

# What happens next?

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Preacher: Chris Fry

[ 0 : 00 ] As we shall see, after death is divided in the Bible into two situations.! The importance of being as clear as the Bible allows us to be,! so that facing death and facing what comes after death may be a great motivation for us to settle the question of our eternal destiny and live holy and godly lives in this present world.

Let me give a very brief recap on what we looked at last Sunday. One day we will not be onlookers of other people's grief or even our own experience of grief, but we ourselves will be those who die. And we do not know the day of our death. This is in the hands of our sovereign God. And it is a certainty that we shall die unless the Lord Jesus comes first.

And the Bible says plainly and flatly, it is appointed unto man to die once. We are facing that reality and it is a reality for all of us.

Whatever you and I may think even fleetingly about this, it is an inescapable reality and should demand our attention because for all of us it means the end of life as we currently know and experience it.

[ 1 : 30 ] It's massive. It's overwhelming and for millions of people apparently crushingly final. Death is not natural.

The world was not hardwired in God's created beauty of Genesis 1 to experience decay and death. Death is the result of human sin. The Bible says it's the wages of sin that is death.

And the death of any human being is another reminder of sin in this world. Another reminder of the curse that has come upon God's creation.

It's normal. It's universal. But it's not natural. And Christian people need to remember that because the world will try to paint it in different colors.

But it's not natural. And our whole beings scream against the reality of death. And then there is the fear of death.

[ 2 : 42 ] And the Bible again talks of this and talks of those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

And fear of death, though a very uncomfortable thought and reality, is nevertheless a very healthy warning for each one of us because we might do something about being ready for death if we are fearful of it.

We must not be those who bury our heads in the sand, but those who find out clearly and plainly what God has to say. Because death is not the end.

Death is not the end. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, our lives go on.

What happens after death? There are many popular ideas. I've put a few of them down there.

[ 3 : 42 ] Rest in peace. Wander around most graveyards. You'll just see that said. It seems the appropriate thing for people to say.

Everybody says it, doesn't they? If anybody dies, a celebrity dies, you just hear people who've got no religious convictions at all, but they just say R.I.P. Oblivion.

It's interesting that people talk in those terms, but I wonder how many people actually do embrace the idea of death being absolutely the end. The end. Loss of all consciousness.

Nothing. You can't get your head around that, can you? That you should not exist as a being. But it is an idea.

As is reincarnation, which has been around for centuries, as a thought in Hinduism and Buddhism, this thought that life will carry on, and in some way or other, we shall be in a place where we shall inhabit some other form.

[ 4 : 51 ] I don't want to go into that territory. I can't think of the right word. There probably is the right word for this, but sort of the idea of recycling. We live in a recycling age.

And the sort of the woodland burial kind of approach is a sort of acknowledgement of that. It's almost like we're just made of substances.

We just go back into the earth and we grow trees. That's what we are. We all become part of the bigger universe. And so on.

Well, these are popular ideas and you could add a few more. There are also some religious ideas that kick around. The idea of purgatory. If you've been brought up as a Roman Catholic, you'll know about this.

This is the place where people go who need to have their sins forgiven but haven't been completely forgiven. So they need to have prayers prayed and masses given for them. And after a certain number of years, they will escape.

[ 5 : 51 ] The pains of purgatory. Not a pleasant waiting room place. It's a painful place where sin is purged. And the Catholic Church also has a doctrine to do with children who die before the age of reason.

Sort of limbo. These little, little souls. They're sort of floating around like amoebas in some universe out there. So what does the Bible have to say about any of this? Cross line through a whole lot because it doesn't have any space and parts for any of those popular ideas.

And it's just a big reminder to us this morning that we must get our understanding from what the Bible says rather than just imbibing popular culture.

So, John's Gospel and this chapter that we've read this morning is helpful for us as we look at this subject.

Please look at John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[ 7 : 17 ] It's binary. Two outcomes. Perishing or eternal life. John 3, 18.

Whoever believes in Him, Jesus, is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Binary. Condemned or not condemned? Perish or eternal life? And the key in this very context here is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus is seen so frequently in scriptures as either the sort of the capstone, the key point or a stone of stumbling.

And it is your relationship with Jesus Christ that is the pivot point upon which your eternal outcome is determined.

[ 8 : 30 ] And as if we were there, we cannot, we cannot remove the person of Jesus Christ from this pivotal discussion.

And that is why as it's stressed in this particular point, Jesus says, he who believes in Him has eternal life.

He who does not believe in Him stands condemned already. Because He alone can deal with the sin issue which is the cause of death.

our relationship with Jesus Christ is fundamental. The meaning of perish and condemnation.

The Bible indicates that after death the experience of those who have not placed trust in Jesus Christ to deal with their sin problem is condemnation. everyone who refuses Jesus' offer to be their sin bearer condemns themselves to bearing their own sin and to suffer the punishment of that.

[ 10 : 01 ] The Bible calls this a second death and that it occurs within a place called hell. Jesus warned frequently of this in strong and unmistakable language.

You cannot read the gospel record without uncomfortably encountering Jesus' statements on this reality. the one from heaven knew with an intense knowledge about hell.

And every time he spoke of it must have been another reminder to him that one day upon the cross at Calvary he would himself bear the hellish sufferings of sin punishment that each one of us deserves.

And he did. for all our sins. But as painful to the Savior as every mention of hell must have been he loved us that much that he warns us constantly so that we may escape that outcome.

The devil who one day will be eternally consigned to hell has done a fine job in deceiving people that hell is just a medieval construct to frighten people.

[ 11 : 27 ] A substantial number of Christian people seem to have accepted this lie as well. Understandable because of our natural revulsion but we have to read our Bibles.

And to those few who seem to entertain a cavalier idea that hell can't really be so bad please think again in the light of the Bible. Hell is that place where all the gracious presence of God is absent and all that remains is unmitigated curse.

scripture says of those who die without Jesus they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

2 Thessalonians 1 verse 9 Because God is the source of all good and hell is the absence of God hell must also be the absence of all good.

Likewise community fellowship and friendship are good rooted in the triune God himself but in the absence of God hell will have no community no camaraderie no friendship bleak aloneness Jesus warns each one of us this morning but he also offers to everyone escape from this condemnation as you repent of your sin and trust Jesus to be your sin bearer and your eternal life giver.

[ 13 : 45 ] Please accept his offer. I want to speak carefully now to those for whom the mention of this subject is painful because of ones that they have known possibly very dear ones who have died and whose eternal destiny is unclear.

We are mercifully not given to know the intimate dealings of God with an individual soul and certainly not at the moment of dying.

It is however instructive and helpful for us to remember that when Jesus died two others died immediately alongside him. one cursing him but the other appealing to him for mercy.

The pre-death lives of these two men may well have been very similar and they are on the crosses because of criminal activity. mercy. But without any regard to the past life Jesus immediately and wholeheartedly receives and welcomes the man who utters a one sentence appeal for mercy.

It's wonderful isn't it? today you will be with me in paradise. Two men one warns us and the other encourages us that there is mercy to be found in a single cry to the Savior.

[ 15 : 40 ] The meaning of eternal life and not condemned. These are the gifts of God's grace experienced in this life.

This side of death filled out gloriously after death in heaven and eventually in the new heaven and the new earth. no condemnation may sound weak but it's a gloriously positive affirmation that sinners like us can amazingly stand before the God who is called holy, holy, holy.

And as he scrutinizes us deeply and from birth to death can yet say of us guiltless, accepted, how can this be?

it is only the covering and provision of the Lord Jesus Christ our sin bearer and our righteousness that can cause the holy God to look on his son and pardon me.

there is no other way to stand unblemished and vindicated before God on the day of your death but to be identified today with Jesus Christ so I say again come to him now the present heaven I spoke just now of heaven then of a new heaven and a new earth this is the teaching of the Bible possibly most clearly expressed in the book of Revelation where the apostle John is given a vision of the present heaven and all that is taking place in that setting the veil is set apart and he's given a sight of what is going on isn't that brilliant that God is so kind to give us that insight but towards the end of the vision he's given us a sight of something even more wonderful and astonishing as a refreshed or completed heaven is joined with a restored earth and the pivot point of this change is the visible and physical return of the

[ 18 : 00 ] Lord Jesus Christ to this earth so in the Bible there's a very clear demarcation of what is happening now in the present heaven and when the things of the present heaven have reached their conclusion and fulfillment and in particular when the church of Jesus Christ is complete the Lord Jesus Christ will then return and it is on that point of return that there is the ushering in of a new heaven and a new earth and I said to you I wanted to give two messages and the first message today is about the present heaven and next week we will look at the new heaven and the new earth we have inherited and absorbed ideas of the present heaven that are sometimes unbiblical and typically very unappealing so let me read you something on that very score which I'm sure you'll be able to say yeah I probably feel a bit like that myself when an

English vicar was asked by a colleague what he expected after death he replied well if it comes to that I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss but I really wish he wouldn't bring up such depressing subjects over the past 15 years this pastor says I've received thousands of letters and have had

hundreds of conversations concerning heaven I've spoken about heaven at churches and conferences I've written about heaven taught at seminary courses there's a great deal I don't know but one thing I do know is that people what people think about heaven frankly I'm alarmed I agree with this statement by John Eldridge in the journey of desire nearly every Christian I've spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service and even though it's very good for us to meet together here as we do

I think you probably feel a bit drained of the thought that what's going on this morning might carry on for even another five hours we have settled on an image of the never ending sing along in the sky one great hymn after another forever and ever amen and our heart sinks forever and ever that's it that's the good news and then we sigh and feel guilty that we're not more spiritual we lose heart and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can Gary Larson captured a common misconception of heaven in one of his far side cartoons in it a man with angel wings and a halo sits on a cloud doing nothing with no one nearby he has the expression of someone marooned on a desert island with absolutely nothing to do and the caption shows his inner thoughts wish I brought a magazine well it strikes a call doesn't it but we're our own worst enemies if we fail to be students of the bible and don't take the trouble not only to see what the words are saying but to use dignified sanctified imagination to realize just how precious and wonderful heaven is how could it not be that the almighty eternal unknowable

God how could this God live in a boring place how could it be so stripped of richness and variety how could it be that people should spend a day there and say I wish I was somewhere else if there's nothing else we take away from this morning that would be a great thought just to sort of put that to bed and to say even if I don't understand this properly I need to know I do know that this is far more wonderful a subject than I've ever got my head around before and now I'm going to dive into some areas about the present heaven which I believe the Bible teaches and I hope you find it chimes with you and is a blessing so what can we say of the present heaven it is the eternal home of God who is three in one this mystery which we cannot understand but there we shall experience we shall experience because we shall be in close presence of that very God and see and experience the love between the persons of the Trinity heaven is also the home of

God's holy angels who serve him day and night ministering in particular for the benefit of every believer do you realize that well Hebrews 1 14 talks about that Hebrews 1 14 do you want to turn that up quickly are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation who are those who inherit salvation us who are we served by angels who sends these serving beings to us God have you ever considered how much you may have been helped or protected by angels in heaven you'll know it will be revealed to you you'll see it is the home of those who belong to [ 24 : 38 ] Jesus Christ he has loved us from all eternity and the names are written in a book of life and in time we have come to know him and entrusted our lives to him all these people from creation until Jesus return are at death welcomed into God's heaven not while he's missing the book is complete it is the place where the risen Lord Jesus Christ in his resurrected body is at God's right hand ruling and raiding the world that he made until all his enemies are vanquished and his church of saved sinners cleansed by his precious blood is complete it is the place where we shall see our savior face to face and all inadequate conceptions of him will be driven away and the faintest ideas of his worthiness sufficiency and glory will be exploded a thousand fold it is the place of overwhelming worship of

God again and again John's vision of heaven is colored by a never ending crescendo of worship song it is the place where we will no longer be troubled by temptation and sin hallelujah do you have a sense of just how much of your life is sort of sucked out and energy driven from you by the trouble of temptation and sin oh it's a pain isn't it every day every day every moment of every day we carry it around with us we don't escape as we get older we sit in the same ways the temptations are just as strong and we battle and we fail and we have to come to

Jesus again for his cleansing not in that place not in that place it is a place where frustration regret disappointment failure misunderstanding and shame will be no more and how much we are troubled by those things how much life is spent in regret how people struggle under the guilt burden of shame in their lives Christian people know these things not there all the things that battles against us in this life within us and outside of us will be removed we will live with clarity wholeness and intensity it is a place where the limitations of our earthly decaying body will be completely removed however it is not the place where

Christian people enjoy resurrected bodies yet the bodies of those who die now remain on earth until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ so in what condition will we be in the present heaven no the Bible is not categoric but John's vision of the present heaven includes description of believers clothed in white robes and evidently Revelation 7 verse 9 from every nation tribe people and language if we were just sort of identikit souls floating around in some sort of soup how could it be that John was able to distinguish people from Africa and Ireland and Ethiopia and the different languages being spoken to be able to say yes this is the great multitude these are the people from every kingdom tongue and tribe this speaks of distinctiveness this speaks of uniqueness it speaks of identity it's a physical description and it's a description that distinguishes between people suggesting that our spirits may be temporarily clothed in a sufficient physical form completely accommodated to heaven but awaiting resurrection life it is the place where

God's people take a lively interest in Christ's reign and rule in contrast to the cartoon version of people given wings and sitting on their individual white clouds plucking harps this place is full of bustle engagement lively interest and refreshed rejoicing also when the New Testament describes Christians who have died as asleep we should not take this to mean that they are unconscious and unaware asleep is New Testament kind code language for death and a reminder that we should all be awoken in resurrection body life when Jesus returns it is the place where each of God's people is with Christ which is far better let's read these exact words of Paul in

[ 31 : 01 ] Philippians 1 21 Philippians 1 21 Philippians is one of the last letters of Paul it is believed he realized he's run his course he's nearing the end I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain if I have to go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labor for me yet what shall I choose I do not know

I'm torn between the two I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body wasn't Paul's choice of course was it but he sort of weighed up those two options and he feels constrained in his spirit to believe that he's actually going to continue for some time because he will enjoy fruitful labor in the Lord I like that thought he's not just going to sort of peter out retire he's going to enjoy in the body fruitful labor in the Lord he says right that's that's fine that's good that's going to be for your blessing but on the other hand if it was down to me personally

I would want to depart and be with Christ because for me that would be gain and it would be far better than anything that I could possibly experience in my present sphere of service far better so let's extrapolate Paul's words from Philippians when he says that to be with Christ in heaven after death is going to be gain and far better than anything he knew whilst living for the Lord on this earth and I think this is a key and it's important for us to take it this tells us that there cannot be anything about the present heaven that is in some way a substandard version of anything we currently enjoy on earth put it into the

Christian context there cannot be anything about the present heaven that is less than the richness and the beauty the splendor and the loveliness of knowing God's spirit at work in his people and being together and working together and seeing him at work in our lives there cannot be it would be so ungodlike for that to be the case I seem to be falling apart but that's alright I am falling apart we'll go with this so shall we know one another in heaven alright that's a big question people have written books about this J.C. Rahr wrote a book about this shall we know one another in heaven good question doesn't actually talk about heaven being a place where oh

Sammy you have a chat with Tim shall we know one another in heaven my answer to that on the basis of the far better and the gain is absolutely surely yes to a deeper and richer level than ever experienced on earth we will also get to know Christian people that we've heard about but never met isn't that going to be lovely are you looking forward to actually talking with Christian people that you've heard about but never met put your hand out Spurgeon that's what Spurgeon yeah Aaron who you like to talk to you put your hand up oh anyone anyone probably someone I never heard of yeah okay well we've all got people

[ 36 : 23 ] I hope you've all got people you think it'd be so interesting to talk to them wouldn't it well I told you last week I would love to talk to John Newton I love his letters and then to be able to speak to him in person wouldn't that be great such a gracious man I would just love to listen to John Newton shall we be aware of what's going on on earth hmm that's an interesting thought I say surely yes in a measure as it concerns the growth of Christ's reign and rule in Revelation 6 verse 10

you turn it up Revelation 6 verse 10 John saw at the opening of the fifth seal

I take this to be present heaven it's ongoing Christ's kingdom is ongoing there's a battle ongoing it's present heaven I saw under the altar the souls of those who have been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained these are martyrs Christian martyrs they died and they're now in the present heaven and they called out in a loud voice how long sovereign lord holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood and each of them was given a white robe and they were told to wait a little longer so these are people they're not angels they're Christian martyrs they've lived a life on earth they have died for Christ and they are in the present heaven and they are appealing to the lord god and saying to him in prayer how long oh lord until you avenge you're asking that question and god gives them an answer and he says you have to wait a little longer so that they are aware of past life they pray to god concerning the situations of earth and god gives reply to their prayers that's interesting isn't it shall we be aware of god's purposes and plans not completely but surely to a far greater measure than we currently enjoy shall we see how god has answered prayer and blessed us in ways that we hardly realize absolutely yeah absolutely we will be humbled by the realization of the largeness of god's work and the perfection of his ways shall we see the fruit of labor that appeared cut short or even fruitless at the time prayers that we have prayed work that we've undertaken which has seemingly come to nothing shall we see any fruit from that absolutely our kind and sharing god will surely be delighted to demonstrate to us the answers to the prayers that we have made some of which may have happened but which we were unaware of and some of which have not yet happened but will happen whilst we are in the present heaven and for those years of labor that appeared quite fruitless as we trudged around this community and gave leaflets through the door and saw bare fruit well we don't know the outcome of all those things but the word of

God says your labor is not in vain revelation 14 13 says blessed are the dead who die in the Lord their deeds will follow them their deeds will follow them you could take that as a matter of rewards I'm happy to actually receive that as a statement that the things that have been begun will in God's providence be completed and that they will have the privilege of experiencing the blessing of that shall we be part of rejoicing when a single sinner on earth repents hmm you think of the verse surely yes I'm thinking of the phrase in Luke 15 10 look at that there it seems like an innocuous parable about a very sort of earthly situation and then it has an extraordinary codicil to it Luke 15 all right this is a parable of the lost coin suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one does she not light her lamp sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it and when she finds it she calls her friends and neighbors together and says rejoice with me I found my lost coin in the same way I tell you that there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents I love the context there the woman has found the lost coin the father has found the lost son and the woman says very glad about that keep that to myself no go run up and down the street knock on the doors get the people in have a party celebrate together because what has been lost has been found and she wants to share in her gladness and so it is

I think we are going to enjoy the tremendous delight of being able to rejoice with the angels in the presence of the father over every sinner who repents and so there are many people on your prayer list for whom you are praying and some of those may not come to faith in Jesus Christ in your lifetime but our gracious God will give you the privilege of rejoicing in his presence by the knowledge of the day when they do come to him I do remember dear lady back in my park all days and she prayed for her daughter all her life and she died and it was quite soon after she died that her daughter came to faith in Christ I'm utterly convinced that our gracious abundant heavenly father would have been the first to tell that dear mother your daughter has come to know you to know him to know him it's your daughter

[ 44 : 48 ] I can almost imagine the father God summoning the people who are close to the situation in the vast company of heaven and saying come close come and just listen to this great news this is what's happened shall we be part of the welcoming party as each newly died saint enters heaven amen and amen how could it be otherwise hebrews 12 1 which is a very well known verse says this since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses and he's referring to those people of faith who have gone before have all died at hebrews 11 the people of faith and there is an interpretation which is completely valid which says they are there as a kind of passive encouragement and testimony to us of the importance of continuing faithful to our

God and encouragement for us as we read their lives and indeed that's what we do as we read Christian biography anyhow we are encouraged by that thought but there's another way of interpreting that verse and it is this it's to say we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses They are in the present heaven and they are the ones who actually take a very keen interest in the development of the Christian and they are very keenly interested in how we do progress through our lives and they are going to be so rejoicing when we go through heaven's portals on death they're cheering us on rather than being a disinterested backdrop rising and they rise to applaud as we reach the finishing line which is completely natural isn't it anything that may have been enjoyed and experienced in this life as a Christian is completely trumped expanded deepened by the phrase far better far better and it's for you and me to think about these things to ponder them to make use of sanctified imagination and develop pictures and thoughts of the heaven to which we abound which are rich in hope and expectation brothers and sisters we need this we do need this as Colossians 3 verse 1 says set your hearts on things above this present heaven is a place where we God servants will be participants with the Lord Jesus Christ as he completes the vanquishing of his enemies the building of his church and the creation of his bride and so the call goes out today to join this king king Jesus because heaven is not yet full and is not yet complete and there is space and there is room and there is grace to spare and running over and there is a welcome for a person just like you and me any of us in this room today there is a welcome to be found in this present heaven because a gracious God who sent his son not to condemn the world but to save it presents his son again to you today and says don't be your own sin bearer don't bury yourself under the condemnation and burden of that sin which will only leave you into this second death but come to the saviour

Jesus Christ who bears our sin and offers us eternal life and the spirit of the bride say come and let him who hears say come whoever is thirsty let him come and whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life amen we have a great song to finish it is crowned here with many crowns number 480 ending Thank you.