

# How can you have hope in the face of death?

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Preacher: Phil Martin

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Rachel, I should probably introduce you, but maybe you could introduce yourself. Hello everyone, I'm Rachel, I'm 23 years old, I am married to Isaac, who isn't here tonight, but we've been married for a year and a half. I'm a Christian, I...
- Well, I... Okay, yeah, so I enjoy having... I enjoy playing music, and... Oh, I grew up near here, I grew up in Sydenham, which...
- Where did you go to school, somewhere near here? Yeah, I went to school in Catford to a... yeah, a church... sorry. A school called St. Darcy's College, which I was in from year one to year 13, so...
- I really didn't change very much. And I grew up in Sydenham from when I was three years old, and I only moved out for university, so I've been here for a long time. And I also have a medical condition called cystic fibrosis.
- We're going to come back to some of those things in just a minute. But, so, you're a Christian. Perhaps we can start there. Could you tell us how did that come about?
- [ 1 : 2 3 ] Yeah, my parents are Christians, and they very faithfully taught me the Christian message from a young age. I also went to Grace Church, Dulwich, when I was young, and was faithfully taught the gospel message there, in Sunday School Youth Group, and in our church.
- So, that was very, very wonderful. Yeah, I'm all so faithful in teaching me about the Lord Jesus, who is the King, because he has created everything through him, his life.
- And so, he demands obedience from us, because he is our good King, Creator. But, we all by nature reject him.
- And that I had, by nature, rejected him. And so, I deserved his punishment. But, this same Lord, this same King, out of his great love for me, the Lord Jesus came and died in my place.
- He took the punishment that I deserved, so that he might offer me forgiveness. And so, this same Lord that I will meet on the final day, as the judge of all, he has paid my debt.
- [ 2 : 4 6 ] And so, I no longer need to be afraid of the judgment that I deserve, because he's already paid it. But, wonderfully, it's...
- The gospel message isn't simply a message of forgiveness, but also of being brought into God's family. And so, I've experienced that blessing for myself. But, yeah, it is so wonderful that, through the Lord Jesus, anyone who believes in him is adopted into God's family, and has life with him for eternity.
- So, I was really grateful that I was taught that message from a very young age. And, by God's grace, I trusted it. And, yeah, God's been very faithful to me.
- Was there ever a moment, as you were sort of growing up, that you sort of felt, you know, you thought, why do I believe this? And, you know, did you ever have to sort of think, as an adult, to reassess, actually, is this stuff that I've been taught as a kid, is it true?
- Was there ever that kind of process, or was it fairly sort of smooth sailing, straightforward for you? Sorry, I just turned off. I...

[ 3 : 58 ] In general, it was quite smooth sailing, I would say. The Lord graciously held me and gave me wonderful features to explain the Bible to me.

And as I grew up and read it for myself, I discovered that it was true. I wouldn't say there were particular moments where I thought it wasn't true, although I do remember having particular questions when I was growing up that I wanted to have an answer to.

I wasn't planning on saying this. When I was younger, there was a point when I was attending church, and I don't know if any of you have seen the Truman Show, but there was a point, I didn't, I sort of thought it semi-seriously, like, what if this is like a great situation experiment?

But thankfully, I think what helped me think through that was just seeing the lights of those around me, and seeing their great love for me, and love for Christ, and just, yeah, seeing that they'd been transformed.

It wasn't just something that they were trying to manipulate or anything like that. So we're talking about hope in the face of death, and you mentioned you've got cystic fibrosis, many of us, perhaps, will only be hazy about what that actually means, what it looks like, perhaps you could just fill us in on some of that.

[ 5 : 30 ] Yeah, so cystic fibrosis is a hereditary condition, which means that I was born with it, and I will have it until I die.

It's, because it's a condition that affects my DNA, it means that it affects a lot of my life, particularly my lung condition is not so great, and also my digestive system is affected as well.

So as you can imagine, it's something I have to think about every day. I have to do some medical routines, and physio, and medicines, and things like that. and also I'm more likely to get chest infections, and when I do get them, they're more likely to be a bit harder to recover from, or I often have to be put on antibiotics, a bit stronger antibiotics, than maybe some others would be.

so, yeah, I have a medical routine that I do every day, and when I'm ill, particularly, it might take a bit, a bit longer, than when I'm well.

Sometimes, it can, there was a time a couple of years ago where it would take me about two to three hours of every day just to do the medical routine, but a lot of it is just maintaining, because I can't recover from having a cystic fibrograceous, because I have it, the medical routines I have are about maintaining health, rather than necessarily improving it.

[ 7 : 07 ] So, yeah, they are things that I will have to do all the time, and if I wasn't to do them for a long time, I would die, and also, even, even if I was to keep doing them, the statistics say that it is more likely that I will die early, so, yeah, I have a lower life expectancy, but this was particularly for me when I was at school, and I was about seven years old, so my parents hadn't hidden any of this from me, but I think it particularly came home to me when I was about seven or eight, and my best friend from school had been, she knew I had cystic fibrosis and she'd done some research, and she came into school one day and said, Rachel, you're going to die before me.

obviously, none of us know when that will happen, and that might not be true, but I think it particularly came home to me at that time, that, yeah, I think I've been aware of the sweetness of life from a longer age.

how do you cope, how have you coped with the prospect of death seeming much closer to you? Yeah, this might sound a bit strange to say, but in some ways, I'm quite grateful for the, that cystic fibrosis has taught me a bit about the fleetingness of life and the imminence of my death.

I'm quite grateful to, to know that I am a finite creature. We all know this, but we can pretend like it's not the case.

And, so I've been grateful that cystic fibrosis has brought that home to me a little bit more than perhaps I would have otherwise. And, I've known, therefore, that I, I need to be ready for that day when I will die and meet my creator.

[ 9 : 12 ] And, I'm really grateful that I have been told the gospel message and told it faithfully. And, I, I have no need to fear death because, yeah, well, I don't have, thankfully because, because I know the gospel, I don't have any unknowns about death.

I know that, I will, I will meet my creator. And, yet, my future judge is also my present saviour.

So, I already have a personal relationship with him. So, I know that when I meet him, it will be, it will be a time of joy when I get to see him face to face. And, because I have trust in Jesus, it means that death is more the gateway into a life of eternity with him rather than something to be feared.

And, yeah, something about eternity is that it's, it's a, it's a wonderful thing. It's, I think we can maybe hear the word eternity and think, gosh, is that just floating around?

On a cloud? Quite a boring time? But, no, because it is, will be with the author of life, the very good God who gives us all good things.

[ 10 : 42 ] It's a physical face. It's the Bible for us at the new creation. And, all the good things that we experience in this life will be there perfect.

And, all the bad things that we experience, they won't be there. So, it's a wonderful thing to look forward to, that I look forward to. And, I, yeah, I think the Christian hope of death really came home to me when, there was a time when I was in Sunday school and my Sunday school teacher at the time really graciously told us we must have been 10 or something, but she told us that her dad had died and she revealed to us how she was feeling and one verse is that we're encouraging her in that time and that she was mourning but also rejoicing because her father was a Christian and she knew that she would see him again and that he was with the Lord Jesus.

and, what a difference that makes that the Bible talks about how we, as Christians, we mourn and yet we do, we don't mourn with those who have no hope because we do have a hope in the Lord Jesus after death.

Lots of people would, would think, might be thinking to themselves, yeah, of course you would want that stuff to be true about hope beyond death but actually it's just wishful thinking, it's an emotional crutch, you hear that quite a lot, just to kind of help us cope.

So, I guess, you know, where do you get your confidence that it is not just a wishful thinking kind of hope that it's just going to turn out to be nothing and isn't real?

[ 12 : 51 ] Yeah, well, I think it's something that we all do wish to be true and so the question is how can, yeah, how can we have confidence and God clearly promises it in the Bible so I suppose the question underlying it is that how can we trust that God keeps his promises and this is just my perspective on this if a guest has, if you're a guest and someone's brought you do ask them about what gives them confidence in this but I think particularly for me trusting God's promises he has a wonderful track record in the Bible of him keeping his promises the most significant of course being the Lord Jesus he as it was foretold in the scriptures he died and rose again and because God has promised that that is the same for the Christian the Christian although they die they will rise again through Jesus that gives me great confidence that God can keep that promise he's already risen the Lord Jesus but it's more than that because the Bible talks about how when we put our trust in Jesus we become united to him so it's not just that

Jesus died and rose again over here and God does a similar thing with me over here but that because Jesus died and rose again I have confidence that I like this illustration a helpful way of thinking about it is imagine if Jesus is like the needle and Christians are the thread Jesus goes through the veil of death he goes through that garment and the thread has to follow and so as Jesus died and rose again so it is a guarantee for all those who put their trust in him that we also die and rise again so that's one of the things that gives me great confidence and the other thing is that it's just seeing people's lives around me who have been changed by the Lord Jesus the Bible talks about how without him we are spiritually dead and that when we put our trust in him we are spiritually raised to life so there's a resurrection work that goes on there and an example of this is my husband he became a Christian at university and he would be the first to say that his life really radically changed when he put his trust in Jesus he had a love for God and a love for others that he absolutely did not have before his anger his frustrations his pride were completely turned upside down and it's not something that he could have done himself it was definitely

God's work in him and so seeing that kind of resurrection life and in my life and those around me who I know become Christians like God has done the spiritual resurrection of course he will follow through with the physical resurrection so these things give me particular confidence in the hope the hope of death the hope after death with the Lord Jesus I imagine this might be raising all kinds of questions for people here and there'll be time to ask those if you'd like to just what difference then does it make to you do you think to be a Christian with cystic fibrosis I think it makes a huge amount of difference well firstly I suppose the most obvious one is that I'm looking forward to the new creation where I will have a body that doesn't have CF which would be wonderful so I'm looking forward to that day but it's more than that

I'm simply looking forward to the new creation and I don't really care about this life quite the opposite it means that I have a contentedness in this life that I wouldn't have otherwise to give an example I think the time particularly the times when I've spent a lot of time doing medicines someone could look on that and think wow what a waste of time not a waste of time but it feels so unprofitable because you're doing the same thing every single day you don't see any difference I think that would probably make me quite bitter and envious of other people if I didn't have my trust in Jesus but I actually have a contentedness with that because I know my value isn't in what I do I know this time isn't all there is but that instead my value is found in the Lord

Jesus and what he says about me that he has adopted me my status under him is part of his family I know the Lord Jesus and this is actually what we were made for it's what life is all about so I already have the fullness of life in the Lord Jesus even though it might not look like it with all the things that I have to do that I have all that I seek and the new creation will just be a continuation of that with the physical reality matching up to that that I already have every spiritual blessing in Jesus so that gives me real contentedness that's the difference in this life and also I think it gives me greatest joy with the things I do get to experience so I want to be God gives us many good gifts gifts and it is a wonderful thing to be able to enjoy them as gifts because I don't need to put any pressures on them that they can't hold all the wonderful things that

[19:15] God has given me I can be thankful for them rather than resentful for things that I might be missing out on and really I know I'm not really missing out on them because these things they last to give them for humble with God's given me the wonderful gift of marriage and I have great joy in being married to Isaac it's a great time but the Bible talks about how a lot of the wonderful gifts that we have are pointed forward to the new creation where they'll be in their fullest fulfilment and perfected there and so as I'm enjoying marriage now God says that is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church which we experience now but it is going to be at its fullest fulfilment in the new creation so even as I'm enjoying marriage now with Isaac

I know that it's going to bring forward to an even greater reality and I don't need to be worried about missing out on things because in the new creation they will come to their fulfilment and I suppose lastly as well I don't have a fear of death as I've said already but if Jesus is the author of life and my trust is in him and he has defeated death then I know that he will take me through with him as with every believer to have life to the full in the future so there might be people thinking well you know that's that's you and that's your issues but what relevance does that have for me and for those of us without cystic fibrosis yeah I suppose to put it bluntly we're all going to die

I may well die earlier than my peers but that doesn't mean that death is not there for everyone when my parents I have a brother and when they taught us the gospel good news about Jesus they didn't change a single word for my brother Jesus is his king and he must submit to him and find new life in him as well thankfully he has and he needs to be ready for the day when he's going to meet Jesus and so we all need to be ready for that day now I think the shadow of death lies heavily on us doesn't it I think more heavily on us than we may sometimes realise just think how much of our lives and decisions are really governed by that quiet knowledge that the clock is ticking it can seem a distant problem can't it death but that the clock is ticking and we don't have long that death is coming there's a guy called

Ernest Becker who is not a Christian but he wrote a book called *The Denial of Death* I don't know if you've seen it or heard of it he talks about the fear of death governing much more than we think though we may deny it and here's a quote from him he says it is the basic fear that influences all others a fear from which no one is immune no matter how disguised it may be there's an American philosopher called William James who puts it like this he says death is the worm at the core of human happiness that puts it pretty well doesn't it I've been thinking recently about how strange it is that photos of happy scenes in the past can make us sad and I don't know if you have experienced that but maybe the childhood photo the university photo of the university mates 20 years ago or the photos of the kids when they were small why is that nostalgia is a really strange thing isn't it but it's death that explains it because quietly we know that those happy times of the past are gone forever never to return death brings everything to an end and as much as we may pretend we don't mind really that is simply a coping mechanism how to cope with something that we can't do anything about just have a look down at these words of

Jesus again it's on page 34 let me read them verse 25 there Jesus said to her I am the resurrection and the life whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die do you believe this I'm just going to draw out two points from these sentences that Jesus says a stunning claim and a stunning hope a stunning claim just look down at those words again I think it's surprising he says I am not I give you see that I am life I am the resurrection and the life what kind of claim is this no other human being has ever made a claim that comes close to this and being taken seriously not only by the people of his day who took him seriously but then by countless millions in the centuries gone by that in itself is worth considering isn't it how could that be but what kind of claim is it

[ 25 : 55 ] I think it is greater than we may think firstly it is an identity claim if he is the resurrection and the life then he is saying that he is the source of true life and who else could be the source of resurrection eternal life but the creator God himself God the Son it is an identity claim Jesus is not claiming to be a visionary with a map where a visionary with a map where he points and says life is over there or do this that and the other do a kind of religious system keep the ten commandments or keep the five pillars or whatever it is if you do that follow these religious rules then you can have life now he's claiming to be the one who is the source of true life and when we come to christianity we find that jesus claims to be far greater than we had imagined perhaps uncomfortably so the second thing is this is a claim to uniqueness i am rather than i give in other words if you want life you must come to me jesus is saying i'm not just one of well i hope you can see here that jesus is saying that he is not one of many paths up a mountain to life it is better to say that christ is the mountain if we want life we must come to him that by the way is why he says whoever believes in me do you see that if we want life we must abandon all other hope and come to him it is a stunning claim of course the question comes is it just an empty claim is it an empty promise like so many politicians giving the promises that they don't fulfil well no it isn't an empty promise because actually if you read on just in this chapter a few words later jesus says these words to a man who is dead in the tomb he says lazarus come out and the man who had been dead for four days came out in full sight of everyone and if you read on you see that the whole the whole nation learns of this public event that of course is why he was taken seriously by those first followers who were with him he backed up his claims and so a stunning claim identity as god uniqueness not simply i give but i am now this may raise all kinds of questions which i'd love to hear them in just a minute secondly briefly a stunning hope and the point i want to make here is that heaven is not the consolation prize but the main event heaven is not the consolation but the main event i am the resurrection so there are versions of christianity i think where the idea of heaven is

is like the consolation prize after this life you come across that perhaps that's perhaps that's what you think take for example the word afterlife often used but i think that gives the game away it's in the name isn't it afterlife the idea that that heaven isn't the main event in fact actually but the main event is life now and that actually what jesus came to bring was some kind of eternal post-match analysis or post-match warm down the afterlife after the great joys and dramas of this life have been lived well if that's the case then to be honest who cares just get on and live your life and whatever happens in the afterlife will happen but look down at verse 25 whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live where is the main event when is life going to be fully experienced and enjoyed according to jesus not primarily in this life but beyond death in the resurrection do you see that yet shall he live a better phrase is heaven is not the afterlife but the life after i have a friend who has a picture on the wall he's a christian he has a picture on the wall that simply says the best is yet to come and that is true for the christian it's why rachel and it's why all christians can live and die with such hope listen to this account of a 14 year old girl who had put her trust in christ eliza cunningham on her deathbed at near the end she was informed that she had not long to live and she responded oh that's good news indeed a 14 year old girl can you imagine that on her last day she was asked how she felt truly happy if this is dying then it's a pleasant thing to die don't cry for me rather rejoice praise on my account how can a dying 14 year old girl say that well she had understood that jesus is the resurrection and the life and that she was losing nothing as she died but her life stood before her as an eternal horizon dawning yet to come jesus says these words later he says my kingdom is not of this world and of his people they are not in the world they are in the world but not of the world the life he is bringing is not for in this world but far far greater than that and we heard rachel speak again and again didn't we about the new creation a full bodied resurrection future with god that is the life that we were made for and the life that we long for and it will be forever and then forever again i sometimes enjoy thinking about this once we have lived in god's presence as his children in a new creation for an eternity there will be another eternity to come and then another and it will just get better and better it's impossible to get our heads around actually but one thing we do know it is not the afterlife but the life after that is the hope of the christian heaven is not the consolation prize but the main

event we were driving out of london the other day and we got to a bit in chelsea that someone had written someone had written a massive one word on a wall hope well i hope you can see that in these verses jesus takes that word and makes it real well this probably is the most wonderful thing about being a christian for me is the hope just a final thing to say a stunning claim a stunning hope and then finally a searching question do you see that the searching question that jesus asks all of us it's the same one he asks martha at the end of verse 26 he says i am the resurrection and the life far greater saviour than you had dared to imagine and then verse 26 do you believe this it's a searching question isn't it it's the question he asks to each of us rachel if you have if you have to do all this horrendous stuff to keep living and you're so looking forward to heaven why bother yeah i can totally understand why someone would ask that and i suppose that there are a few things to say to that firstly it's not my job to decide when i live but when i die god is the creation of all life and he will take me when he refuses to so that's that's the first way but also like what a wonderful life we have even though it's so full of difficulties god gives us so many generous gifts and i think i don't appreciate half of them as i should but he gives us all including me very very wonderful things to enjoy this life and yeah the other thing i was going to say was he's also given those who follow jesus we have a job and my job here on earth is to make the lord jesus known and there are many ways i can do that even if i have other things to do like maintaining my health and all the other things that we may have duties for but as a christian i have the wonderful job of making jesus known and having a life full of prayer and thanks to him who has given me all the wonderful things he has and how would you deal with the question why has god made me like this that is also a good question and certainly what the bible says is that it's not because of anything that it's not for any sin that either me or my parents have done that i was born this way i can't answer why god has made me this way he has his reasons and he hasn't revealed them specifically to me but i know that whatever reason he has is good and there are many best things out of it such as as i mentioned earlier just being grateful for knowing a bit better my length of time my pace in this life and i'm sure there are many there may be many other reasons that they would be good there are

many other questions which you can pitch in please do if you like to we've got a great one here i'd like to know more about heaven being a physical place that's a surprise yeah i mean it was a surprise to me as a 23 year old actually i've been a christian for 10 years before i realised the bible was very very clear that heaven is a physical place there's lots of ways to answer that one way i think that's helped me is that god didn't get the ingredients for perfection wrong when he made the thing in the first place he made a physical world he made us with physical bodies he made us designed us to be to enjoy him in relationship with him but in his place in his physical world to enjoy his blessings so i think it would be surprising if heaven was anything other than that actually that would be surprising if heaven therefore were a kind of disembodied spiritual experience much more sense that actually god says no when i make heaven when i make a new creation it's going to have the fundamental ingredients that it had at the start except it's going to be better that's one thought for you on that anything you want to add there how can we believe in the life after when we cannot see it just take up these gospels again and turn to page 59



Thomas one of Jesus' disciples asks this exact question on page 59 he says he hasn't seen Jesus rise from the dead at that point and the others say in verse 25 they say we've seen the Lord but he says unless I see his hands and the mark of his nails and place my finger in the mark of his nails and place my hand inside I will never believe in other words unless I see I will never believe Jesus then comes again and shows himself and says verse 27 put your finger here and see my hands do not disbelieve but believe Thomas at that point is completely convinced and he says my Lord and my God which is the response to the risen Lord Jesus but then look at Jesus' words back to him have you believed because you've seen me blessed are those who have not yet seen who have not seen and yet have believed so how can we believe in something we haven't seen well in a sense we have seen it the apostles his disciples that generation saw it and they have done our seeing for us and they have passed down the witness of what they saw to us and

[ 41 : 09 ] Jesus says you've got enough you don't need any more evidence you've got what you need to believe in who I am I'm sure there's more we could say on that question that's a great question thank you for it why is this life why in this life are there such difficult circumstances if God is the creator so why I guess that's a question about why suffering why any of this come to page one or page three and it's just there in the first in verse five or a hint of it really the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it Jesus speaks of this world as being in darkness by which he means we are under the judgment of God for our collective rebellion against him saying that we want to live life our own way why is the world as it is the Bible says it is because we are actually in darkness and the difficulties and struggles and sufferings that we face are meant to point us to the fact that there is something wrong with our relationship with God and we need a saviour there's lots more we need to say on that subject if somebody suffers does that mean they're a particular they're being punished for sin no

Jesus is very clear about that he gets asked that question later in this gospel we won't go there now but in general terms why is the world as it is it is because of our broken relationship with God and it's meant to point us to our need for a saviour why can you yes great questions here questions about the bible how can we trust the bible why do we trust what the bible says about life after death or is John's gospel based on reliable evidence there's lots of ways to there's lots of reasons why we can believe that this is true one of them is if you read it it has a ring of eyewitness truth about it that's not something that you can quantify scientifically but read it and see what you think the disciples who wrote these things down they went and died most of them for what they believed for what they'd said now why would you do that for something that you knew to be a lie these are trustworthy eyewitness accounts

Jesus himself we perhaps won't go there now but he speaks of the old testament scriptures as the scriptures so Jesus held the belief that the old testament was the word of God and the old testament speaks of the same hope and then you will see again as you read through this that Jesus commissions those twelve eyewitnesses to be his special witnesses in the world and he says when I'm gone the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth speaking to the apostles so that they would be equipped to take his words to the world and that's one of the reasons we can trust that these are the words of Jesus and the words of God in five minutes in three minutes we probably can't answer that question from every angle but maybe there's enough there to make us think actually it's worth reading it's worth looking into for myself now do we have any other questions that I've missed

I'm sure we do do you envisage the new creation being like living life on earth in the same corporal body with the same activities etc no so we're given new bodies the Bible says Jesus talks about a resurrection completely new bodies these bodies will be gone thankfully and he compares it to the difference between a seed and a plant this body is like the seed that's sown but the new resurrection body will be like the plant almost no continuity it's completely unimaginably different and better there will be no sense in which our bodies will be flawed or failing or dying there will be no sin it'll be just think about that for a second there will be no selfishness no sin only love for each other and only love for God that would change the world in an instant wouldn't it it would be unrecognisable the Bible talks about the new creation being a world in which nothing destroys and nothing harms and gives images like the child we are to play the whole with the snake and the lion will lie down with the lamb it will be unrecognisably different no more of anything that spoils and it will be a completely new creation and that just gets the imagination spinning

God says enough in the Bible about it to show us what it's going to be like but it doesn't give us a really sort of blow by blow account because actually it's going to be beyond our wildest dreams thank you very very much indeed for coming it's been a delight to be with you and to be cheering over this issue together please come and ask me questions I'm going to be sticking around and can I say can we all say a huge thank you to Rachel for sharing her story thank you