



The Resurrection of the Dead

So, Christ one day will physically return, and as we've already made mention of when we talked about hope in the intermediate state, He will raise us up with Him. This is a hope we see all throughout Scripture, from Old Testament to New Testament. Job said in Job 19:25-27, *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"* Isaiah prophesied in a similar vein in Isaiah 26:19: *"Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead."*

John 11:25-26 says, *"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"* Then, go down to Romans 8:23-25, maybe the most clear picture of this, where Paul writes: *"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*

Piper comments on this passage, saying, "Christianity is not a platonic religion that regards material things as mere shadows of reality, which will be sloughed off as soon as possible. Not the mere immortality of the soul, but rather the resurrection of the body and renewal of all creation is the hope of the Christian faith." Spurgeon says even more clearly:

[The resurrection of the body] is the Christian's brightest hope. Many believers make a mistake when they long to die and long for Heaven. Those things may be desirable, but they are not the ultimate for the saints. The saints in Heaven are perfectly free from sin and, so far as they are capable of it, are perfectly happy. But a disembodied spirit never can be perfect until it is reunited to its body. God made man not pure spirit but body and spirit, and the spirit alone will never be content until it sees its physical frame raised to its own condition of holiness and glory. Think not that our longings here below are not shared in by the saints in Heaven. They do not groan so far as any pain can be, but they long with greater intensity than you and I for the "adoption ... the redemption of our bodies." People have said there is no faith in Heaven, and no hope. They know not what they say—in Heaven faith and hope have their fullest swing and their brightest sphere, for glorified saints believe in God's promise and hope for the resurrection of the body.

So, this is what we are talking about in the intermediate state. That we are longing for the resurrection of our body, even while we are with the Lord in heaven.

Jesus rose from the dead.

So, what is this resurrection of the dead that is our hope? Well, first and foremost, we need to realize that our hope of resurrection is grounded in the fundamental reality that Jesus rose from the dead. A fundamental truth of the gospel expressed here in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Also, Acts 23:6 says, "Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.'"

And really the truth upon which the gospel stands or falls is if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we are wasting our time here tonight, all of Christianity is a lie, and all Christians are fools. The Bible itself says that, later in 1 Corinthians 15, Christians are to be pitied among all men if Jesus did not rise from the grave, because they have based their lives on a lie. But if Jesus did rise from the grave, then this truth has mammoth ramifications for every single person in all of history.

So, did He rise from the dead? Most people think the burden of proof here is on Christians. Christians must give evidence that Jesus rose from the grave, but I don't think that's completely the case. Of course, there's a burden of proof on those who believe in Christ, but there's also a burden of proof here on those who don't believe in Christ, because there's no question, even among the most secular of scholars, that around two thousand years ago, an entirely new religious community and movement was formed almost overnight, and immediately, hundreds of people started claiming that Jesus rose from the grave, even when it meant they would die for claiming that. A fast-growing movement of people that now makes up what some estimate is as large as a third of the world survives as a result. So, how do you explain that? If you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, then there's a burden of proof here to provide some other plausible account for how the church started.

Possible Explanations for Jesus' Resurrection ...

So, with the burden of proof on both sides, let's look at the alternative explanations and ask the question, "Which is most plausible?" Here are the possible explanations for Jesus' resurrection that have been proposed throughout history. First, some have proposed that Jesus didn't die on the cross. Now, this comes in different forms. Muslims, for example, say that Jesus didn't even go to the cross; somebody who looked like Jesus went to the cross instead. This is what Mohammed teaches in the Koran. Never mind the fact that Mohammed said this six centuries later, when those much closer to the historical situation, both Christian and non-Christian alike, reported that it was indeed Jesus who died on the cross.

But then, there are others who have said, "Yes, it was Jesus who went to the cross, but He didn't really die there. He was just hurt really, really, really, really bad." He fainted, He went unconscious, and they thought He was dead, but He wasn't, and because of the time

constraints with the Passover feast, they took Him down before He died, buried Him quickly, and later He regained consciousness and escaped from the tomb.

Now, this explanation assumes that Jesus went through six trials, no sleep, a brutal scourging, thorns thrust into His head, nails thrust into His hands and feet, and after hours on a cross had a spear thrust into His side. Then, He was wrapped in grave clothes and put in a tomb with a stone rolled over the entrance that was guarded by Roman soldiers. Are we to believe that in this situation, Jesus regained consciousness, hopped out of the tomb, nudged the stone out of the way, hopped past the guards standing nearby, and coolly went about His way? I'm going to say, "Not too plausible on this one."

The next explanation: Jesus' tomb was not empty. This is most often described as the "Wrong Tomb Theory." The theory goes that when the women went to the tomb that first Easter morning, in their grief and shock over Jesus' death, they went to the wrong one and mistakenly thought He had risen, and everybody else who started to believe did so because they were going to the wrong tomb, too. Since that time, everybody has been going to the wrong tomb. If they'd just checked next door!

Now, this was in a day when the last thing Roman authorities, or Jewish authorities, for that matter, wanted was for a group of people to claim that their leader had risen from the dead. That's why guards were posted at the tomb to guard it. Unfortunately, apparently they guarded the wrong tomb. The reality is, no one would have believed Jesus had risen from the grave if the tomb where He had been buried wasn't actually empty. All somebody needed to do was say, "He was buried over there," and this would have shut down the whole idea from the start. We stand on pretty firm historical ground that the tomb was empty.

Now, this doesn't in and of itself prove the resurrection of Jesus. What if the disciples stole the body of Jesus? This is a conspiracy theory, so to speak, that the disciples stole the body of Jesus and claimed that He was alive to others. There are two pretty strong reasons why this is unlikely. First, this would mean that these timid, scared Galilean disciples outmaneuvered a guard of highly disciplined and skilled Roman soldiers in order to do that which all the Jewish and Roman authorities were making sure would not happen. Second, this was preposterous. There were many would-be Messiahs, so to speak, in those days who were executed, and in no case do we find any of their followers claiming that their leader had risen from the dead.

The reason was because the entire religious system was set up against the idea that someone could or would even want to rise from the dead. In Greco-Roman thought, the goal in life was to be free, liberated from the body, and the last thing you would want to do in their worldview was to come back into the body. In Jewish thought, the idea of individual resurrection back into a world full of sickness, decay, and death was inconceivable. This was not even an option in Jewish thought to claim, unless of course, it was true.

Now, you look at these last two, in particular the empty tomb or the stolen body, both of them are undercut by the reality that people claimed to see Jesus. If you have an empty tomb but no one has seen Jesus, then you just have something strange going on, but not a resurrection. If you have disciples who stole a body and claimed that Jesus was alive, but nobody could see Him alive, then you've just got some disciples who are fabricating a story. But if people actually saw Jesus after He had died on a cross, you've got a real issue.

That leads us to the fourth possible explanation that has been proposed in history: The disciples were delusional when they claimed to see Jesus. After all, people in that day didn't

have the scientific knowledge we have today, and they were prone to believe more in the supernatural. So, in their pain and grief over Jesus' death, they still believed that Jesus was somehow guiding them and leading them. They even had visions in their minds of Jesus speaking to them. Maybe they really believed He was still alive, or maybe they knew He wasn't, but they believed He was spiritually alive, and over the years that just developed into a myth that Jesus rose from the grave physically. Many have even said the disciples were hallucinating.

Again, this thought was unthinkable in their worldview. According to this theory, we're to believe that this shift in worldview just sprang up overnight. No process, no development, no debate or discussion, and all of the sudden thousands upon thousands of people are believing that Jesus rose from the grave. Hundreds, not just twelve disciples, but hundreds of people are saying that they had seen Him. This is not just one person saying they saw an image in the clouds that kind of looked like Jesus. This is hundreds of people whom He appeared to. He ate with people. He drank with people. He talked with people. Hallucinations don't eat and drink! This was not just spiritual imagination; it was physical manifestation. Okay, maybe a couple of couple of people could have been deluded into thinking they had seen Jesus, but Paul writes in the first century, just a few years after this happened, "Jesus appeared to over 500 people, some of whom are still alive." In other words, go ask them. You can verify this!

What if I told you that in preparation for the Masters golf tournament Tiger Woods gave me a call? He wanted some tips. He wanted me to play a practice round with him to help him out a little. So, I did. It was a busy week, but I thought, "Hey, for Tiger, why not? We're buds." So, we did. I showed him how to drive the ball a little further. We were even on one par 3, and I hit a hole in one. He was impressed; even asked if I could somehow be a substitute for him in the tournament.

Now, if that's the case, you could easily go to Tiger Woods and say, "Do you even have any clue who David Platt is or how terrible a golfer he is?" He would probably say, "I have no clue who David Platt is, and I'm pretty sure he's a terrible golfer." You could verify that, which is the picture here. Hundreds of people who were claiming they had physically seen Jesus, and do you know what? They were telling people about it, and they were losing their lives for it. Pascal said, "I believe the witnesses that get their throats cut." This was not in their best interest. N.T. Wright says, "The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus. Nobody was expecting this kind of thing. No kind of conversion experience would have invented it. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and enter into a fantasy world of our own."

This leave us with one other possible explanation: Jesus died on the cross and actually rose from the grave. You say, "Well, that doesn't mean a real physical resurrection of Christ caused this radical shift in history." Then, what did? The burden of proof is on you. I can point you to truths that are strongly evidenced. I'm not just talking the Bible; I'm talking evidence that is granted by virtually all historical scholars, even religiously skeptical ones. Jesus died by crucifixion. His followers believed that He rose from the grave and appeared to them. Their lives were radically changed as a result, to the point where even the most hardened advocates against Christianity...i.e, Paul, James...when they saw the resurrected Jesus, they became the strongest advocates for Christianity. Gary Habermas, probably the most renowned scholar on the resurrection of Jesus, said,

In general, the more thoroughly one option fails, the more likely the others become. And the more strongly an option is established, the more the others diminish. In particular, when the early and eyewitness experience of the

disciples, James, and Paul are considered, along with their corresponding transformations and their central message, the historical resurrection [of Jesus becomes] the only plausible explanation for the facts.

Startling Implications of Jesus' Resurrection ...

We're not talking resuscitation here. Not reincarnation. We're talking resurrection. Dead for three days, came back to life, and if this is true, if Jesus did indeed die on the cross and actually rise from the grave, then the implications are nothing short of startling. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we don't have to worry about anything He said, because it was a lie. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then we have to accept all He said. This is the way the Bible talks about Jesus' resurrection.

If Jesus rose from the dead, then it is clear: He is Lord over life and death. He has absolute authority over life and death. Listen to Jesus' words in John 10:18: *"No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."* Who determines when they live? Who in here made a decision one day, "I think I'd like to live," and so you persuaded your parents to bring you into the world? Who in here, when you are dead, when your heart flatlines, has the power to say, "I'm coming back to life." If Jesus rose from the dead, then He clearly has absolute authority over life and death.

Second, if Jesus rose from the dead, He is Lord over sin and Satan. As we've seen, death is the consequence of sin, and so Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, after he has said, "Go talk to the people who saw Him alive," after he has shown the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, *"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."* Jesus has absolute authority over sin and Satan.

If Jesus rose from the dead, He is Lord over life and death, sin and Satan, and He is Lord over you and me. He has absolute authority over your life and my life. This is the foundational confession of Christianity. Romans 10:9-10, *"...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."*

The invitation is clear for every one of us: Believe in the resurrection of Christ. *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised from the dead..."* This is where the message of Christianity is radically different than every other religion. This is not a list of things to do, boxes to check off, rituals to follow. This is truth to be believed.

So, believe in the resurrection of Christ and surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Follow this...this is so key...follow with me. There are scores of people around the world in churches and small groups who believe in the resurrection of Jesus, yet, are not saved. The reason I say that with full confidence tonight is because even the devil himself believes in the resurrection of Jesus, and he is not saved. If the devil himself were here tonight, and I were to ask him, "Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?", he would say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?", he would say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Do you believe He died on the cross and rose again?", he would say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Do you believe He is the only way to be saved?", he would say, "Yes." Even if I were to ask him, "Will you commit to live a moral life and come to church and get

involved in leadership?", he would say, "Yes.", because you can believe and do every single one of those things and not be saved.

But do you know what the key question is, the question that would change everything in that conversation? It is if I were to look at the devil and say, "Do you repent of your sin and surrender your life to Jesus as Lord?" He would say, "Absolutely not." We confess Him as Lord. This is a heart condition in Romans 10:9 that says, "Yes, yes, I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sin and rose from the grave as my Savior, and my life belongs to Him as Lord." Our eternity is dependent on the answer to this question. We will one day stand before Him, John 5 says, and He will be our Judge.

Now, this is where I want to begin to make the connection to the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Christians. So, follow this here in John 5:21-29. At the end of this passage, Jesus says,

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

When the resurrected Christ returns, Christians will experience physical resurrection with Him.

So, truth number one is Jesus rose from the dead, and we've already seen that He's coming back, so then, follow this: When the resurrected Christ returns, Christians will experience physical resurrection with Him. Paul makes this connection in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23: "*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*" So, Christ was raised from the dead, and His resurrection was the firstfruits, the foretaste, of resurrection from the dead to come for all who belong to Christ.

Now, I want to focus here specifically on the resurrection of Christians. Obviously, John 5 talked about those who have done evil being resurrected to judgment, and we'll get to that, but we're focusing at this point on the resurrection of Christians. I don't know if it's possible to sum it up any better than in the Valley of Vision, where a Puritan prays, "Thou wilt come to raise my body from the dust, and re-unite it to my soul, by a wonderful work of infinite power and love, greater than that which bounds the ocean's waters, ebbs and flows the tides, keeps the stars in their courses, and gives life to all creatures."

Most believers will die.

So, here's what Scripture teaches. First, most believers will die. I emphasize "most" there because this is a bit of a contradiction with what we said earlier, that death in this world is inevitable. It is inevitable until you factor in the return of Christ. The reality is, Jesus is going to come back one day, and some of His people will be alive on that day. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, *"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed."* So, most...almost all believers in history are going to die. Wow! Wouldn't it be awesome to be among those who are living when He returns? Lord Jesus, come!

All believers will be resurrected.

So, most believers will die, but all believers, regardless of whether or not they are dead or alive on that day, will be resurrected with Christ. All believers will receive a resurrected body. First Thessalonians 4:14-17 says,

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.

So, follow this: Those who are alive when Christ returns will be physically transformed in their bodies, while those who are dead when Christ returns will be physically reunited with their bodies, just like we've talked about. So, the intermediate state is intermediate for a reason: Physical, bodily resurrection is coming. Just as Jesus' body was raised from the dead, so our bodies will be raised from the dead.

Our resurrection bodies will be Christ-like.

The Bible talks about our resurrected bodies. Our resurrection bodies will be Christ-like. Philippians 3:20-21, *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."* First John 3:2 says, *"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."*

So, our resurrection bodies will be Christ-like, and they will be physical, just as Jesus' body was physical. He had hands and feet that you can touch. Luke 24:38-39 says, *"And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.'"* Also, John 20:27 says, *"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.'"*

This is so key, and it's why I put 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 right here. It says,

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and

the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

The Bible views the physical body apart from sin as holy, good, and valuable. The body is not a bad thing. The body is not anti-spiritual. Even when we talk about the flesh as our sinful nature, we need to realize that our flesh-and-bone bodies, going all the way back to Genesis 1-2 before sin entered the world, were created to be good. This is why, when the Bible talks about ultimate salvation, the end of the story is not our souls united to the presence of God, but our bodies risen to enjoy the pleasure of being with God.

There are implications for our lives here on earth that we see all over Scripture, particularly in passages like 1 Corinthians 6, where the Bible says clearly: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you. So, glorify God with your body." Oh, see how our understanding of eschatology, or the end times, affects our lives on the earth today. We know that our bodies are good, created by God for His glory, and our hope is a redeemed, restored, and resurrected body.

So, on this earth, we dare not ignore the care of our bodies, which is a dangerous temptation for us. There can be such a lack of discipline in our lives, and particularly in American culture, when it comes to eating and exercise and sleep, where we ignore the care of our bodies. It was a year and a half ago when I became particularly convicted about this through my precious wife because my eating and sleeping and exercise patterns were extremely unhealthy. No sleep and no exercise. This is sin to ignore the care of our bodies, to not glorify God with our bodies. Russell Moore put it best. He said, "Because we believe in the resurrection of the body, we know our bodies are not expendable vehicles for our souls, and they are certainly not playthings for our amusement." In view of the resurrection of our bodies in eternity, we dare not ignore the care of our bodies on earth.

At the same time, we must be careful not to go to the other end of the spectrum. We must not idolize the care of bodies, thinking that this earthly body is what I'm living for. Paul writes the letter of 1 Timothy with the church at Ephesus in mind, and most scholars believe that the Ephesians spent a great deal of time and money training athletes for a variety of festivals. It was a craze, so to speak. So, listen to what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:6-10:

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Did you follow that? Paul says, "Physical training is definitely not bad, but at the same time, it's not best." This is so key. Hear this: Physical training is valuable. Just like we've seen, we need to care for our bodies. We eat well, exercise well, but let that pale in comparison to the training we do in godliness, in prayer, in the Word, in fasting, in worship, in sharing the gospel. Train there. Train much more there. This body will last for a few years; the most healthy body is not even guaranteed to last today. But godliness will last forever and ever and ever.

So, there are implications here for our lives, not to ignore the care of our bodies, and not to idolize the care of our bodies, and I think there are also here implications for our death. People sometimes wonder, as they think about their death, whether they will be buried or cremated.

Now, I want to be careful here. I'm not saying that there's a biblical verse I can point to that commands burial. Nor am I saying that anyone whose body has not been buried, maybe it's been cremated, is somehow spiritually in the wrong, or if you cremated a loved one in the past, that you were in the wrong, and you should feel bad about that. The reality is, particularly as we talk about persecution tonight, many who have died for the gospel were not buried; they were burned at the stake, or their bodies were never found.

So, I'm not at all trying to be legalistic here, but when you consider the biblical teaching on resurrection, I think you would have to conclude that the picture of burial is biblical. In other words, the burial of the body points to the hope of the resurrection of the body. When we place someone's body in a tomb or in the ground, just as Jesus' body was buried, we are saying that we believe one day, that body is going to rise again, just as Jesus rose again. First Corinthians 15:3-4 says, *"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..."* The very picture of burial and resurrection points us to the gospel in Romans 6:4. It says, *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* All throughout the Old Testament is pointed to in places like Hebrews 11 where we see significance tied to the burial of someone. Hebrews 11:22 says, *"By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones."*

So, the point I want to make here is that the picture of burial is biblical, and at the same time, the picture of cremation undercuts resurrection. Now, again, even as I say that, I want to be careful. I'm not at all saying that if someone has been cremated, that they won't receive a resurrected body. Obviously, biblically, that is not true. How someone is buried or cremated is definitely not the determinant of their eternity; faith in Christ alone is that. What we're talking about here is the picture of burial that points to the gospel and resurrection that is not pictured in cremation, and I believe this is worth noting. Again, Russell Moore, I think, puts it best:

Since we believe in the resurrection of the body, we do not see a corpse as garbage. From the time of our earliest ancestors in the faith, we have buried our dead, committing them to the earth from which they came with the conviction that they will one day be summoned from it once more. The image of sleep is useful—not because the dead are unconscious but because they will one day be awakened. God deems as faith Joseph committing his bones to his brothers for future transport into the land of promise. In the same way the act of burial is a testimony of the entire community to the resurrection of the body. Cremation is a horrifying testimony of the burning up of the flesh

and bones, a testimony that is decidedly pagan in both origin and in practice. Of course, God can resurrect a cremated Christian (or a Christian torn to pieces by lions, etc.), but how we deal with the body of a Christian teaches us—and the watching world—what we really believe about the gospel. Cremation ought then to be shunned by those who hope in Christ.

I agree here, because...follow this...Christians look forward to the restoration of the body, not relief from the body. Our ultimate hope is not that we are going to be ultimately delivered from our bodies. No, our ultimate hope is ultimately that we are going to have restored, resurrected bodies in the presence of God.

So, we even need to be careful when we talk about people who we know are in Christ who die. Don't say, "Well, I'll never have the opportunity to hug my husband or wife again." Not true; you will! You will hug your husband or wife again, if they are in Christ, when you and he/she both have resurrected bodies. Don't say, "I'll never see my son or daughter who died again." You will see them in more glorious ways than you ever saw them before.

Our resurrection bodies will be physical, which makes us wonder then, "Well, what will they look like? What will our resurrection bodies be like?" The pivotal passage on that question is 1 Corinthians 15:42-57. You read through this passage, and you see so many truths just flowing from it. It says,

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 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. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 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. 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.

Our resurrection bodies will be spiritual (entirely Spirit-filled).

Based on 1 Corinthians 15:42-57, we can know that our resurrection bodies will be spiritual (entirely Spirit-filled). Paul says, "It is sown a natural body, but it is raised a spiritual body..." Which doesn't mean nonphysical, but is a reference to being encompassed, overtaken even, by the Holy Spirit. Our resurrection bodies will be entirely Spirit-filled.

Our resurrection bodies will be eternal.

Our resurrection bodies will be eternal. Paul says our resurrection bodies will be raised imperishable; it won't wear down or wear out over time. It will not be susceptible to corruption. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul says, *"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."* Our outer self here is wasting away, and every person who grows older knows this. This is evident as we age, but our resurrection bodies will be completely healthy and completely strong forever.

Joni Eareckson Tada, herself a quadriplegic, talks about the hope of a glorified, resurrection body this way:

I hope in some way I can take my wheelchair to heaven. With my new glorified body I will stand up on resurrected legs, and I will be next to the Lord Jesus. And I will feel those nail prints in his hands, and I will say, "Thank you, Jesus!" He will know I mean it, because he will recognize me from the inner sanctum of sharing in the fellowship of his sufferings. He will see that I was one who identified with him in the sharing of his sufferings, so my gratitude will not be hollow. And then I will say, "Lord Jesus, do you see that wheelchair over there? Well, you were right. When you put me in it, it was a lot of trouble. But the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. I do not think I would ever have known the glory of your grace were it not for the weakness of that wheelchair. So thank you, Lord Jesus, for that. Now, if you like, you can send that thing off to hell."

Our resurrection bodies will never need a wheelchair.

Our resurrection bodies will be beautiful.

They will be eternal, and our resurrection bodies will be beautiful. First Corinthians 15 says it will be raised in glory. Imagine the sinless beauty of the inner person overflowing into the perfect beauty of the outer person. We won't have to try to look beautiful; we will be beautiful. I'm not talking, nor is Scripture talking here, about a vain beauty like so many seek in this world. We're talking about a real, deep beauty like the beauty that shone from Moses' face in Exodus 34:34-35. It says, *"Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him."*

Daniel writes in Daniel 12:3, *"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."* Jesus says in Matthew 13:43, *"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."*

Our resurrection bodies will be powerful.

Our resurrection bodies will be powerful. First Corinthians 15 says our bodies are sown in weakness, but will be raised in power. Now, again, this doesn't mean that we're all going to be this body-builder type, but that our resurrection bodies will be strong, free from disease and weakness that we are familiar with in this world in so many different ways. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus says, *"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit*

indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Justin Martyr drew the parallel here between Jesus' healing ministry on earth and the ultimate healing of our resurrected bodies. He said,

All things which the Savior did, He did in the first place in order that what was spoken concerning Him in the prophets might be fulfilled, that the blind should receive sight, and the deaf hear (Isaiah 35:5), and so on; but also to induce the belief that in the resurrection the flesh shall arise entire. For if on earth He healed the sicknesses of the flesh, and made the body whole, much more will He do this in the resurrection, so that the flesh shall rise perfect and entire.

Charles Spurgeon described this conversation with his body as it aged, saying,

I said of this poor body, "You have not yet been newly created. The venom of the old serpent still taints you. But you shall yet be delivered. You shall rise again if you die and are buried, or you shall be changed if the Lord should suddenly come today. You, poor body, which drags me down to the dust in pain and sorrow, even you shall rise and be remade in the redemption of the body. For the new creation has begun in me, with God's down payment of his Spirit." Oh beloved, can't you rejoice in this? I encourage you to do so. Rejoice in what God is doing in this new creation! Let your whole spirit be glad! Leap down, you waterfalls of joy! Overflow with gladness! Let loose the torrents of praise!

Then, go back to Joni Eareckson Tada, who writes,

I still can hardly believe it. I, with shriveled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright, and clothed in righteousness—powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope this gives someone spinal-cord injured like me? Or someone who is cerebral palsied, brain-injured, or who has multiple sclerosis? Imagine the hope this gives someone who is manic-depressive. No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts, and minds. Only in the Gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope.

Our resurrection bodies will be recognizable.

Now, some people wonder, "Will we recognize one another's resurrection bodies in heaven?" Scripture seems absolutely clear that our resurrection bodies will be recognizable. Based, first and foremost, on the fact that Jesus was recognizable in His resurrection body. He promised that He would Himself rise in John 2:19: "*Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'*" Then, the promise in Romans 8:11 is that the Spirit of God will raise your body...yours...to life. It says, "*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*"

1 Corinthians 15:37-38 says, "*And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.*" Matthew 8:11 certainly pictures a table where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are recognizable. It says, "*I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven...*" Moses and Elijah are clearly recognizable by Peter in Luke 9:30-33:

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.

So, Thomas Oden biblically concludes, "The glorified body is not a different body, but a different form of the same body."

Based on all we know in Scripture, we will reflect our uniqueness. We are each uniquely created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27-28 shows us this: *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"*

We will retain various distinctions. You look at a passage like Revelation 7:9-10, and ethnicity is not erased. You see ethnically all tribes and peoples represented around the throne of God in heaven. It says, *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*

So, you put all of this together, and you have a glorious picture of resurrected bodies around the throne of God. I love the way Henry Alford depicts this reality in this hymn:

Ten thousand times ten thousand in sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints throng up the steeps of light:
'Tis finished, all is finished, their fight with death and sin:
Fling open wide the golden gates, and let the victors in.
What rush of alleluias fills all the earth and sky!
What ringing of a thousand harps bespeaks the triumph nigh!
O day, for which creation and all its tribes were made;
O joy, for all its former woes a thousand-fold repaid!
O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore;
What knitting severed friendships up where partings are no more!
Then eyes with joy shall sparkle, that brimmed with tears of late;
Orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate.
Bring near thy great salvation, thou Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of thine elect, then take thy pow'r, and reign:
Appear, desire of nations, thine exiles long for home;
Show in the heav'n thy promised sign; thou Prince and Saviour, come.

The return of Christ and the resurrection of Christians will usher in the restoration of creation.

The story just keeps getting better from here, for Scripture teaches that the return of Christ and the resurrection of Christians will usher in the restoration of all creation. This is what Paul describes in Romans 8:19-25:

For [all] creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 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. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

There is a sense in which creation is longing for the redemption of our bodies, which will usher in the restoration of all creation. This is why Martin Luther said, "Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime." Creation will be physically restored in honor and beauty forever and ever. Randy Alcorn asks the question,

Do you ever sense creation's restlessness? Do you hear groaning in the cold night wind? Do you feel the forests' loneliness, the oceans' agitation? Do you hear longing in the cries of the whales? Do you see blood and pain in the eyes of wild animals, or the mixture of pleasure and pain in the eyes of your pets? Despite vestiges of beauty and joy, something on this earth is terribly wrong...The creation hopes for, even anticipates, resurrection.

We'll talk about this more when we get to the hope of heaven.

When the resurrected Christ returns, all people (Christians and non-Christians alike) will be resurrected for the final day of judgment.

For now, let's close this section with this: When the resurrected Christ returns, all people (Christians and non-Christians alike) will be resurrected for the day of final judgment. Obviously, we've seen how the emphasis in Scripture...when it talks about the resurrection of the dead, the emphasis is on followers of Christ whose bodies will be raised with Christ. All the descriptions we've seen are descriptions of the resurrected bodies of men and women who knew and trusted in Christ.

The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about the resurrected bodies of those did not trust in Christ, but that doesn't mean they don't have a resurrected body. Instead, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the Bible talks about how, in the words of Daniel 12:2, "...many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." We saw this in Jesus' words in John 5:28-29, which says, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

This truth is reiterated in Matthew 25:31-33, which says, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left." Again in Acts 24:14-15, the Bible says, "But this I confess to you, that

according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." A resurrection to face judgment.

The Final Judgment

After the intermediate state, upon the return of Christ, every one of us will one day be raised physically to face the final judgment, which leads us into this next section. Hebrews 9:27-28, we've seen these verses a few times already, and so they help tie together these themes for us: *"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."* It is appointed, the Bible says, for man to die once, and after that comes judgment. This is talking about every single one of us in this room, and we must think carefully about it. Every single person listening to my voice will one day stand before God the Judge to give an account for how we lived. J.I. Packer said, "There are few things stressed more strongly in the Bible than the reality of God's work as Judge."

Biblical Truths...

A day of final judgment is coming.

So, what will happen at this final judgment? Well, let's listen to what Scripture teaches. Number one: Scripture makes clear that a day of final judgment is coming. It's all over Scripture. In Acts 17:30-31, it says, *"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."* Romans 2:5-11 says,

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.

In Revelation 20:11-15, John says,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them,

according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

But it's not just Scripture that makes this clear: Our own minds, hearts and lives make this clear. The desire for judgment is instinctual, meaning, we all have an innate desire for justice in the end; a hard-wired hope that justice will reign one day. When we see a gunman shoot and kill children and their teachers at point blank range, we long for justice to be served. When we see Nazi Germany systematically exterminate millions of Jewish men and women, we long for justice to be served. In this, we reveal within ourselves a longing for more beyond this world, and there's a reason we have that longing. God put it there.

We see what's going on in Syria, we hear stories from Sudan, and we look at violence in our own cities, and we instinctually know: This is not all there is. Justice is coming. It's the cry of humanity in Habakkuk 1:2-4.

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

I so appreciate the way Tim Keller puts this. He writes:

I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? However, if the resurrection of Jesus happened, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world.

The desire for judgment in us is instinctual, and the fact of judgment is inevitable, again, both biblically and practically. Biblically, see Revelation 20:12. It says, *"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done."* Then, practically, listen to Jonathan Edwards: "The only natural argument of any weight, for the immortality of the soul, takes its rise from this observation, that justice is not extended to the good, nor executed upon the bad, man in this life; and that, as the Governor of the world is just, man must live hereafter to be judged." The desire for judgment is instinctual in us, and the fact of judgment is inevitable to us.

The warnings of judgment are undeniable before us. Second Peter 2:4-10 says,

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of

righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones...

This passage recounts events like the flood in Genesis 6 and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 to say, "Look at history and look at the world around you. Things are not right; they are not as they should be, and fuller, final judgment is one day coming.

The scope of that judgment will be universal. No one in any nation, from any tribe, with any language will be exempt. Isaiah 66:15-24 says,

"For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many. Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD.

"For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

"For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Who among us will escape judgment before God?

The nature of judgment will be personal. We've talked about how nothing on that day will be hidden, and everything will be revealed. The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23 remind us that. It says,

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

The day of judgment will not ultimately determine our spiritual condition. This is key...follow this. The day of judgment will not ultimately determine our spiritual condition. Instead, the day of judgment will truly reveal our spiritual condition. Randy Alcorn put it this way:

In the day that we stand before our Master and Maker, it will not matter how many people on earth knew our name, how many called us great, and how many considered us fools. It will not matter whether schools and hospitals were named after us, whether our estate was large or small, whether our funeral drew ten thousand or no one. It will not matter what the newspapers or history books said or didn't say. What will matter is one thing and one thing only—what the Master thinks of us.

Plainly put, judgment day will make clear whether or not you knew Jesus, and what Jesus says is the only thing that will matter on that day.

The nature of judgment will be personal, and the impartiality of judgment will be unquestionable. Romans 2:9-11, *"There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."* Colossians 3:25, *"For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality."*

And, as we've talked about, the effects of judgment will be eternal. Every single one of us will one stand before Christ as Judge, and you and I will either go to eternal punishment or to eternal life. Matthew 25:46 says, *"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The final Judge will be Christ.

A day of final judgment is coming, and the final Judge will be Christ. Jesus is prophesied in Isaiah as the one who will establish and uphold justice forever more. Isaiah 9:6-7 says,

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

He will bring justice to the nations. Isaiah 42:1, *"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."* We've seen in John 5:22-27 that the Father,

"...judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears

my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man."

Jesus says in Matthew 25:31-33, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left." Jesus, according to Acts 10:42, is "the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead." Romans 2:16 says, "...on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

In 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul says, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom..." If all of that is not clear enough, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." Jesus will be final Judge.

All angels will be involved in this judgment.

The Bible teaches, interestingly, that all angels will be involved in this judgment. According to Scripture, holy angels will gather the judged. Matthew 13:41-42 says, "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 24:31, "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Fallen angels, i.e., demons, will all be judged. Second Peter 2:4 says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment..." Jude 5-6 says, "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day..."

All people (and all they have done) will be involved in the judgment.

Obviously, not just angels, but all people (and all they have done) will be involved in this judgment. In Romans 14:10-12, Paul says, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

And not just each of us, but all we have have done. Ecclesiastes 11:9 says, "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." Then, Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." Matthew 12:36-37, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Again, Jesus says in Luke 12:2, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

So, there are two realities that we need to recognize here, based on how we have responded to Christ, that revolve around two groups of people, both reflected here in Revelation 11:18, which says, *"The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

On the day of final judgment, here's what will happen. One, God will justify every saint who has trusted in Him. Followers of Christ who have trusted in Christ will stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account of ourselves. On that day, we will not be ultimately justified before God by anything we have done. Instead, we will be justified, or, in other words, judged innocent, solely based on trust in what Jesus has done.

The Bible makes this absolutely clear. Romans 3:27-31 says,

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that no one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

It is only through faith in Christ that those who are united in Christ will be delivered on the Day of Judgment before God. Those who have trusted in Christ will cling to Romans 8:1-2 on that day, which states, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."*

Just because the believer has already trusted in Christ does not mean that day of judgment in the future will be unimportant. It will be very important. Randy Alcorn observes: "God's Word treats the judgment of believers with great sobriety. It does not portray it as a meaningless formality, going through the motions before we get on to the real business of heavenly bliss. Rather, Scripture presents it as a monumental event in which things of eternal significance are brought to light and things of eternal consequence are put into effect."

On that day, for every follower of Christ who has trusted in Christ, it will be declared openly and publicly that every one of their sins has been forgiven. Let me repeat that: Every sin will have been forgiven. Let me repeat that: Every sin will have been forgiven. In the words of Psalm 103:9-13,

[God] will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Glory be to God! Isaiah 43:25, *"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."* Keep going and look at Micah 7:19, *"He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."* Hebrews 8:12, *"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."* Hebrews 10:15-18,

"And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,' then he adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.' Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin."

Praise God that on this day of final judgment, it will be clear and openly declared by God that our every sin has been forgiven. God will have completely removed them from us forever! Every sin!

So, follow this: On the day of final judgment, varying rewards for faithfulness will be distributed. Now, exactly what this means and how these rewards look is open for much discussion, but the clear teaching of the New Testament is that all who have trusted in and followed Christ will be rewarded in their faithfulness to Christ in varying ways and to varying degrees depending on their lives. When Jesus talked about that day of judgment, He said in Luke 19:17-19, *"And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'"*

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, talks about how that day will disclose the true effect of our lives and our faith. He says,

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

So, Scripture exhorts us as Christians to work for the reward of the Lord. Colossians 3:23-24 says, *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."*

Now, this obviously doesn't mean that we're competing. We're not competing with one another for rewards. That's often how we think about rewards today. Only certain people who do comparatively better than others get rewards, but that goes completely against the grain of the New Testament's concept of rewards in the body of Christ. The Bible exhorts us as a body to rejoice together in every growth in faith because we're not competing with one another for reward. First Corinthians 12:26-27 says, *"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."*

Instead, we're compelling one another toward reward, spurring one another on. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."* In fact, Paul talks about how the church at Thessalonica is his reward; they are the ones he is living for. First Thessalonians 2:19-20, *"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy."* In Philippians, he says he's living to see the church at Philippi stand firm in the Lord. Philippians 4:1, *"Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."*

So, don't miss this: It is biblically right to live for reward in heaven. Some may think that sounds selfish, and it almost sounds super-spiritual for some to say, "Well, my reward is God; He's all I want." Well, yes, of course, but Scripture, i.e., God, in His Word, exhorts us to live for reward. It makes sense when you consider what reward is for. Reward is for faithfulness to God, for service to His church, for the spread of His gospel...all things He has called us to. There's no questions that we are living for these things, to the glory of our God, now and forever. You especially see the promise of reward in passages about persevering amidst persecution.

One of the greatest books on a theology of suffering and persecution, written by a Romanian pastor, is entitled, "Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven," and in that book, this Romanian pastor said, "I didn't want to include that last part of the title, but the more I studied the New Testament, the more I couldn't avoid the realization that God has promised those who persevere in suffering and even martyrdom as they proclaim the gospel have a crown of life and righteousness waiting for them from God." So, work, live, serve faithfully, and spur others on to do the same thing as we compel one another toward reward in Christ.

For those who have trusted in Christ, the day of Judgment will be a day when every single sin will have been forgiven, and varying rewards for faithfulness will be distributed. God will justify every saint who has trusted in Him. At the same time, on that day, God will condemn every sinner who has turned from Him. We know what is probably one of the most famous verses in all the Bible, John 3:16, but look at it in its context. John 3:16-18 says,

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Then, hear this same John's depiction of the Day of Judgment for all those whose names were not written in the book of life, which we see earlier in Revelation is a reference to those who did not trust in the blood of the Lamb who was slain to cover their sins. John writes in Revelation 20:12-15,

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

On that day...follow this: On that day, every sin will come to light. On that day, 1 Corinthians 4:5a says, "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." Instead of every sin being forgiven, every sin will come to light, and instead of varying degrees of reward being distributed, the Bible teaches the exact opposite for those who refused to trust in Christ. For them, varying degrees of punishment will be enforced. Again, we don't know exactly what this means or how this will look, but when

Jesus speaks about coming judgment and condemnation and punishment, He speaks in comparative terms, talking about those who had greater knowledge or greater opportunity or whose sin was even more severe.

This is evident in various passages. Matthew 11:22-24 says,

"But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

Also, Luke 12:47-48 says,

"And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."

Again, Luke 20:45-47 says,

"And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'"

Now, on that day, two questions will matter and two destinations will result; two questions and two destinations. First question that will matter on that day is: Did we put our faith in Christ's work? All of Scripture is clear. Galatians 2:15-20:

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Also, Revelation 13:8 says, *"...and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain."*

I want to be absolutely clear: Our standing forgiven before God on the Day of Judgment can and will only be as a result of faith in Christ. None of our works will matter on that day. In fact, dependence on our works in any way will completely miss the point of faith. On that day when you or I stand before God to give an account for what we have done, the cry of our hearts must be: "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling." Don't put

your faith for that day, your hope for that day, in what you have done for God. Put all your faith and all your hope for that day in what God has done for you in Christ. Did we put our faith in Christ's work?

Now it's at this point that some might say, "Well, then, isn't that the only question that counts?" In a sense, it is; absolutely, it is, and we could stop here, and simply move on. However, here's why I don't want to move on just yet. Scripture, over and over and over again, warns us about spurious, superficial faith; faith that is merely intellectual assent. Faith that is no more than what demons possess. In light of passages like Matthew 7 and James 2 and many other New Testament texts, I want to put before you the follow-up question which I believe Scripture puts before us: Was there evidence of faith in our work?

We've talked about Matthew 7:21-27 a good bit already. It says,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Look at the rest of the New Testament. Matthew 16:27, *"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."* The rest of these passages that we've read that talk about records of what you and I have done, and it's interesting, when judgment is described even for believers in Scripture, we see judgment according to what we have done.

In Matthew 25:31-46, which we've already read, Jesus' followers are recognized for what they have done. Let's read it again:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Second Corinthians 5:10 says, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."* Then, the famous warning about spurious faith in James 2:14-26, where James confronts people who claim to have faith, but they have no deeds, and James says, "Can such faith save him?" and the clear answer is, "No." The passage states,

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

This is why Jude encourages those who are in their faith to keep themselves in the love of God and to persevere. He says,

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

You look at Revelation 14:12-13, and you see a call for endurance of the saints, and then look at the end of the passage. It says, *"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 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!'

Now, people read these verses and then think, "Okay, then, is my work the basis of whether I will enter into heaven on Judgment Day?" The answer to that question is absolutely not. Christ's work on the cross alone is the basis of our salvation. You and I cannot earn eternal life with a holy God; we put our faith in Christ's work. Then, when we do, this reality of faith bears fruit in our lives.

So, on this Day of Judgment, when you or I stand before God, what will be the basis of justification before Him? The only basis of justification before Him is the work of Christ on a cross. What is the means by which His work will be applied to our lives? Faith. Faith alone. Trusting solely in who Christ is and what Christ did. Then, in the background of our lives, it will be evident that this faith was real; it was genuine, because Christ produced fruit in and through us. Two questions on that day: Did we put our faith in Christ's work? Was their evidence of faith in our work?

This is where we realize that mere intellectual assent will not stand on Judgment Day. And making an emotional decision at one point in your life and living the rest of your life far from God will not work on that day. It's why I said earlier, "Do we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and do we surrender to the lordship of Jesus?" All kinds of people who are content to pray a prayer and call themselves Christians and move on with their lives, living however they want to live, completely far from God, I have news from Scripture: You won't go to heaven if you don't want God. Is your faith in Christ's work and is that evident in the work of your life?

This Sunday, we have a brother sharing a testimony here in our Easter service about spending fifty years in the church, active in the church, a member of the church, serving on committees in the church, leading the church, yet not a follower of Christ. And so, I ask, "Have you put your faith in Christ's work?"

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