

**The Resurrection of the Dead
“What Happens When You Die?”
Hebrews 6:1 - 2; Luke 23:39 - 43**

So for the last few weeks we've been making our way through Hebrews 6 verse 1 and 2 which talk about the basic teachings about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

We've looked at faith - faith that believes God for things and faith that endures hard times. We also saw that faith is not simply cognitive assent, it's also acting; faith is doing.

We talked about the laying on of hands which has to with affirmation and commissioning, with impartation and with healing.

Then last week we talked about what?

Washings.

Whatever muck or dirt or dung we have a God who can make us clean through what Jesus has done by the Holy Spirit.

Last week we looked at “repentance from dead works”.

Dead work” is act or deed or ritual that has the appearance of being good and but are a substitute to real relationship with God.

This morning we find ourselves looking at the “resurrection of the dead”.

So to explore this I want to ask the question, “What happens when you die?”

One view of course is that you are truly dead.

Of course, that's never been the Christian view.

So what do you think?

“What happens when you die?”



Where are you up to?
Tell the person next to you.

Now as part of my preparation, I thought I'd do some research and see what New Zealanders thought about life after death.

However, what I found is we don't do that kind of analysis.
We do all kinds of other surveys.

So for example, life expectancy.

For men what's the current life expectancy in New Zealand - does anyone know what it is?
It's 80 years.
For women it's? 83 years and 6 months.

If you're older than that... well done. You are above average.
If you're approaching those numbers... you may want to listen to what I have to say this morning😊.

So we don't know what Kiwi's think about what happens when you die.

We don't have that data so we have to go across the ditch to our neighbours in Australia who actually *do* ask these kinds of questions

This is what they found:

- Respondents were asked whether they either believed in or were open to the existence of the soul. 69.7 per cent said "Yes".
- They were also asked about whether they believed in a "god". What do you reckon? 57.9 percent said "Yes"
- So what percentage believed in life after death? 59.6 per cent.

So what does life after death looks like?

There are a number of views out there.

So for example there is a view that when you die you go into a kind sleep.

This was a view that the Reformer Martin Luther held to.
Luther conceived the state of the dead as a deep, dreamless sleep, removed from time and space, without consciousness and without feeling.

Luther said, after death “the soul after death enters its chamber and peace, and sleeping does not feel its sleep.”

It's called “soul-sleep”.

Now it's possible but I don't think the evidence bears it out.

So that's one view.

And every now and then people will bring up the idea of *purgatory*.

When it comes to purgatory there are two views.

The classic view is that Christians when they die are not perfected with all sorts of character flaws and imperfections.

So what happens is Christians when they die go to purgatory, a state of further purging, punishment and disciplined so they can become perfected and ready for heaven.

(Here's someone's idea here):



A more modern view is aimed more at non-Christians.

What it says is that non-Christians are given another chance after death to come to their senses, admit they were wrong, and then be welcomed with open arms into heaven.

After they die they go on a journey where there is a lot of soul-searching until they finally call on Jesus as King and Forgiver.

It's a very modern view.

Let me be clear at this point: I do not believe and I do believe Scripture teaches purgatory in either form.

If there is a purging, a cleansing, where does that happen?

It's here.

Our time here on earth is a time of making important decisions.

It is a time of refinement through life's twists and turns, bumps and ups and downs.

It's here and now.

Many of you know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada.

Joni was an athletic, active young women and one day when she went swimming at a local bay. She dived in as she had done many times before but this time she misjudged the shallowness of water and immediately knew something was wrong - she broke her neck.

Doctors told her she would be a quadriplegic for the rest of her life; Joni was only 17.

And of course she sank into a deep depression and wondered, "Why me?"

To cut the story short, today Joni is 71 and still a quadriplegic.

It has been tough.

She has to be in the constant care of others.

She married but even her wedding day was an ordeal.

Her carers did their best to shift her paralysed body into her wedding dress. She was wheeled the isle and she did so she ran over her dress leaving a black grease stain.

Recently Joni was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Joni though would say though that God has been gracious.

She has founded a number of ministries and is a brilliant speaker, writer and artist. (Has anyone ever heard her in person?)

And she said this:

"God uses suffering to purge sin from our lives, strengthen our commitment to Him, force us to depend on grace, bind us together with other believers, produce discernment, foster sensitivity, discipline our minds, spend our time wisely, stretch our hope, cause us to know Christ better, make us long for truth, lead us to repentance of sin, teach us to give thanks in time of sorrow, increase faith, and strengthen character."¹

In other words, it's in this life where we are being shaped and formed as God desires.

So the Christian word for this is... sanctification.

¹ <https://www.epm.org/blog/2021/Jul/28/our-trials-driving-us>

So having said all that, here's where I'm up to.
(You may disagree with me - you're most welcome to be wrong😊).

We know that Jesus' died on the cross for our sins, for our rebellion, our wrong doing, our disloyalty.

It's this that cut us off from God - who is the source of life - and in turn caused evil and chaos and death to come into creation.

And he was buried.

He not only bore our wrong doing so that we could be forgiven and washed clean, he rose from the dead three days later.

In doing so his confronted and defeated our two key enemies.

Our human nature - the sin sickness, the virus that infects us all.

I mean, I've said it before, to be infected and affected by sin does not mean we can't do good. It means that we just can't help being bad.

In 8 out of 10 areas we're doing great... but then in the 9th and 10th area we're a mess.

The other area is death.

And Jesus has said to those who have put their trust in him, the loyalty, their allegiance as King, they too will share in his risen life.

They will find their way through and out of death.

I do think that Scripture teaches that we do have what we refer to as a "soul" - that immaterial part of you that is still conscious and contains your personality and character.

I think Scripture bears this out.

Paul says in Philippians chapter 1:21 - 24:

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me.

Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far..."

He also writes in 2 Corinthians 5:6 - 9:

"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."

He is talking about being away from his body and being with the Lord.
He's is talking about his "soul".

The next question is "**Where?**"

What would you say?

Well, we have one insight from our reading in Luke.

Jesus in his crucifixion speaks to this criminal:

"Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in *paradise*."

Now, does Jesus always tell the truth?

Yes.

In other words, Jesus wasn't simply thinking to himself, "Oh. This is such an awful experience and so I'll make something up console him just to help him through to the end."

No.

Jesus was giving this dying man crucial information he (and we) needed to know.

And when he spoke to the criminal on the cross, did he speak in language that the he could understand?

Yes.

"Paradise" has meaning, a meaning that he would have understood.

The original meaning of paradise had the idea of an enclosed beautiful garden with a royal palace at its centre.

In the hot climates such a place was a place of sanctuary and rest.

By the time of Jesus paradise had gained symbolised the abode of the righteous after death.

So after you die your soul - that immaterial part of you that is still conscious and contains your personality and character - will go to be with Jesus in paradise.

Paradise is a place where you will be fully conscious .

It will be a place and a time of rest and refreshment, being held in the love of Christ is in the presence of God.

If you a conscious and the presence of God, then there will be others who you know.

It will be amazing!

However, paradise is not your final destination nor is it your final state.

It is intermediate life.
Ultimate life is to come.

Hebrews 6 talks about the “*resurrection*” of the dead.
What will that look like?
You’ll have come back another Sunday.

Now, some of you may also be thinking, “What about those who haven’t trusted in Jesus?”

There is a judgement.

There are some sincere Christians who do say, “I don’t believe in a God who would judge anyone”.

The New Testament speaks a lot about the final judgement.

I mean it says it here in Hebrews 6.

We will have to talk about that one too.

So to finish; if you have trusted in Jesus, you’re future is glorious; it’s going to be amazing.

If you have people who have died in Christ - you’re loved ones - family, friends - are safe in God’s keeping.
And there will be a day of reunion.

The second takeaway is this: there are people in our world today who are terrified at the prospect of their death.

There are!

The last year and a half has borne this out.

People in the West are faced with their mortality like never before.

We though, are bearers of the good news of Jesus that gives hope and assurance.
May we have those conversations in the coming days and weeks.