

A brief history of death

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[0:00] We're going to have a brief history lesson this evening, a brief history of death. What's the history of death? Well, as I'm sure we're familiar, there was once a vibrant world, it was fully alive, things worked perfectly until a wife and her husband heard the voice of a serpent and took and ate some deadly fruit.

And from that time on, them and all their descendants experienced a world which is subject to death and decay.

But in history, there comes along moments which fill real sort of life-changing, history-defining moments.

I wonder if I say the year 1969, what happened then? Moon landings. Moon landings. Excellent. I don't actually know if that's the moon. I hope it is.

But in 1969, that was a big year for the history of the world. That Apollo 11 spacecraft landed on the moon.

[1:24] For the first time, humans reached a place before unreachable. As those famous words that were said by Neil Armstrong, that's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

And in terms of the history of death, there's been a moment like that. As one man did something that no other has done before.

We see it there in verse 20. It shapes the history of death. Verse 20, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. The moon landing was a sign of things to come. Leading the way in space exploration and other things. And in Jesus' resurrection, this is such a history-changing moment that it's the sign of things to come when we think about death.

[2:38] A giant leap forward for humankind. One man did something no other man had done before.

And so we're going to move from space imagery to agriculture. Because that's what we've got really in verse 20.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. The first fruits, that's the first bit of the harvest.

And it's a sign of what's to come. And that's the case for Jesus' resurrection.

It's a sign of what's to come. So where are we now?

[3:38] There's been this big history-changing moment. This sign of things to come. But where are we now in the history of death in our worlds?

Because we know that death is still around us. We've been reminded of that this week in the news. It's been everywhere. The Pope died. Another reminder that death is real.

It takes the best of us. None of us are immune. Well, verse 21 and 22 show us what the state of death is now.

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

So human beings, we start life in Adam. Adam, that first man.

[4:43] And because death came in through him, so all related, all of Adam's seed, all of Adam's descendants are subject to death too. But there's another category of people in, oh, I don't know what happened to Jesus there.

In verse 22. So in Christ, all will be made alive. They have a different status to those in Adam who are heading for death.

They'll be made alive. And that word for alive there, that's the thought of God, the creator, the source of life, enlivening, quickening, raising up those who are dead to life.

Because of his resurrection power. Adam and his wife Eve, the first in the world, the first in humanity to experience death.

Christ is the first in a new humanity leading the way forwards for a new humanity in which there is resurrection hope beyond the grave.

[6:04] But it's not been resolved yet. We know as we look around the world that people still die.

And that's because there's an order to this. See that. Begin to see that in verse 23. But each in turn, Christ's first fruits.

Then when he comes, those who belong to him. As an order to this. Christ is the first one raised from the dead.

And then when he comes, so all who belong to him will be raised from the dead. That is when the one who has changed history by his resurrection comes to end all of history.

And once history comes to an end, death will be history itself. The end of history means the end of death.

[7:15] That's the future for it. We get more details here in verse 24.

Then the end will come when he hands over his kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. So now, because of Christ's resurrection, he reigns at the right hand of his Father.

But there's still some things to be completed. All things must be put under his feet. And that includes death. But right now, death is an enemy.

The last enemy is death. It will be destroyed. But right now, it's an enemy. And we feel that, don't we? Even at Christian funerals, where there is the hope that loved ones are safe with the Lord Jesus, death still feels like an enemy.

It doesn't feel right. But at the end of history, Jesus is going to destroy it. History for Jesus is like a computer game.

[8:44] Where you go through the levels and you defeat your enemies. And then at the end of the game, there's a last big enemy. A last big boss.

And that enemy is death. And it will be crushed. Death will be completely dead.

And the big knockout blow for death is firstly Jesus' resurrection. That's a sign of things to come. But then our resurrection.

Our souls, when we die, they go on to live in the presence of our Lord forever. But then one day, we too will rise.

And as we rise, as our new bodies rise, that resurrection, our resurrections will shout loudly to death, you have not won.

[9:54] You could defeat many people, but you couldn't keep our Savior down.

And you cannot keep his people down. Because Jesus is the king and all will be under his feet.

And then we get some more information in verse 27.

For he has put everything under his feet. Now when it says everything has been put under his feet, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

When he's done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him, who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. So as history is wrapped up, Jesus, our representative, will hand everything that he has won through his work for us in the cross and resurrection, he will hand it to his Father.

[11:06] And so all will be under our trying gods. There used to be adverts on TV when I was growing up that the future is bright, the future is orange.

The orange, they did. And you know what? I love the color orange, and that sounds very attractive to me. But here we see that it's even better than orange.

The future is bright. The future is everything under Jesus' feet. That's what we see in these verses. Including death.

Gone, crushed, defeated. All those in Christ who are resurrected physically will be like a punch in the face to death.

And so if this is the history of death, and this is where the future of death is going, what do we do now?

[12:18] How do we live now? That's death being crushed. I don't know if this is a...

Actually, let's get there in a moment. The Corinthian church, as we said a bit last week, was a complete car crash of a church. They were a mess.

You read the book of Corinthians, and you can see that there were some people sleeping with their own relatives. There were some people spending time, perhaps after church, heading out into the red light district of Corinth, sleeping with prostitutes.

Church was morally a complete mess. They didn't live like their lives had been transformed by Jesus. They weren't living like they had an eternal hope in a future resurrection because of their resurrected Savior.

They didn't live like God was at work in their bodies now and will give one day, raise them with new resurrection bodies. And so it...

[13:29] And it shouldn't be a surprise that they were living like this because, as we said last week, there were people in the church who said, there is no resurrection. And so if this life is all there really is, then sure, go ahead and do whatever you want to do.

I don't know if this is a thing anymore. It was, I reckon, about 10 years ago. People would say the word YOLO. Does anyone know what that means? You only live once.

Yeah, yeah. Okay, there's some nods. That's good. You only live once. I remember friends of mine would think about things in life and think, oh, it doesn't matter.

YOLO. So bunk off work or school. YOLO. It doesn't matter. I only live once. Let's have some fun. Get drunk on a night out.

YOLO. It doesn't matter. I only live once. And that's the motto of verse 32. See Paul's quote there?

[14:34] Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. And there were people in the Corinthian church living by this idea. YOLO. It doesn't matter. Let's eat and drink.

Tomorrow we die. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. But Paul is showing us here in this great passage, you don't just live once.

You live twice. You live twice. You're going to live forever. Your Savior has been risen. You have new life with him. Everything's going to be under his feet.

You've got a new creation to look forward to. And so the phrase you should be living by is yount.

You actually live twice. Because we're going to live forever with God.

And that's what Paul wants them to see. As we work our way through 29 to 34, you actually live twice.

[15:35] Verse 29 helps us to begin to see this. I was going to skip verse 29 because it's confusing. But I think we should go there. Let's have a look. Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? What is that about? It's a confusing verse. There's many interpretations of it.

But taking it at face value from what we read there, it does seem that there was probably some in the Corinthian church who were being baptized for some who were in the church who had died without being baptized.

So and so died. They hadn't been baptized. And so and so said, I'll stand up. I'll go and be baptized in their place. Paul is not commending this.

There's no mention of this elsewhere in the New Testament. But he is saying to them that if that's what you're doing, it would be pointless if there was no resurrection.

[16:54] Baptism, we've mentioned baptism quite a bit over the last week or so. Baptism, we know it's a picture of our union with Christ. It's a

picture that we have died with Christ and we're now raised with Christ. Being baptized says, I wear the t-shirt and it says, I have been raised with Christ or I will be raised with Christ. We can wear the t-shirt that says, yo, I actually lived twice. Twice. Because that's what Paul's history of death and helping us to see the future of it shows us. And so how can we live as a result of this? Well, two things. Risk your life in service of the Lord Jesus.

Risk your life in service of the Lord Jesus. Risk your life in service. That's what Paul says. Verse 30. And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?

[18:01] I face death. Yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul went through enormous hardships for the sake of the gospel.

We see that in the book of Acts. He was beaten. He was chased out of town. He was stoned or threatened to be stoned. And in fact, in Ephesus next week, we'll see he ends up in a bit of a gospel riot.

And I think he mentions that here in verse 32. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? By wild beasts, I think he probably means just wild people who are attacking him against him.

Why would he go through that? Why would Paul, the once persecutor of God's people, suffer so much for the sake of the gospel?

Well, if there was no resurrection, it would be stupid. But because he knows the history and the future of death, he feels it's worth it.

[19:14] So that people may know life in the Lord Jesus Christ. We may not face these sort of risks to life here for being a Christian, but around the world, this is the reality for many of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Would you come to church if you knew that it might mean that you're going to be stoned? It might mean that you may even die. Would you take that risk?

Would you follow Jesus if you knew it would risk losing your job or your family or your home? Well, if we're in Christ, we can say, that's okay because I actually can't lose my life.

I know that one day I will be resurrected with my Lord Jesus. I've shared this story with you before, but it's an amazing one.

The story of Jim Elliott and his friends. He and four others, they gave up good career prospects and went with their wives to South America to share the gospel.

[20:29] And they had this idea to reach this small little tribe called the Alka Indians. Small tribe that hadn't heard the gospel before.

And they had a reputation for being particularly brutal towards any sort of foreigner. It took lots of planning, lots of organization, but finally they were ready to go.

Jim and his four friends went in and very shortly after were killed by these people. And not long before he went in, he wrote this famous saying, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

I'll say that again. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, thus our lives, to gain what he cannot lose. After Jim Elliott's death, Elizabeth and one or two of the other widows ended up going back to that tribe that had killed their husbands.

Knowing that they were risking their own life, but actually, God worked wonderfully and saved some of that tribe. Why does Paul, why did Jim Elliott give their lives in such service?

[22:06] Why would they risk their lives for the service of the Lord Jesus Christ? We know we cannot keep our lives here. Perhaps we try to.

But one day, death will catch up with us. But because Jesus is raised, we are going to gain eternal life. And so it's okay to make sacrifices for following, for serving the Lord Jesus.

It's okay to sacrifice our reputation, our money, our careers for the sake of the gospel. For the sake of people knowing Jesus, our resurrected Savior.

Because we've seen the first fruits. We've seen he was raised from the dead. A new resurrection body. And because he's been raised, so will we.

If the dead are not raised, go wild, eat, drink, and be merry. But if Christ has been raised on his kingdom, we're going to live with him in his kingdom, with his people forever.

[23:14] We can make sacrifices for following the Lord Jesus Christ. And so if Paul can fight wild beasts in Ephesus, we could spend time with wild children in Sunday Club or CY.

If Paul can do that, we can spend time reading the Bible with that non-Christian friend who has so many questions.

If Paul can do these things, we can labor in the church kitchen for an hour or two on a Sunday in order that people may feel welcome in the building as we give them nice drinks and other things. And none of it's in vain. It's of eternal value. That's where this chapter is going. Sneak preview to verse 58.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[24:28] Because we see and we know the history of death, our labor for the Lord is not in vain. And the second thing is, say no to sin.

Say no to sin. Verse 33. Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character. Come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning, for there are some who are ignorant of God.

I say this to your shame. Ow. It does matter what we do. It does matter what we do with our body even now.

God lives in us. He is changing us and he's preparing us to live forever with him in new resurrection bodies. Because of the Lord Jesus, he is recreating you.

We are new creations. And so he says to them, just very bluntly, stop sinning. Don't live like you're ignorant of God.

[25:46] Here's the future. We know the future plans. There is something more than this world. And so say no to sin. Verse 33.

He says, do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character. But perhaps he's talking particularly, quoting that particularly, because there are people who are misleading them about the truth of resurrection.

Don't be misled. And perhaps we could apply that to other situations. Perhaps there's people we do spend time with who we feel like they easily mislead us.

And we need to be a bit more on our guards. Perhaps there's places we go to where we know we're going to be easily led into some sort of sin. And we need to take decisive action with that and say no to that.

And saying no to temptation and to sin is hard, but it's not in vain. It's living, preparing ourselves for the time when all evil will be done away with.

[27:01] When death will be defeated, crushed under the feet of Jesus. And we'll be at home in the place where righteousness dwells. To practice being at home.

And so we don't want to waste our lives thinking YOLO, thinking you only live once. If that were true, then sure, go away from here and eat, drink and be merry.

But because you actually live twice, we can live gladly in the service of the Lord Jesus. For we know the future.

We know that death will be history. For we like Jesus, that first fruits will be raised a new and everlasting life.

And share together in a glorious new creation. Let's respond firstly in a song.

[28:13] And then if anybody's got any reflections or questions that they'd like to share, there's an opportunity for that. And then perhaps we'll say one or two prayers to ask God to help us with this.

So we're going to sing this song about the Lord Jesus, our resurrected King, who's now returned victorious to the throne in heaven.

And we can give him the glory. Because we know what he's done. And we know the future. So we crown him. Crown him.

Together. In my...

I mean, I'm not a historian. I don't know. But my understanding is that the Greek culture at that time said, spirituality cannot be linked with physicality.

[29:24] So if there's sort of a spiritual world, it can't possibly include physical resurrection. And if that's what they were thinking, you

know, that spirituality is completely different to physicality, then that would sort of explain their sexual ethics, wouldn't it?

They'd say, I'm a spiritual person. But what I do with my body, it's nothing to do... It doesn't touch my spirituality. So I can go and, you know, go to the red light district or whatever.

But the principle of resurrection shoots that all down, doesn't it? Because it says that the high point of spirituality is a physical resurrection.

And that physical matters, and exactly as you were saying, therefore, what we do physically is spiritually significant.

So in terms of sexual morality, and I guess we could sort of take that thought on. But the bit about your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

[30:29] You know, making coffee is a spiritual act of spiritual worship. It's a physical thing. Doing the church cleaning is an act of spiritual worship.

And it's just interesting the way they were thinking, and the way Paul aims at it, and undermines it, and contradicts it.

Yeah, yeah. I think you're absolutely right. I think that is what they would think. It's sort of, I don't know if I've got the word right, but some sort of Gnosticism, isn't it? I bow to your knowledge.

I don't know what it's called. Then that's what Steve would say if he was here. Yes, Steve would tell us. But Steve's not here. We have to make it up as we go along. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

I thought your hand was up, I'll say, but it's a water bottle. Any other comments or questions?

Michael, can we not throw you the microphone over, but respect our equipment?

[31:39] I was just thinking about those words you were closing with, that there's people who fancy there is no life after. Can't quite hear you. Sorry. Those people who fancy that death is the end, you know, and there is no resurrection.

The kind of consolation in those words, well eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you're dead. I think even in those words there's a sort of hidden mercy, because evidently if you look around, there's people who pursue that kind of hope.

It's not long before they become not very merry, and, you know, the sadness, they might end up on the street.

So I think going that way wholeheartedly, the hidden mercy is that you might discover, oh dear, this is death before death, you know.

And it might encourage them to consider again. Yeah. You know, back to Ecclesiastes, it's all meaningless. It does remind us of Ecclesiastes, doesn't it?

[32:45] Yeah. Yeah. Thank you for that. That's interesting that, yeah, people might be able to see how empty that sort of philosophy of life is.

Yeah. Yeah. Maybe that he ends up at a church. Yeah. And pray it leads people to the saviour.

Yeah. Are you off?

I shouldn't have asked. Just from what Michael said, I remember watching some TV programme about many rich, filthy rich celebrities that have got to the top.

They have got to the top. Whatever they were heading for, they reached. And then they found it was empty.

They had the money. They had the people's adoration. But it was empty. And that just, you know, example.

[33:58] Yeah. What more is there? Yeah. Thank you. Anything else?

Bill. um thank you very much i think just worth thinking about that matter of time and the fact that christ has been raised but we are not yet raised but we will be people talk about uh the tension that we live in have already but not yet we're already christians but we're not raised as we shall be in the end so i think that's helpful for us to understand our the spiritual life at the moment because there is a sort of incompleteness about our experience isn't there there is a sense of sort of a frustration really we already belong to the lord we're raised spiritually but we're not yet raised physically there's still indwelling sin and i think that helps us to understand the uh you know paul says a wretched man who will deliver me from this body of death you know the sense or perhaps it's just me but i think that the sense of frustration that we're we're not what we ought to be and yeah um yeah i think the fact that the best is yet to come yeah that paul says we're in a not yet situation and that's where

we're at we can't change that until until the lord comes yeah it's helpful for us to realize that there'll always be imperfections yeah and uh you know you don't find the perfect church because the perfect church is in heaven or it isn't the glory to be yet to be revealed you don't find perfect christians because they're that awaits the resurrection it just gives us realistic expectations yeah thank you yeah that that already not yet thing it is a struggle it feels frustrating but yet we have that wonderful confidence um in where where our futures are going um we long i think we we sang i yearn to dwell um whatever it is with the glory that never fails um so true um megan thank you i think as well um when it talks about why do we endanger ourselves every hour um that really challenges me because um i think in this country particularly we can i definitely um a little bit empathetic with my faith and that i'm worried about what other people think or you know i don't boldly go and say oh yeah i'm a christian or you know i went to church and then there's people here who you know are their life is on the line and i think it makes challenges me to think about my own life but also for us in this country what amazing privileges we have which we just take for granted and i think um it's so easy to take them for granted that we've got the word in english that we can understand it that we can come and meet in churches and not be persecuted and yes there are maybe slight restrictions i mean do you know but nothing in comparison to other places in the world so i think that's also just a challenge to think as a church to make sure we're praying for um those people in other countries who are persecuted and making sure for me for example you know the children in the church know that that is a reality in the world and we've got people within our congregation haven't we from areas in the world who are persecuted so to just yeah i think for me it makes me just think how blessed we are and actually maybe to have more courage to you know yeah stand up and be counted more maybe yeah yeah thank you for that reflection uh it it's yeah huge challenge and thank you for the thought of we need to be mindful of praying for our brothers and sisters who really do face death every day for being a follower of the lord jesus yeah uh shall we say a few prayers maybe if um three or four people could could lead us in some prayers as as