

SERIES: Life After Death - Week 3

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: Why Heaven Matters Today Pt. 1

Release Date: Monday, 3/16/20

If there is no God, if there is no life after death, then life is a lottery and you get one shot, you get one ticket. There are no do overs and the best we can say to people that struggle, to people that suffer, to people whose lives are less than what they always thought they would be, is sorry, you drew a losing ticket. That's why there is so much despair in our world.

But if Jesus literally, physically, bodily rose from the dead that first Easter morning, everything changes. Everything changes: this is the last week of our series on Heaven. We started reminding ourselves of the historical facts of the literal, physical, bodily Resurrection of Jesus from the grave, as the basis by which we believe we too not only will experience life after death, but that we will experience a literal, physical, bodily Resurrection. And that is the foundation for our theology about Heaven. We went on and talked about what we referred to as this intermediate stage, this intermediate Heaven, that if I was to die today, that's where I would go. It's an intermediate stage because it's awaiting the New Heaven and the New Earth; it's awaiting the Resurrection. It's kind of this intermediate stage right now waiting for the ultimate victory.

Now when we talk about the New Heaven and the New Earth, one question is, will we worship Jesus? I remember when I was growing up, I heard that Heaven was going to be that we would worship forever. And I remember as a child thinking that that sounded better than the other place, but not by much, because it sounded like we were going to be stuck in a worship service forever. [Laughter] And you know, when you're 10 years old, that isn't the best news you could hear. [Laughter]

Will we worship Jesus? Absolutely. Yes, Jesus will be front and center as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but when we talk about being with Jesus and worshiping Him forever, it's important that we don't translate that into an eternal worship service. That's the same problem that we have now. We tend to isolate worship down to one hour a week instead of understanding worship as a way of life. Everything I do every day ought to be an act of worship, and that's what we're talking about. Will there be times when the people of God gather together millions strong and sing worship in the presence of Jesus? Absolutely, Yes, and those will probably be the highlight moments, but certainly it won't be limited to that.

One scholar says, according to Genesis One and Two, God made us for relationships, work, and worship. That's a good way to think about Heaven, but think of it all as worship. We will experience relationships with one another, with meeting new people. That will be part of the value system of Heaven and that is a form of worship. We will also work in the Kingdom, there will be governments, there will be work, there will be meaningful things to do, and that will be an expression of worship, as well as what we do in the presence of Jesus.

It was interesting to me in reading through quite a number of books about Heaven, every single book I read addressed the question, will Heaven be boring? And I thought, what have we done to

this topic that that is such a pressing question, that somehow, we've made it seem like something that will be painfully boring. I can assure you that will not be the case, but we need to think of worship in the Biblical sense, of going beyond just a service to the many things that we will do in the presence of Jesus.

Now there's probably some people who would say, you know, why do we need to speculate and try and figure all this stuff out? You know, when I die, I'll get there. We'll figure it out then. Well, there's a problem with that and the problem is this: if your theology of Heaven is bad, it dramatically affects how you live your life on this Earth today. If we are thinking that Heaven is this experience that is somewhere out there in some mystical place, and we are a disembodied spirit, just kind of hanging around in the presence of God, that is a very gnostic view. It's not a Biblical view, it's a gnostic view, and what that creates within us is exactly what the gnostics believed, and that is that this world is bad and I can't wait to get out of here. Therefore, it creates this escapism mentality. Rather than understanding the truth of Heaven, what I'm left with is Salvation is a Ticket to Heaven, and I can't wait to get out of here and leave this troubled Earth behind, and if I believe that, then it dramatically affects the way I view this world, the people in this world; it affects the way I live my life every single day.

But if I understand that in reality, God is redeeming all creation back to Himself and that He is going to make a New Heaven and a New Earth. And rather than this Earth being annihilated, it's going to be redeemed, and rather than an emphasis on, *I'm out of here*, there's an emphasis on Jesus coming back and establishing His eternal Kingdom, it changes the way I think.

Now, I would acknowledge to you there are occasional comments in the New Testament that have to do with something like *absent from the body, present with the Lord*. And the context of those comments are usually someone like Paul who's facing imminent death. And yes, it will be a wonderful thing to be in the presence of Jesus. But you have to balance that with the overwhelming focus of the New Testament on the return of Jesus. If I die today, I understand I will be absent from the body, present with Jesus and that will be a wonderful thing. But I also realize that my brothers and sisters will still be struggling, people will still be dying. The suffering will continue.

So, the overwhelming emphasis of the New Testament is not on just me getting out of here. It's on Jesus coming back and finally redeeming all Creation, where those wonderful words in Revelation 21 are spoken, ***It is done***. That's the longing of the New Testament. Not *I'm outta here*, but **He's coming back and the mission is finished and accomplished**.

I invite you to turn with me to Romans Chapter Eight. I want to take us back to a few passages that we've already looked at. Just to pick up a couple of thoughts as we bring this to an application. We looked at Romans Chapter Eight. We looked at Verse 11, that reminds us that even though the Spirit of God has given us life, we have been changed. We have been redeemed. We're still waiting in hope that this mortal body will one day be changed into an immortal body. There's still this awaiting of the final return of Jesus, the final Resurrection, the New Heaven and the New Earth. We went down then to verse 18 and following, and reminded ourselves that right now, all Creation is eagerly anticipating the redemption of Jesus Christ. That when God created in Genesis Chapter One and Two, God said, *This is good*. God has never changed his mind about that. The devil has not so messed up everything, that God's going to annihilate it and start over.

Rather, God is going to redeem all Creation back to Himself. God is ultimately going to win: mission accomplished. And so there is this reminder that we have been set free in the power of Jesus, and we are in essence a symbol, or a model, of ultimate redemption, and all Creation looks at us and longs for the freedom that we have experienced in Christ.

Pick it up in verse 21:

that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (NASB, Rom. 8:21-25)

Clearly Paul is saying that the Creation is personified, and it looks at the freedom that we have experienced, and the Spirit longs for that day when Creation will also be set free from the curse or the bondage of sin, but goes on to remind us that while we have experienced the life of the Spirit, our body still groans, because the mission has not been completed. We're still living out this new heavenly life in an earthly body. Therefore, our body groans and Creation groans. It even goes on to say, the Spirit groans, as we long for that day when Jesus finally brings in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Therefore, we have in hope, been saved. Past tense, we have been saved, but our Salvation is in hope, meaning that we have experienced the life of the Spirit today, but there is still a hope that there is more to come: the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Redemption of all Creation, the changing of our body from that which is corruptible to that which is incorruptible.

We talked about from Philippians Chapter Three, the reality that the moment we trust Christ as Savior, we are citizens of Heaven, but living out our citizenship on Earth. The church is a colony of citizens of Heaven living out our heavenly citizenship on Earth. Therefore, in a very real sense, we as the church have brought the future into the present to give this world a glimpse of what is to come. That's what the text is saying. All Creation looks at what the Spirit has done in us, and longs for that same freedom, but we ourselves groan with the reality that mission is not accomplished yet, that we are still awaiting the final Resurrection, the change from this mortal body to an immortal body. But in these days we are to live out a picture, a glimpse of what is to come, through our lives today.

With that in mind, go to First Corinthians Chapter 15. It's within this chapter that Paul makes his argument for the historical Resurrection of Jesus and then promises that Jesus is the *first fruit*. He's the pledge. He's the promise of what is to come. He is the promise that we too will be literally, physically bodily raised from the dead.

I want to pick it up in verse 50:

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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. (1Cor.15:50-58)

This lines up very closely with Romans Chapter Eight. There is the promise that one day this perishable will put on imperishable. This mortal will put on immortality. I'm looking forward to the day when my body no longer groans, but I have been resurrected and changed for the eternal Heaven and Earth.

After this magnificent chapter, that for a New Testament chapter is very long and very full, the concluding statement is, *Therefore, go sit on a hill and wait* –That's not what it says. If we buy into this escapism, that's what we do. *I'm just waiting to get outta here*. But if we understand what he has said, if we understand the New Heaven and the New Earth, if we understand what God is doing, and if we understand that we as citizens of Heaven are living out that Spirit-changed life on Earth, *we* are actually a glimpse of what is to come. We are a glimpse of the *New Creation*. Therefore we give the world just a peek, just some sort of a symbol of what is to come, as part of our witness. Therefore, rather than sitting on a hill and waiting to get out of here, we roll up our sleeves and we get to work. Our assignment is to bring God's eternal, Heavenly Kingdom to Earth today, through the power of the resurrected Jesus.

Therefore, we begin now bringing the New Heaven to Earth through us as His *new creation*. So his conclusion at the end of this magnificent chapter is, ***Therefore be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord***. We have work to do. That's a completely different mindset than *I'm outta here*.

Understand then what he is saying. We go all the way back to Genesis One and Two, and God brought Heaven to Earth in His Creation and God said, *This is good*. Sin once again divided Heaven and Earth. It was brought back together in a magnificent way in the person of Jesus, God in the Flesh, Heaven together with Earth again. Jesus died for the sins of the world, which is what separated Heaven from Earth, was buried and rose again. And on that first Easter morning, there in the Garden, Jesus was the beginning of the New Creation. Jesus had made it possible for Heaven and Earth to come together again. And every person that trusts Jesus as Savior becomes a citizen of Heaven. Our sins are forgiven and once again, Heaven and Earth comes together, so we as citizens of Heaven now begin to live out that life on Earth. Therefore, we are busy about the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, bringing the future into the present, as a promise or a pledge, or a glimpse of the reality of what is to come.

Cara: Bryan, a lot of people view Salvation as something that ensures our future, but that hope for the future has a huge impact on our lives right now.

Bryan: Yeah, it sure does. Somehow, we have to move away from this theology of Salvation being a Ticket to Heaven and realize it's just so much more. I mean, the language of the New Testament is new creation in Christ. It's born again. It's metamorphosed. You know, we were a caterpillar; now we're a butterfly, and there's just so much to it. So when you think about the language of the New Testament, when it talks about Salvation, it's all three tenses, past tense, present tense, future tense. We tend to always talk about "saved": "I was saved 10 years ago." "I was saved when I was 20 years old." But the New Testament talks mostly about future tense. You know, if you're struggling, if you're persecuted, if life is really hard, the hope of the Gospel is in the future tense. It's what's to come, and understanding that, gives you the courage to live out your calling, now.

Cara: I like your past message when you said that our mind goes to that place where we were losing, or what we've lost, but to the new perspective of looking at it in what we gain. So I love this message, because the emphasis was on not just me getting out of here. It's on Jesus coming back and redeeming all Creation.

Bryan: Yeah.

Arnie: But you know to me it's so complicated. Can you give us an illustration of what it means to bring God's Heavenly Kingdom to Earth today?

Bryan: Yeah. So that's very abstract language, [Yes, it is.] and preacherly language. And you imagine people leaving church saying, "I don't even know what that means."

Arnie: I'd be one of those.

Bryan: So trying to gain some understanding, I tend to think of what are the values in the New Heaven and the New Earth that will define that existence, and what would it mean to get a glimpse of that now? So that kind of kindness, that kind of compassion, that kind of generosity, that kind of beauty, that kind of love for one another. So you're creating these pockets of flourishing, these glimpses of the world to come. So you can kind of think it through, whether it's how you run your business, whether it's life in school, in a neighborhood, in a family, in your church. It's just trying to figure out, what would be inappropriate there? So then, isn't it inappropriate here, and what would it look like to do something about it, and at least create those glimpses of the world to come? It ends up actually being very practical.

Cara: So even the smallest things that we might do for Jesus can be a preview of Heaven for someone?

Bryan: Yeah. You know, I've become convinced over the years that life is ultimately defined in the moments. It's not the huge vacations. It's not all the big stuff. I mean, think about it. You can think back, I can think back, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago, 50 years ago, of moments, of conversations, of exchanges that took 60 seconds, and 50 years later, I can still remember them. They're meaningful. So I think those moments happen all the time, if we just look for them. And we get a sense of that's what gives life meaning.

Cara: I always like to think, *for such a time as this*. I'm here; I might not be enjoying it to the fullest, but actually, when I look at the perspective that I'm here for a purpose, you get a lot more out of it, to have that positive perspective of it.

Bryan: Yeah. And thinking through, why does this matter? [Right] You know, we live in a house, and there's been years and years of memories and moments made in that house. Somebody had to build it, somebody had to wire it, you know, all these construction people that made it possible for us to create memories that will matter forever. You know, every job matters if we really think about it.