with what to call it. Randy Alcorn in his book on Heaven calls it an intermediate heaven. You're fine if you want to just call it Heaven, but there is this sense in which we go into that intermediate state for a period of time, until the return of Jesus and the Resurrection occurs, and we move from that state into our eternal state, which is a resurrected body that is literal, physical, probably more similar than different than what we understand today. We will absolutely know one another. We will absolutely enjoy one another. It will be Paradise on Earth.

There's also this thought that when we die, we kind of disappear and leave this old Earth behind. We fly away, but we need to understand, yes we do, but we come back, because at the end of the day what happens is the new Heaven and the new Earth come together as one, and God redeems all of creation back as he intended it. He restores Paradise and life is lived out on this Earth in a resurrected body, in a perfected state. And in terms of creation, I would suggest far more similar than different than what we see today, only perfected, clearly not floating around in some mystical Heaven somewhere.

The reality is also because that is true, the moment Jesus rose from the dead, He began building His eternal Kingdom and His Kingdom is being built here on Earth. On Earth, He is building a heavenly Kingdom and he is building this heavenly Kingdom on Earth with citizens of Heaven, which is every person who has trusted Jesus as Savior. Therefore, you are now a citizen of Heaven, living on Earth, bringing a new heavenly value system and a new heavenly way of life to Earth, and we're beginning to build the kingdom today that ultimately will be perfected in the new Heaven and the new Earth, and when we get to the end and the return of Christ. That's why Paul says at the end of this letter in Verse 58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."*

What he is saying is because of what we believe to be true, that there is a *resurrection of the dead*. There is a better day coming. There is everything that we're going to talk about over the next several weeks that reminds us that we need to be busy about building the eternal Kingdom of Heaven on Earth today. That's the assignment. As citizens of Heaven, we're bringing Heaven to Earth and it's a glimpse. It's a glimpse of what is to come as a witness of the promise of God.

Many people have the idea that their Salvation is just a ticket to Heaven and I can't wait to get off this Earth and go home. I understand that. But you have to be really careful with that. Our assignment is not to abandon this world, but as citizens of Heaven, to begin building a heavenly Kingdom, begin bringing God's value system to this Earth as a glimpse of what is to come, as a

glimpse of our hope of the future. That's why we're supposed to be busy *abounding in the work of the Lord*, not being distracted in the stuff of this world, but about the stuff that will last forever. And be busy about the Kingdom. And it doesn't matter what we do on a daily basis. Yes, one day we are going to fly away, but we're coming back. We're coming back to experience Creation that's been redeemed and perfected by the power of God.

Because this is all true, then our preaching is not vain. It's not empty and hollow. It is filled with the power of Jesus. It is the power of God unto Salvation. Our faith is not in vain. It's not wishful thinking. It's not faith in faith. It's rooted in the life changing, Resurrection power of Jesus. Therefore it is life changing. Our faith is not worthless. You're not still in your sins. We have every reason to believe that Jesus, God in the flesh died for your sins. He paid your penalty and it's not just wishful thinking to believe that you have been washed clean. Your guilt has been dealt with. You have been redeemed by the *blood of the Lamb* and you stand clean before God because Jesus died for your sins.

When you stand next to that graveside, when a loved one dies, you have every reason to believe that that person that's trusted Jesus as Savior, you will be together again in the future. That you will walk hand in hand and side by side and you will enjoy eternity together, knowing that person as you have known him on Earth. That is not the final goodbye. And rather than being of all people *most to be pitied*, we are a people to be envied, because in God's goodness and grace, He has made His message known to us. The only difference between us and those people out still walking in despair is the grace and mercy of God. We're not smarter. We're not more clever. We haven't figured something out that they can't. It's just God in His goodness and grace has made His message known to us and because we have received it, we have hope. We have the promise that no matter what life throws our way, there is a day coming more glorious than we can even begin to imagine today.

If tomorrow someone finds the bones of Jesus in the grave, we've got nothing, and then life becomes a lottery, and there's only a handful of people that live that draw a winning ticket. For everyone else, all we can say is, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, you get one shot at this and you drew a losing ticket. I'm sorry for your struggles. I'm sorry for your suffering. I'm sorry for your pain. I'm sorry it's not working out, but you drew a losing ticket and that's all I can say. I can't imagine a message with more despair. But because there are no bones in the grave, then no matter what you have experienced, no matter how much you're in pain, no matter how much your struggles, no matter how hard life has been, for some of you, life just hasn't been easy; you need to recognize that this life is not all there is and there is coming a day more glorious, more wonderful, more of everything you ever wanted life to be then you can even imagine today, and it's promised through the Resurrection of Jesus. Our belief in life after death is not just some wild opinion based on nothing. It's rooted in the historical, literal, physical Resurrection of Jesus, and on that basis, we have every reason for hope that there is a better day coming. That is the hope we have in the resurrected Jesus.

Cara: Bryan, your message is really encouraging today. How do we keep the truth of God's Resurrection power foremost in our minds?

Bryan: I think one of the critical pieces of that is we have to remember how the story ends. We know how the story ends and that really should change everything. So there's a little bit like watching a rerun of a sporting event, the Super Bowl or something, and you know who wins.

Bryan: So one time Patti and I and our girls, we had gotten into one of the summer Olympics and a particular distance runner and watched him all the way through and this was the gold medal race. And we're gathered that evening and he fell way behind and they're all getting anxious and yelling at the television. At least that's my version of the story. And I'm cool, calm, collected off in the corner. And I'm saying things like, you can tell by his stride, he's comfortable and he's right where he wants to be. And I was saying all kinds of things that I really don't know what I'm talking about. But then it's like here, he's going to make his move. And at the end of the race he comes back and he wins the gold medal and Patti looks at me and she says, how did you know that? I said, well, I heard on the news earlier today, it's one of those time delay things, but it's like I knew he won. And if you know that, it should change the way you view everything that happens along the way. So as Christians, we know how the story ends and Jesus wins and that's important to remember.

Cara: Would it be an accurate view then to say that we're part of that story? So we're the part of the story between Acts and the Revelation of Christ, so we're in that story? Is that, if that's accurate to say that, then it kind of makes you feel pretty special.

Bryan: So when life is hard and you're being persecuted, what do Christians have, well, it's the hope that we'll ultimately be saved and be with Jesus in the new Heaven and the new Earth. That's the promise of the Resurrection is Jesus wins and the best is yet to come.

Arnie: So the hope of the Gospel is not a promise that everything will work out and make sense in this life.

Bryan: Yeah. I think once we start thinking that we're setting ourselves up for great disappointment. I think people buy into what I refer to as the let's make a deal theology. And it's the idea that if I'm a good boy, I'm a good girl, then God owes me. And so that's the deal. And so then when tragedy strikes, you know, most Christians would say, I don't believe that. I don't buy into the let's make a deal theology. But they do. And you find out they do when tragedy strikes and people say, well, that's not fair. Why did this happen? You know, they feel like they kept their end of the bargain and God didn't keep His end of the deal. And the problem is God never made that deal. The reality is sometimes life doesn't make sense. Sometimes it's really painful. You know, that's a big part of my own personal story. After watching my dad suffering for 20 plus years, it was 24 hours a day, seven days a week for over 20 years. So in my mid-twenties, I'm processing: If God is so good and He's kind, He's compassionate, He is loving, how do you explain at that point, the first 20 years of my life? And you don't get to a point where everything makes sense. You either believe God tells the truth and accept the fact there's a lot of things I don't understand. Or you become angry and bitter and walk away. But at the end of the story, you're not going to understand it. It's not going to get explained. It's not going to make sense. You just have to believe that God tells the truth.