

What Happens When We Die?

Together in Truth

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Saturday, May 2, 2020

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Tonight and tomorrow morning we have a great privilege ahead to be able to look into the future and have an infallible, reliable testimony of what is going to happen to us. Not all of the details are there that we might like from Scripture but the fear of the unknown is removed from us, the uncertainty of what lies beyond this life is answered for us and answered very clearly in the pages of Scripture and we are coming to the end, tomorrow morning will be the final message of this 12 part series as it's turned out that we've titled "Together in the Truth." We've done a flyover, you might say of systematic theology starting with the authority of Scripture, going through God and Satan and man and sin and salvation, and now we arrive to the concluding two messages as we look to the future and answer the question what happens when we die and what happens next. What's going to happen in your personal life when you die, what's going to come about for you, that's a critical question, the most important question that you could ever answer, and then on a more global stage, a more universal stage we answer the question what happens next, what is next on God's timeline as he works out his eternal purposes for all of human history. What's going to happen next.

And there's some overlap between these two messages that's unavoidable but we're going to start tonight by answering the question what happens when we die, and I'm quite aware that there is probably no discussion that people like to have less than the question of death. The topic of death makes people feel uncomfortable. There's an element of the unknown and there's this recognition that we are going to have to let go of the only thing that we have known which is this life, and enter into a realm that we have never seen before with our eyes or with our understanding, and that is unsettling for us to realize that what we know now is not permanent, it is unsettling to realize that we will cross a realm and into a different realm than what we have ever known, and people are unsettled by that especially if they haven't studied Scripture because all that is left if you don't know what Scripture says about this are the speculations of your own mind, the speculations of others, you know, and people say silly things like, "I think heaven is going to be someplace nice and green," and things like that, but they have no authoritative basis on which to say those things, and people say, "Oh, well, Aunt Martha, she's in a better place now." But it's all just a vapid hope and a speculation that's not grounded on anything other than the fact that the alternative to think that there's something other than that is too horrible to contemplate but we have to come to Scripture and especially I'm speaking I know primarily to believers in Christ tonight, you and I have to come and deal earnestly

with Scripture, we have to wrestle with what it says and not hide away from the parts that are more difficult, not hide away from the reality that death is coming for each one of us; no, we need to look these things full in the face, so to speak, we need to consider all that God has said about this and be responsible Christians and study what God's word has to say about it. You know, it is not true that we have our best life now. This life is simply a very temporary passing vapor that leads us into the eternal reality that God has prepared for us in Christ.

So we come to consider the question tonight what happens when we die and Scripture repeatedly confronts us with the reality of death whether we like it or not. In Ezekiel 18:20 it says, "The person who sins will die." Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." And Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die." So the specter of death hangs over the Old and the New Testaments and calls us to contemplate the reality that is going to face us all.

Now I'm not here tonight to threaten your sensibilities and I'm not here primarily to make you uncomfortable, even though it may do that, I'm here to help you from God's word. You know, true knowledge dispels fear. You know, an understanding of what Christ has prepared for us eliminates the fear of the unknown and there's a certain reality that you and I need to grasp as Christians, there is something that we need to grab hold of and cling to as we contemplate the reality of death before we get into any of the details that I have for you tonight from God's word, and the reality that we need to cling to is the fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. That is the most important aspect that we could ever grab hold of is that our Lord Jesus Christ has entered into the grave and come out safe on the other side. Well, what Scripture tells us in a general way without looking at specific passages is that those of us that are in Christ will therefore share in his experience of death. Those of us that are in union with Christ will share in his resurrection and so our brother in heaven, our representative, our Lord and Master has gone before us into death and come out safe on the other side and the promise of Christ is that everything that he has accomplished he will share with us. And therefore if you belong to the Lord Jesus, you have this preeminent promise given to you that just as Christ died and rose again, so also you will die and rise again, and you are safe in Christ, you are secure in him, what happened in the experience of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection will be replicated in your life as well. You will die, yes, and there is, you know, there is an aspect of loss there but far greater is the surpassing reality that you will rise again and therefore you and I as Christians can approach this topic with a great sense of anticipation, of hope and confidence and not fear. We don't have to run from the topic. We can stare the most difficult human topic square in the face and not flinch because our Lord Jesus has died and risen again and he promises to share that with us as well, as we'll see here as we go along this evening.

But as we answer the question what happens when we die, we have to realize that the answer is different depending on whether someone is a Christian or not. There is a great fork in the road that takes place at death. If you think about all of humanity going forward on one great road toward its collective appointment with death, death is therefore a fork in the road and those who are Christians will go one direction and into a place of

blessedness, however those who are not Christians will go on a completely different fork in the road and go into a place of eternal destruction.

So it is a very serious and sobering topic that we are considering and to prepare our minds for the urgency of it, I'd like you to turn to Matthew 7 for just a moment, Matthew 7 as we go to Scripture and we go to the words of our Lord Jesus. I am quite quite confident, I am absolutely certain that this topic is one that the Lord will bless as we study it together. I'm absolutely certain that the Lord is pleased that we are considering this today because he tells us to contemplate the reality of what happens when we die. So in Matthew 7:13 he says,

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

And so we are instructed to realize that the way into eternal life is narrow, the way to eternal death is broad and easy to find and to fall into, and so Christ calls us to contemplate these things and be aware of what is ahead in the nature of man and what the outcome of life is going to be for man.

Well, why is it that we even have to bother with the question of death? It's because we're all sinners, we are all children of Adam and when he sinned, he plunged the human race into separation from God and we entered into a realm of death; physical death, our earthly lives will come to an end, and also eternal death as we face the possibility of judgment for our sin. So the reality of death is a testimony to the fact that you and I are sinful and that Scripture says the wages of sin is death, and death is the outcome of the fact that we have inherited guilt and corruption from Adam, and you and I in our natures and by our actions and our words and our inner being, let's say, we are sinful and God judges that and sin has the inevitable consequence of death. So the fact that we all die is a testimony that we are universally sinners and that is the sad reality of humanity, that we have fallen from the position that God originally created us to have, we are now corrupt, we are sinful and death has entered into the world through sin, Romans 5.

So this is why we die, we die because we are all sinners and so the answer to death somehow must be found in a Gospel, in good news that answers the problem of death and that's what Jesus Christ has done for us. Christ died on the cross for sinners just like you. In doing that act of death he was offering a sacrifice to God to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him and therefore remove the curse of death from us so that when we pass through this life and enter into, and we physically die, it's not the final curse of death that awaits the unbelieving but rather because Christ has removed the curse of death from us, we can therefore enter into that resurrection life that Christ himself has, and so the most urgent thing for you tonight is to know that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and I appeal to you, I ask you, I encourage you, I call upon you to contemplate the reality of sin and death and to contemplate it honestly so that your heart might be prepared for the wonderful reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that if

you've never turned to him, you would do so in response to the eternal realities that we are considering here this evening.

Let's answer the question with that introduction out of the way: what happens when we die? Death is the end of life. We need to define our terms here. What happens when we die? Well, death is the end of life and it brings about a separation of the soul from the body, the immaterial part of man from the material part of man. We talked about death as being a fork in the road where saved humanity goes one direction and unsaved humanity goes a different direction, well, death is also a fork in the road for our personal existence. Our bodies die and are disposed of in one way or another, but our immortal soul, that immaterial aspect of our being lives on and the question is what happens to that immaterial part of our existence when we die, and the answer to the question what happens when we die depends on a preliminary question that has to be asked. I say a preliminary question, two preliminary questions that are the flipside of the same coin.

Let's start with this first question: are you a non-Christian? Are you one that has rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ? You are still in your sin. You have not bowed the knee to Christ. You have not repented you have not put your faith in Christ and you are therefore separated from God and you are hurtling, as it were, toward this appointment with death on your own and in your own sin and guilt. I would just plead with you to contemplate is what's going to happen to you, then, when you inevitably die? Let me remind you, Scripture says it's appointed for you to do this. You will die if the Lord tarries. There is no one, just roughly speaking, there are isolated people that are over 100 years old but just for the sake of round numbers, consider the fact that everyone that prior to 100 years ago, they're all dead. They're all dead. There is no one that has escaped that reality and that's what's going to face all of us. We are all going to die and if you are not a Christian, the prospects could not be more bleak for you than what they are. It is bleak. It is awful to contemplate and yet this is the reality that unavoidably awaits you if you continue in your rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're a non-Christian and you die, Jesus Christ made it clear what will happen to you.

Turn in the Gospel of Luke, turn to the Gospel of Luke in Luke 16, and as you're turning there in your Bible, let me just remind you that very recently, three or four weeks ago, we studied the topic of Jesus on hell, we examined especially in the Gospel of Matthew what Jesus Christ himself taught about the reality of hell, and what we saw in that time from God's word was this, is that Jesus taught that hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for sinners, and as we contemplated that we saw that Jesus taught that hell is real, that hell is painful, and that hell is eternal, and if you die as a non-Christian here's what awaits you, here is the gaping jaw of death and what it is waiting to swallow you up into, a reality of pain and judgment that never will end. It's an awful thing to contemplate. I feel a particular weight as I say these things to you but I'm able to say them to you because I know they're true from God's word and also I know that God would have you been warned about the outcome of your present condition. If you are not a Christian, there is a place called hell waiting for you of conscious eternal punishment as the just retribution of God upon your sinful rejection of him, your sinful rejection and violation of his laws throughout your life, and your sinful willful rebellion against the Gospel of Jesus

Christ which has been freely offered to you so many times from this pulpit. It cannot go well for you. Let me say that again: it cannot go well for you, my non-Christian friend, when you die. And Jesus taught on this plainly. He has warned us there is no excuse, there will be no answer for you, there will be no objection for you saying, "But no one told me! No one warned me! Christ didn't say anything about this!" No, that's not true at all. Jesus Christ said a lot about it and you're being told about it again here this evening.

Luke 16, we see that you will go into an immediate, conscious punishment for your sins and Jesus taught this in Luke 16:19. Let's just read the narrative. It's pretty plain, it's pretty clear in its teaching. Jesus said this in verse 19, he said,

19 Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

Stop there for just a moment. The rich man being representative of everyone who dies in an unsaved condition and we see that this teaching from our Lord here at this point is a direct answer to our question. It gives us direct information from the infallible lips of Jesus Christ himself to answer the question what happens when we die, what happens to those who are non-Christians when they die. This rich man was not a believer. He enjoyed life here on earth but it came to an end and there was a time of reckoning for him, and let's see what happened to him. In verse 23 it goes on to say this,

23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

Notice the reality that he found himself in. He was conscious. He was aware. He was mentally aware of everything that was happening to him. It was real, in other words, as we saw from Jesus, and what we see here in Luke 16 is that it was painful. He was in torment. He said that he was in agony in this flame, torment and agony awaiting him and that now became his conscious experience and he cried out for relief. He asked father Abraham to have mercy on him. He who had known earthly splendor now was begging simply for a drop of water on his tormented tongue from the man that he used to despise, the poor man Lazarus. And could he get even that little measure of relief? Verse 25,

25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over

from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

You see, his position was fixed. It was real. It was painful and his position was fixed, it was unalterable. It could not change. Despite how much he wanted to escape, as much as he wanted even relief to come from outside to him, Abraham said, "It doesn't work that way. Your position is fixed and now you are suffering eternally in a way that is completely disproportionate to the brief, temporary, passing splendor that you enjoyed while you were on earth."

So we see here that Hades is the abode of the unsaved dead. It is the place that the unsaved go to when they die and it is the place where they dwell, and we see that it is a place of misery. Misery. Let that word sink into you just a bit. To die without Christ is to enter into unalterable misery which Scripture describes in terms of torment, agony and pain. This is the reality that awaits you, my unsaved friend. This is what awaits you if you continue in your rejection of Christ, and so severe is the problem and so grinding is the recognition and it is so painful that you see the rich man crying out to Abraham to send someone to his living relations and to warn them lest they come to this place of torment also.

Look as you continue on in the chapter there in verse 27,

27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- 28 for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

It was so severe that his mind flashed to his still living relatives and said, "They've got to be warned! Someone has to tell them about this lest they come to the place of torment," because he did not want them to share in his agony that he was experiencing.

Look at the testimony there in verse 29,

29 ... Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

Abraham says, "They've got the Scripture. That is enough warning for them." And this rich man and you see the hardness of his heart and the continuation of his pride and rebellion in this place of judgment, he's still arguing with the man of God, he is still rebelling against the word of God to him even in his torment. Look at this when he says in verse 30, he says, "No, father Abraham." Are you kidding me? You are in a place of conscious punishment and you are still telling the man of God what is true and what is not, what should be and what should not be? He still hasn't been purged of sin, you see. He's still under the domination of iniquity and rebellion even as he is suffering in hell. You just see how far-reaching and how bad the clutch of sin is on mankind, still arguing with Abraham and he says in verse 30,

30 ... 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'

He thinks if only Lazarus is resurrected and goes to his brothers and testifies to them, that they'll be so overwhelmed by the miracle of the resurrection that they will listen and they will automatically repent. That's what he thinks. He's wrong. Abraham says to him in verse 31,

31 ... he said, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'

What you see there is that God is saying that his word is a sufficient warning about the realities of eternal judgment, and it is the responsibility of men like you, of women and boys and girls like you to heed the testimony of Scripture because that's all the warning that you're going to get. God is not going to send you a man resurrected to talk to you and to persuade you, and even if he did, you are so dead in sin and so blinded by the devil that you wouldn't listen to him if he came. You would find some reason to dismiss it. You would find some avenue of rejection. So God comes to you, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to you tonight through his word and says, "You have the Scripture laid out before you. This is all the warning that you are going to get. You need to heed the word of God because if you don't, nothing else can help you." So it's not that God hasn't given us testimony to warn us, he has given us everything that we need in order to enter into the realities of salvation, and if you don't, it is only and solely and exclusively your responsibility. It's not God's fault. It will be your responsibility for rejecting the testimony of the word of God that comes to you.

Let me point the positive aspect of this out. You know, on the negative side God says a resurrected man won't help you. Heed the Scriptures and if they won't listen to that, they won't listen to anything else. Well, on the positive side of this Scripture says that it is sufficient in itself to lead a man to salvation. Look at 2 Timothy 3 with me, 2 Timothy 3 in verse 15. We'll start at verse 14, 2 Timothy 3:14, Paul says to his disciple Timothy, he says,

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

So the Bible says in Luke 16 that Scripture is a sufficient warning to the unsaved. In 2 Timothy 3 it says it is sufficient to lead a man to the knowledge of Christ and to find salvation, and that the word of God is sufficient to prepare you for the afterlife, to prepare you by leading you to Jesus Christ for salvation from sin.

So my friend, and I think some of you young people, I have pictures of some of you that sit to my right when we're gathering together, some of you that are 10, 11, 12, 14 years old, and you know, I just want to emphasize to you again that the fact that you have the word of God and that you have been born into a family where the things of Christ are believed, there is a great opportunity for you to pursue these things, to seek Christ in his word and to find him while you are able. But young people, if you harden your heart against God's word, if you harden your heart against the Gospel, if you harden your heart against Jesus Christ, what's going to become of you? What will happen to you? You know, that's a rhetorical question. It's not that I don't have the answer to it. We are seeing what will happen to you. If you die in that state of rebellion against the blessings that have been given to you, my friend, you will enter into a place of physical suffering, of accusing memories, of conscious separation from God which will be the just punishment for your sin. These things are serious and we can't laugh these things off, we can't play around these things. You have the opportunity as a young person right now to consider these things deeply and I know that some of you have, I receive cards and notes and some of you at that tender age, you're seeking to respond to Christ and I thank God for that. I thank God for you young people who have tender hearts and I just want to tell you that you're on the right track as you pursue these things of the Lord Jesus. But I know that also some of you, your rebellion against Christ and your rebellion against your parents and your rebellion against your family is manifesting the fact that you are in this realm of death that leads to your eternal destruction and you should not assume that you're going to have the opportunity to escape it, and the fact that you get angry and you reject God's word does not change the reality of what Scripture is describing that lies ahead for you if you die without Christ.

So if you're not a Christian, your future has just been laid out before you if you do not repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is this what you want? Is this the future that you want for yourself? Would you spurn Christ yet again and take another step toward sealing this outcome of your existence, conscious eternal punishment, hell being a real, painful, eternal experience? The consequences of your answer to that very question are incalculable. They cannot be measured and, my friend, my young friend especially some of you boys and girls that I'm talking to, I'm pleading with you yet again to turn from your sin and rebellion and come to this gracious Lord Jesus that you've heard so much about because he will save you, he will gladly deliver you from this fate, he will gladly deliver you from this judgment that you deserve and he will do it now. You don't have to wait until you become 22 like I did or other people, you can come now and be delivered from the fear of this death that awaits you.

So I call you to the Lord Jesus Christ tonight, that you would come and be saved by him, and understand that there will be no second chance after you die. You know, father Abraham told the rich man, he said, "It's fixed. There's a great chasm. You can't come from there to here. You can't leave punishment after you're dead and enter into the realm of blessing. It doesn't work that way." The opportunity that you have in life is the only opportunity that you're going to have and so you should not presume against it, you should not deny it, you should look reality square in the face and let the fear of God motivate you to seek the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, eventually those who die and enter into this realm of death, eventually they will also experience a bodily resurrection. Your soul when you die as a non-Christian, your soul immediately goes into this place of conscious punishment, this place of torment, but eventually later on you will experience a bodily resurrection that will fit you for the infliction of eternal punishment.

Look at Revelation 20:11. As we turn there in Scripture and this is a frightful warning from God's word, looking into the more distant future beyond your death in this life and what awaits at the final outcome. In Revelation 20:11, the Apostle John said this, he said,

11 ... I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them [you see, this dwelling place of Hades yields over its prisoners, you could say and yields them over for this still further future judgments that will come to them] it gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

There is a bodily resurrection even for the wicked that awaits them and God will give the unsaved dead a body that is fit for the infliction of eternal punishment upon them and they will experience a bodily judgment forever for the sins that they committed while they were on earth in the body, and every sin that you have ever committed will be exposed before a holy God and you will be judged for each one of them. Each individual sin worthy in itself of eternal judgment, multiplied by thousands and millions of sin of heart, word and deed that you've committed, and how can that ever come out well for you? You will give an account and you will experience punishment for every sin that you have ever committed. Every evil deed, every evil word, every angry interaction, every sinful thoughts, every sinful look, all of them coming crashing down on the crown of your head, as it were, and being judged by God at this Great White Throne Judgment and then cast into hell and separated from God forever and ever. Wow. Wow. Your life will be compared to the standard of God's law and will be found that you are a lawbreaker. You will be found guilty and punishment must follow. Jesus himself said in Matthew 25:46, he says, "These will go away into eternal punishment."

You know, this punishment is almost too horrible to contemplate. I say almost because we have to contemplate it because it's the teaching of God's word. We would be foolish to deny it, we would be foolish to ignore it. And yes, these are things that men don't like to talk about. Yes, they are things that many preachers will avoid discussing for fear of

offending their audience. But that doesn't change the reality that God's word speaks to it and we are accountable to that. God has spoken. There's no escaping this reality for the non-Christian. This is what awaits. God has spoken to us candidly in his word and, friend, as I like to say, Jesus Christ when he speaks about eternal punishment, please understand this, he's not bluffing. He's not making this up. He's not trying to scare you only to save you in the end if you continue to reject him. He's not going to say, "Ah, it's all right," at the end. "Ah, come on in. It's okay." No, Christ doesn't deal with us this way. His warnings are real and for those who don't repent, they will experience the fullness of everything that he has warned about here in Scripture as we've contemplated the reality of hell and judgment. It's real. It's painful. And it's eternal. That's the future for those who die without Christ. Are you a non-Christian? This is what will happen to you when you die.

The theologian Bruce Milne says this, "Those who remain unrepentant when confronted by God's claim on them and who continue in the blasphemy and rebellion which sin implies will face God's just wrath." Friend, the doctrine of purgatory that says you'll suffer for a while but end up in heaven in the end, not true. Complete lie from the pit of hell. The doctrine of annihilationism, saying that God will punish you and you will cease to exist so that you will just turn into nothingness as if you had never existed and that will be your punishment, not true. You see, people try to soften the edges of the Bible's teaching and say, "Well, eventually you'll get out of it, purgatory." Not true. "Well, God will punish you, you'll feel pain but it will stop." Not true. It is eternal punishment. It is everlasting and so Scripture does not leave us any realm of escape. This is the outcome for those who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ and I pray to God as I'm speaking to you now, I pray to God that he would spare you of that fate and that the Spirit of God would do a work in your heart to lead you to faith in Jesus Christ because this is too horrible for anyone to face, and yet I can only commend you to Christ. I've said all I can say about that. You need to seek him now for yourself.

Well, we're answering the question what happens when you die. We said, well, we've got to break that question down in two parts, non-Christian versus Christian. What happens when a Christian dies? What happens if you are a Christian and you die? Well, I feel a great weight lifted from my shoulders now as we enter into this realm of blessing and as awful as the contemplation of eternal punishment is, by direct opposite contrast it is a great privilege for us to be able to consider what Scripture says about the future for Christians who die in the Lord, and to answer the question simply, if you are a Christian when you die, you enter immediately into the presence of Jesus Christ. Your soul is separated from your body but Jesus Christ receives your soul into his presence and you enter into a place of immediate conscious blessing that is far better than anything that you have ever experienced on earth. You enter into the conscious bliss that belongs to those who the Lord saved from their sins.

The Bible doesn't give us many details about this but it's enough for us to know that it is a place of blessing. Let's go back to that text that I read to open our study this evening, Philippians 1 in verse 21, and we'll look at it with just a little bit more context looking at the end of verse 20. Philippians 1:20. We'll just parachute into the middle of it without all

the context that we've looked at in the past in our study in Philippians. The Apostle Paul says his,

20 earnest expectation and hope is that he will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

So you see, what I want you to see here is that this text is opening the question, opening the issue that we're addressing. It is dealing with the reality of death and the Apostle Paul, a Christian, is describing what will happen to him when he dies. He is speaking by revelation of God. He is telling us the truth as he writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

What does he say about death? Well, he says in verse 21, he said,

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

To die is gain. You gain something when you die. You add something better, something more valuable than you've ever had in this life. To die is gain. Then he goes on and discusses and explains. He says in verse 22,

22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. [He said,] 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions [here it is], having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

Stop there. Here's the reality of death for a Christian. Paul says it is gain, it is an advantage. You get something that is better than what you have right now. He describes it as being with Christ and he says that being with Christ in the afterlife, after this life is what I mean by that, after we die and we enter into the presence of Christ and have that advantage granted to us, he says it's very much better. It is of a different order of goodness that we enter into, better even than having a fruitful ministry here on earth. He says, "For me, for me personally, when I die I am going to be with Christ. It will be to my advantage and it will be far better than anything that I've ever had in this life."

Now he goes on to say in verse 24, he says,

24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

What he's saying there is that, "Heaven is going to have to wait for me for a little while longer because the Lord has given me some ministry for you that I need to do in the meantime." So Paul embraces the fact that he's going to be on earth ministering for a while longer but he does so in the context of the reality that when he dies, he will enter into a better realm of existence than anything that he's known here on earth, and what's true of Paul is true of every Christian, that when we die we enter into the realm of Christ and it will be far better than anything that we have ever known before.

Let's call a time out and just pause and dwell on that thought for a moment. My Christian friend, I've spoken to the young people, let's speak to some of those of you that are older in life, you're even older than I am, your head is full of gray hair and the bulk of your life is behind you and you have only a few more years to live in the grace of God, and what's going to happen to you? Well, my Christian brother or sister, I speak to you as though speaking to a father or to a mother. I just want to encourage you with the realization that you have nothing to fear in death whatsoever. Knowing what Scripture says about what happens to a Christian when they die takes away every bit of fear about it; that Christ is going to receive you to himself and what you gain in death will be far better than anything that you have here on earth. There is a sense in which, of course, when we contemplate the reality of death, there's a sense in which we say, "Oh, it will be hard to leave my loved ones behind, and I love my family and I love my relatives, and my friends," and all of that, and there is an aspect of that that is understandable but, my friend, what I want you to understand is that even our closest loved relationships are not sufficient, they're not good enough, they're not precious enough to hold us back from that realm of glory that Christ has for us when we die. When the time comes, it should be the desire of every true Christian to say, "I'm ready to depart. When the Lord calls me, I am ready for that," because as we've seen in the past, Matthew 10:37, you see and this is the way that you think as a Christian and as you think about death and understanding that you will enter into the presence of Christ when you die, you think and you contemplate it this way, "Christ is more important to me than anything. I love Him more than my dearest relationship, and when He beckons me to come, I will be leaving people that I love, yes, but I will be leaving to join the One whom I love most, and I get to be with the One whom I love supremely and who loved me supremely. And therefore that will be better and I can embrace that and I will trust Christ for the ones that I leave behind because to die and enter into His presence is going to be the fulfillment of the purpose for which I was created in the first place. Christ created me," you say as a Christian, "Christ created me so that I would be with Him in heaven forever."

So death is simply the passageway, it is the window through which, the door through which I pass in order to enter into the fulfillment of everything that Christ created me to know, and when the day comes, we can look on our loved ones and to be a bit symbolic about it and I don't mean to be dramatic here or to diminish it in any way, but as you contemplate, as it were, walking, taking your last step on earth and stepping across the realm into heaven, you can glance back to your loved ones, [kiss] "Goodbye, my loved ones. It's time for me to go," and you can do that with a sense of peace and confidence and fulfillment knowing that you are entering into what Christ has prepared you for. And see, part of the sanctifying work that the Holy Spirit does on us is to prepare us for that time where our affections for Christ and our affections for heaven are so pure and so surpassing that they are greater and more motivating to us than even our loved ones here on earth. That's what awaits us and Paul says that it's very much better, and to know that and to understand it is to desire it as the fulfillment of the highest aspirations of your life. Those of you that are brothers and sisters to me in Christ, what lies ahead for you is very much better than anything that you've known on earth. It is something to look forward to

and to embrace and to anticipate standing, as it were, on your tiptoes looking ahead, looking forward to that time when Christ calls you to be at home in heaven with him.

Now you might say, "Well, what about the loved ones that I leave behind? I'm leaving behind some that are unsaved even. What about them?" That's a good question and here's what the teaching of Scripture would bid you to understand, is that you having entrusted your eternal soul to Christ and entering into that realm of glory, here's what you have to do, here's what you must do, here's part of what prepares you for the moment of death is that you take the totality of all of your affections and all of those relationships that you care about on earth and you gather them all up and say, "Lord Jesus, I'm going to trust You with them also. I am going to abandon my cares all to You and I am going to trust You to do what is good and what is right, and I'll trust You for what happens to them after I'm gone. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," as the martyr Stephen said in Acts 7. We look forward, we look up and as we look up, our eyes leave behind the things of this world and we look up, as it were, we look up into the window of heaven and say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and we leave everything else to him.

That is how a Christian is to die and to think about death, is to recognize that what Jesus said to the thief on the cross is what's true about us in our day of death. What did Jesus say to that repentant thief on the cross? He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." That sounds pretty good, doesn't it, in this fallen world, to leave this fallen world and to leave your creaky bones behind and to enter into the presence of Christ, into the conscious presence of his glorious goodness, and to have the fullness of his love unhindered by the body, unhindered by remaining sin, and to enter into that conscious experience of all that he has for us. There's a reason we say that will be glory to me. Christian, that's what awaits you at the moment of your death.

Now after death and I'm going to save most of this for tomorrow morning, after we die there will come a time, we're not going to be too precise on the details here, after we die we will stand before what's known as the Judgment Seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:8 says this, and we'll stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ not to find out our eternal destiny because as Christians we already know our eternal destiny here on earth. God has told us that he will receive us into heaven, that he's forgiven all of our sins and he will remember our sins and lawless deeds no more. This Judgment Seat is different than the Great White Throne Judgment that awaits unbelievers. We'll go before Christ and we'll give an account to him of our lives and Jesus Christ will reward us at that time. He will give us the measure, the portion of our eternal blessing and somehow, again we'll look at this tomorrow, somehow the tenor of our Christian lives will be the basis upon which the Lord Jesus rewards us. To the extent that we have lived our lives for Christ, Christ will reward us and give us the capacity to enjoy eternity according to the blessedness that he has for us. Somehow how you live as a Christian today will impact your experience of eternity and we'll look at that more tomorrow. But when you die, you will enter immediately into the conscious presence of Christ, there will be a time where you appear before Christ in judgment and he will reward you, the things of the wasted time of life will be burned up and forgotten, so to speak, and what's left, the things of eternal value

from your life, Christ will reward you for those things. Then later on after that, you will receive a resurrected body and be glorified.

Look at 1 Corinthians 15:51 through 54, and we'll start in verse 50 actually where Scripture says this,

50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

What lies ahead for us after we die is that Christ is going to give us a resurrection body and the body that we have now is not fit to live in heaven forever, and so what God is going to do is he is going to raise our bodies from the dead one day, he is going to change them and fit them for eternal life with him in heaven. You see, the bodies that we have right now are not capable of that. They do not have the capacity to live for eternity and enjoy full unhindered access and full unhindered fellowship with our Lord Jesus.

So part of the blessing that God has for us is that he is going to give us new bodies that will be fit to live in heaven forever. Somehow in a way that I won't pretend to be able to understand, somehow there will be a measure of continuity between our earthly bodies with the eternal body that the Lord will give to us one day. There will be a measure of continuity to it. Moses and Elijah were recognized by the disciples when they appeared in glory at the Transfiguration, and so there was a continuity that allowed them to be recognize there, but it's going to be a change of such wonder and magnificence that, in one sense, it's going to be so different and yet there's going to be a continuity with what went before and it's going to be a wonderful thing to see what that's like when we're in heaven together.

There's an analogy that we can make that we can understand in perfect understanding. Think about being born as an infant and now here you are as an adult. Your adult body looks completely different than what you looked like as an infant. It's larger. It's changed. It's mature as opposed to those early days of infancy. Instead of that smooth baby skin, we've got a lot of wrinkles and all of that. But the point here is that there is continuity between your adult body and the body that you had as an infant. There was a continuity that took place there. Well, somehow there is going to be continuity from our earthly body our resurrection body that is going to be the consummation and the fullness of our redemption. Christ is not only redeeming our souls but even our bodies will be redeemed and will carry forth our existence throughout all of eternity. We will worship God in a glorified body and we will worship him without the hindrance of sin. God has forgiven us

the penalty of sin in this life now, he has broken the power of sin in this life now, in heaven we will be removed from the very presence of sin. There will be no more tears, no more pain, everything that sin has introduced into the misery of our earthly existence will be gone and what will be left will be the fullness of sharing in the resurrected glory of Jesus Christ gathered together around his throne with transformed bodies, Philippians 3, and seeing him face-to-face, 1 John 3 and the book of Revelation.

So friends, friends, I ask you compared to that glory, you realize that even the good things that we have on earth are not worthy to be compared to that. The sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us, 2 Corinthians 4. And let me just say a word of pointed application to today in our present existence in the isolation and the restrictions that our government has placed upon us. I know that some of you are upset about those things but your focus is misplaced and you are not thinking rightly when you are worked up about that to the point of anxiety and anger. You are not thinking rightly about it at all. You must think about these things from an eternal perspective and you must understand from 2 Corinthians 4:14-16 this point, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us because, Paul says, 2 Corinthians 4, momentary light affliction is producing for us a weight of glory far beyond all comparison. So whatever difficulties and suffering we're having right now is so small and insignificant and it is temporary and passing and it's not even that bad, it's not even that bad, beloved, and then when you recognize what Christ has appointed for us to receive, a resurrected body full of glory, the presence of Christ, blessedness forever, and that's what's going to belong to us forever and ever without end? Why are we complaining? Why are you angry? Why are you anxious about that? Have you forgotten the promises of Christ and what lies ahead for you as a Christian when you die, the eternal glory that Christ has appointed for you? Oh, let's you and I hang our heads in confession and repentance that we have gotten ourselves so worked up over such a temporary passing affliction that's not even that bad, and we have allowed it to rob us of the joy that should continually be flooding our souls in a recognition of how good Christ has been for us and the glories that he has appointed us to receive.

Friends, to answer the question what happens when we die as a Christian is to reorient your entire conception of what this life means and what it is that you want out of it. What happens when you die as a Christian? You enter immediately into the blessed presence of our Lord Jesus. In time he will reward you at his Judgment Seat and then down the road he will give you a resurrected body that is fit to share in his glory in heaven forever and ever without end. That's pretty great, isn't it? That's pretty magnificent. This is what Christ has appointed us to and it should flood our minds and our understanding that we have been given an indescribable gift from our Lord Jesus.

So my Christian friend, will you put aside your preoccupation with the things of this world and praise our Lord Jesus for what he has done for us and look forward with anticipation the blessing that awaits you in heaven? I trust that you will. May the Spirit of God bring these things to a lively animation in your heart and mind so that you would

anticipate with joy the realities of heaven and that it would flavor every aspect and every attitude of your life that remains here on earth.

Let's pray together.

O Father, we pray that You would let this hope of heaven conquer our fear of death. Father, why should we be afraid to die when we will really live when we do? Thank You, Father, for the wonderful blessings that You have appointed for us in Christ and, Father, as we've spoken so plainly and directly to the unsaved in this message, we pray for a work of Your Holy Spirit to impart new life to them, Father, that Your Spirit would come upon them and by His omnipotent persuasion, Father, work in them a wonderful reality of faith and repentance that they would embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and that everyone under the sound of my voice would become partakers of this heavenly promise and be with us all, Father, that all under the sound of my voice would join that great heavenly chorus singing the praises of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive glory and honor and power and blessing!" Grant that, O God, grant it in abundant measure far beyond the power of the human words that have been spoken, far beyond the merit of which there is none of the human speaker here tonight. Father, for Your glory according to the power of Your truth, according to the imminent, eternal, matchless worth of the Lord Jesus Christ, save, Father, sinful souls tonight, save them from eternal damnation and put them on the path, lead them to that fork in the road that leads to this blessed eternal life that when they die, Father, Jesus would say to them, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." For the glory of Christ and for the sake of eternal souls, Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. So be it. Amen and amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.