

# Former Things Passed Away

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]      terms of what God is, how God is going to recreate, or what God is going to do away with in this world. But we also want to keep in front of our minds how we get there, because there's no point in talking about heaven if it's going to be excluded to us.

The fact is that tonight heaven is excluded to nobody. The door is open. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and life. He said, whoever believes in me shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. That's, in other words, saying if you really want to go to, that's what Kenny I was talking about this morning. He said, ask yourself this question. Do you really, really long to be with the Lord? That's about the most important question you can ever ask. What does God mean to you in many ways this service? As a follow-on from what we heard this morning, do you really long to be with the Lord, or are you so caught up with this world and the things that are familiar to you in this world that you can't let it go? Well, ask God tonight to show you how important it is to be saved, because that's what God wants. That's why the Lord came into the world. That's why Jesus came into the world to seek and to save those who were lost, like you and I. There is no more crucial issue in this world. Now, if somebody tonight was to come to me, and again, this is a bit of a digression, but it doesn't matter, because I'm keeping the open door in front of us. We're always going to refer what we're talking to Jesus when he was still on the earth as teaching. If somebody came to me tonight and said, how much does it cost me to be a Christian? How much will it cost? Now,

I know you're not talking about money, but how much will it cost to be a Christian? My answer would be two things, two words. It would be nothing, and it would be everything, because that is what the Bible teaches. It costs us nothing in the sense that you cannot work your way into God's favor or into God's city. You cannot save yourself. There is never enough goodness in any one of us to live the life that God requires us to live in our hearts and in our conversation and in our conduct. We, none of us, have enough goodness to gain favor with God. The whole point of Jesus' death on the cross was to pay the penalty that every one of us deserved so that by his free gift, which he offers to each one of us tonight, we can come into heaven and we can be saved. So, to that extent, our salvation costs nothing.

It's all been done for us. There's nothing for you to do. Jesus has done it all. He's paid the price of our sin. All we need to do is take that step of faith into his kingdom. But in another sense, it costs everything, because God demands our soul, our life, our all. If you're a Christian tonight, you are 100% a Christian. You have to be. It means forsaking all. You remember, I think I said this, faith. If you take the words F-A-I-T-H. I must have said this loads of times. Forsaking all, I take him.

Forsaking all. Jesus demands that you turn your back on the life that you've lived up until this point and turn to him and wholeheartedly. In other words, the door of heaven. You can't take your baggage with you. You come as you are. You come by yourself and you come looking to Jesus alone for your salvation.

[ 4 : 0 3 ]      But you have to leave the rest behind. All of it. Everything that you have becomes his. Some of it has to be evicted altogether. Everything that is sinful in your life. Everything becomes oriented to the Lord.

My life, every aspect of it becomes the Lord's. Well, you can say, well, there's a sense in which is the Lord's anyway, because I can't do anything without the Lord. And that's why it's so daft not to be a Christian. Because you're accountable to God and you owe everything you are and everything you have to the Lord. I can't understand someone who doesn't recognize that and who doesn't come straight to the Lord and say, well, I can't breathe without you. So take my all. Instead, we try and kid ourselves on that we can live our own lives by ourselves in our own way, doing our own thing.

And the Lord also said that there's a calculation that we need to make. And he says, sit down first and do the maths. Calculate what it's going to cost you to follow me over and against your willingness to forsake everything. He said this for which one of you who desires to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish. So therefore, he says, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Luke chapter 14, 28 to 33. Read it for yourself.

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has, he cannot be my disciple. The other day, I was sitting down in the front room with a cup of coffee and I switched the TV on. Sometimes watch the news in the morning over a cup of coffee and I switched on. There was this program called Wanted Down Under. So I started watching it for a few minutes. I hadn't seen it before. The idea of the program is that they take this couple, this family, who are thinking of moving to Australia, from Britain to Australia. And the idea is that they follow them and they, of course, the man and his wife, let's say it's a man and a wife, and they investigate the kind of jobs that might be available. And he'll go for interviews and the wife will go for interviews, of course, because the first thing they want to calculate is how much income they're going to have in Australia to be able to afford to live. So they'll do all that and they'll find out what the job situation is, how easy it is to get a job and all the rest. So then they go and look around at the houses, what they can afford for the money that they have. And they go around a few houses and then they check out the cost of living then. They go to the shops, they find out how much a pint of milk costs and they find out how much breakfast cereal costs and all the rest of it. Then they put all the different factors together, like what kind of leisure they're going to have and what the weather is going to be like and what kind of sports they can be involved in, how good the schools are to bring up their kids and all of these things. And at the end of the program, they sit down with a piece of paper and they calculate all the pros of moving to Australia against the cons. Here are the advantages, here's how much salary I'm going to make, here is how well off we're going to be, here's the house prices and all the rest of it, here's the kind of life we're going to have. But then we're going to have to leave our extended family in England.

We're going to have to leave what we're familiar with back home and so on and so forth. And they weigh it all up. And they make a decision.

[ 8 : 12 ] And that's what the Lord says to us in these verses. For which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost? So I'm not, you know, sometimes in our eagerness as ministers, I'm as guilty as anyone.

I sometimes leave this bit out. But the Lord says, renounce all he has. You know what, though? I cannot understand anyone that chooses the life that you have in this world, which will come to an end and which will result in you standing before God guilty on the day of judgment.

And on that day, you won't be able to go back to your old life. It'll all be gone. It'll be a memory, a distant memory in the past. I can't understand anyone who does not want to go to heaven and is not prepared to renounce all the trivialities of this life for the greatest gift that you could possibly have.

I don't understand that calculation at all. It doesn't add up in my mind. So by all means, do the maths, but make sure you come to the right conclusion at the end of the day.

Please. Anyway, that was a diversion. I just don't ever want to lose sight of. It's connected, of course, with what we're talking about. It's heaven we're talking about here. And we're looking, of course, at the second of the categories, which is this.

[ 9 : 51 ] The former things. We looked at the first thing, which was that the dwelling of God was with man. But now we're looking. I want to look at these three things in which the former things, we're told, have passed away.

The former things have passed away. Now, the three things are this. First of all, he sees a new heaven and the new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

That's the first thing that passes away. The first heaven and the first earth. The second thing is that the sea is no more. Verse 1. The sea was no more.

And then the third thing that has passed away is this, that God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of his people.

These three things that God promises will pass away. The first thing is the old heaven and the old earth. The one that you know, you and I are familiar with.

[ 10 : 57 ] The universe that we know that was made by God, but that was so spoiled when humankind decided to live their own way instead of obeying God. God's plan is, and I believe I can prove this from Scripture, is to strip away.

I said this two weeks ago that God will remodel the universe. I do not believe that God will obliterate every single atom and molecule that is in this current existence.

But he will strip away everything that is necessary for him to bring down upon this earth his new city, the new city, the new heaven, and the new earth.

And I go to Romans chapter 8 just to try and prove this to you, where Paul says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time, verse 18, are not worthy to compare with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Here the apostle Paul is comparing what he calls the sufferings of this present time, this present earth, with the glory that God is going to reveal and he's going to give to us.

[ 12 : 02 ] Verse 19, listen to this, For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly.

What is Paul saying to us? He's saying that, although we don't understand this, that somehow creation itself, the environment, the animal kingdom, the mountains, the trees, the weather system, the seas, everything that makes up what we know as the place that God has created in this world, that there's a sense in which it's groaning.

I believe he's speaking pictorially or figuratively here. But what he's saying to us is that a day will come when God will set free that creation which has suffered because of our foolishness and our sin and disobedience.

[ 13 : 25 ] Somehow or other, God will liberate the universe. There will be a renewed universe. He will set it right. He will orientate.

Instead of orientating it in the wrong way, he will fix it so that it is what it always should have been in the first place.

It's no longer a victim, a helpless victim of our sin. Now, that's all I'm going to say. That's all I can say. Because there's nothing much that we know more than that.

Something for discussion. The whole of creation. The whole of creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

And at the former things, the old heaven and the old earth has passed away. The second thing that the apostle sees is that there is no more sea.

[ 14 : 23 ] What does this mean? Well, again, once again, we have to remember that he's talking figuratively. We have to ask ourselves, what does the sea represent? Particularly in the book of Revelation, it represented, first of all, what John was surrounded by.

Remember, John was writing this on the island of Patmos. And the sea for him was what cut him off from his friends and his family and his brothers and sisters in the Lord.

He could not worship any longer with the other people in Ephesus and the places which he knew. He longed to be with them. They cut him off.

And there was no communication in those days. There were letters. There were letters if you were fortunate enough to find someone who was willing to take your letter. But there were no communications like we have telephone and Skype and email.

Nothing like that was ever dreamed of. And so if you were on an island, that was it for months and years and decades. You had no idea who was still alive and who wasn't.

[ 15 : 25 ] And for John, he had no idea how the Christian church was progressing, whether it was in remission or whether it was advancing. He knew that, of course, that he had the promise of God to take hold of.

And all he knew was that the Roman Empire was as rampant as ever, as powerful as ever. And for all the world, it looked as if the Roman Empire was going to ultimately succeed and obliterate every Christian.

That's the way it looked. And the sea represented all the uncertainty of this life, just like it represents for us. When you cross the Minch, you don't know what kind of weather it's going to be.

It could be calm one day. It could be mountainous waves the next. The Isle of Lewis could be here for two or three days without sailing. We don't know. We have to check up Calmac every time we sail, especially at this time of year.

It's even worse in the Mediterranean, apparently, because the sea can erupt at any given moment. You remember in the book of Acts when the Apostle Paul was crossing with the soldiers and how all of a sudden, contrary to the weather expectations, the sea erupted and the boat, the ship was lost and they were shipwrecked.

[ 16 : 34 ] Well, that's what the sea represented. It represented a world that was full of darkness in which you simply did not know. You're never allowed to relax for too long because what could be calm one day is an eruption.

And you see this all around us in any case, even in the 21st century. You cannot predict what is going to happen. I grew up in the Cold War where there was the Berlin Wall and where the constant threat of nuclear war was hanging over us all the time.

The young folk won't know anything about that. There was terror. Everybody thought. My age group, we thought, and older, we all thought the world was going to end because Russia was going to launch a nuclear missile on America.

And America was going to launch nuclear missiles. We're all going to be blown. And it didn't happen. The Berlin Wall is now a relic of the past.

Germany is unified and so on. It's the same nowadays. We don't know what the Arab Spring is going to result in. We don't know what Iran is going to do. We don't know who's going to acquire nuclear weapons and when and if they are ever going to live, whether they're ever going to be used.

[ 17 : 44 ] The sea, what's calm today, is turmoil tomorrow. And it was the same in the day of John. And I want to just spend a couple of minutes assuring everyone that God is in control.

That's what this book is all about, that there's a throne room, a control room in heaven, and a control room that oversees and supervises everything that we don't understand why things happen the way they do.

We don't understand why God allows things to happen the way they happen. And yet, God is in control. And that's why, perhaps if you're a young person today, and I know young people who are despairing right now because they hear the credit crunch, they hear that there's no jobs, and they conclude, what's the point in going to university?

What's the point in getting an apprenticeship? What's the point in working? There's no jobs. And I know people who have gone through four years in university, and they now don't have anything, and so therefore, why should I work in school?

I'll just give up. Can I tell you something? If you're a Christian young person today, do not give up.

[ 19 : 10 ] Because God is on the throne. It may look bleak right now, but God has a purpose for you. You may not see that purpose immediately, but it's there.

God is on the throne. And if you've given your life to Jesus, you know the Lord as your Lord and Savior, then you come to Him and you entrust your future to Him, and He will take care of it.

He is your shepherd. And even if you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, His rod and His staff, they will comfort you.

So I say to you tonight, do not put your life in reverse. Do not give up. You trust in the Lord, and you do your best for the Lord.

Whatever opportunities you have in this world, then you take these opportunities prayerfully and carefully and humbly and selflessly, and you do it for the Lord.

[ 20 : 22 ] Not for yourself, but for the Lord. You give your life to Him. And don't give up, because He has a purpose and He has a plan for you. That's the second thing. The sea is no more.

And the same, of course, applies to so many other things that paralyze us in this world. Are you paralyzed tonight because of uncertainty? Not knowing what tomorrow may bring.

Then you trust in the Lord. Sometimes, of course, we look too far into the future. And Jesus tells us not to do that. But He says to us that just sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

We're all guilty of doing that, aren't we? We look far too far into the future, but we don't know what the future may hold. We don't know who's going to be alive in a couple of days' time or even the rest of the day. We don't know that we can trust in the Lord to do in us and for us more than we can ask or even think.

But then, in the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no uncertainty. It will all have been taken away. All the danger. All the danger. All the eventualities of this life.

[ 21 : 40 ] The possibilities will all be gone. And there will only be certainty. The certainty that you live in a perfect world where nothing will ever go wrong.

Then He tells us there will be no more tears. Because He tells us that He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

That's a promise. There isn't a single person in this hall, this church tonight, that doesn't know what tears are.

Isn't it strange that the very first thing we do when we enter this world is cry? And that first misery. Because the baby doesn't cry without being miserable for something.

You may not know what it is, but it's misery. That's what this world is. Full of. Or you can dress it up. You can pretend it's not like that. But that first cry marks what your life is going to be in this world.

[ 23 : 03 ] The world of fool. I know that some people seem to sail through life with very few problems. But most of us, we will know what tears are from the very youngest experience all the way through life.

Every success will be marred and spoiled by something. The ease of life when there are those periods of prosperity in life, it's spoiled by something.

And if we're living a life that is carefree right now, then be thankful. Because, as sure as anything, there will be sadness.

There's the sadness of some people are naturally what they used to call melancholic.

I suppose we would call it depressive. Now, some of the greatest Christians of all time, if you are a depressive person tonight, some of the greatest Christians of all time were depressive.

[ 24 : 12 ] It's real. Spurgeon said, Once I was lying upon my couch during this last week, and my spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child.

And yet I knew not what I wept for. That was Spurgeon, the greatest preacher that has ever walked the face of Britain. He sometimes didn't know why he sank so low in his own spirits.

There are times of disappointment, times of betrayal, and of course, times of loss. I could look out over this church tonight, and there are very few of you who have not, who I haven't seen in some kind of bereavement or loss or worry or sadness because this world is full of tears.

The first thing that this tells me, this verse tells me, is that God knows every tear that runs down your face.

Everyone is marked and recorded by God. That's what we just sung. Did you see? Did you notice what we sang in Psalm 56 and verse 8?

[ 25 : 54 ] My wanderings, all what they have been, thou knowest. Their number took into thy bottle. Put my tears, are they not, in thy book?

God knows. Every single sadness that we experience in this world, they're all known to him.

But it's more than that. The Lord himself can identify personally with our sadness in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who himself on this earth cried at the death of his friend Lazarus.

He was moved to tears when he looked out over Jerusalem and when he knew that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, when he saw for a brief moment he was overcome by the knowledge that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed because they had refused to believe in him.

And Hebrews tells us that with loud cries, he offered up prayers. In other words, his life was marked as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

[ 27 : 22 ] And so when we read here that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, I want you to imagine the hand of Jesus Christ. And it's a hand that has a hole in it.

And in that hole there was a nail that was driven into his hand and into the other hand and into his feet and the spear in his side and the agony that he suffered instead of us, for us, identifying with our life and our sadness and our pain.

God knows. I very often feel utterly helpless when I go into a situation of sadness or grief or I feel hopeless.

There are no words that you can find that can be of any help whatsoever to someone who's utterly broken and who is inconsolable with a grief that they cannot possibly see beyond.

But God knows. Somehow or other, he is able to identify with us. That's what the Bible says.

[ 28 : 41 ] It tells us that the very man who stood beside the grave of Lazarus and wept is our great high priest who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

I remember when my brother died some years ago. I was with my mother. And we were simply, as what happens in a case like that, we just didn't know what to say to each other.

I didn't know how to react. It was probably the first time that anything like this had ever happened. And I remember a gentleman coming to the door whom my mother knew.

And my father, I should say, because he was alive at the same time, but he was in another room. He wasn't able to emerge. And this gentleman sat and he cried.

And all of a sudden I remembered that he too had suffered something similar.

[ 29 : 51 ] So he was able to identify with my mother and father in a way that even I couldn't. God knows.

He can personally identify. But he can also remove our tears and promises to do so. Whether that means that we will ever find out why things happen in this world, I don't know.

I don't know how much we will find out in heaven about our experiences in this world. How they fitted in to God's overarching, indescribable plan that we can't understand.

Will we ever find out? I don't know. But what the Bible promises me is this.

That I shall be satisfied with God. That's what it promises me.

[ 31 : 07 ] And that I will be filled and you will be filled. If you're a follower of Jesus tonight, you will be filled with no sense of need.

And the sadnesses that you lived your life with in this world will completely disappear. Whatever source of that sadness, whether it's death or whether it's betrayal.

Whether it's frustration. Whether it's worry. Whatever the source of that sadness.

Some of us, I'm sure tonight, are dreading the future for various reasons. We can't face what might happen. But I know that one day, the Lord and his power will take all of it away.

Personally, he will wipe every tear from your eye. And that's something to lay hold upon even in this world.

[ 32 : 27 ] There is nothing greater than to lay hold upon the promise of God. Even in the midst of suffering. That's all we've got.

If you don't have the Lord. If you can't look to him. Where else are you going to look? Who else is going to give you what you really need in this world?

I'm not saying that grief and sorrow and sadness as a Christian is any easier. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's the Christian himself that says, Where is my God?

Having done all for me that I believe that he had done. At the very point I needed him. He's nowhere. Sometimes the belief, the faith that we have in Christ.

It actually seems to work against us. Because we expect. It's like John the Baptist when he was in prison. And he had preached. He had given his whole life to the Lord.

[ 33 : 33 ] And yet, the very moment that he expected Jesus to come and visit him. And to set him free from his prison cell. Jesus was nowhere to be seen. And it shook him to the point.

Almost of unbelief. His faith was shaken. Has your faith never been shaken? Mine has. Yes. But the Lord tells us that faith is faith because it is focused on Jesus.

Not because it's never shaken. We read there in 1 Peter about the testing of our faith. All faith is tested. Like fire sometimes. But faith is always rests.

It always rests in Jesus. And so tonight we have this great promise. Along with all the other great promises of the Bible. That the old heaven and the old earth will disappear.

And there will be no more tears. And no more sea.

[ 34 : 48 ] I'll say this just one, just a word. Perhaps the young ones will wonder why I'm talking like this.

Because the young ones will not perhaps have experienced some of the things that I've been talking about tonight. And yet every generation, there's something within the humankind that longs for heaven.

Even amongst unbelievers. You very often find that in songs and poetry and books. And I think it's, I always find it's interesting to read the words of songs that seem to be the anthem of different generations.

Every generation has one song or two songs or three songs that has been the anthem. The kind of hallmark of that generation. And over the last ten years, the hallmark or the anthem of this generation is a song called Fix You.

Young ones will know what I'm talking about. The old ones won't. And the chorus of the song goes like this. Lights will guide you home.

[ 36 : 13 ] And ignite your bones. And I will try and fix you. I find that fascinating.

Because to me, that is an expression of a longing. A recognition of something I want more than anything else.

But it's also an admittance that I can't have it. God says to us tonight. You follow the Lord Jesus Christ. My light will guide you home.

My glory will ignite your whole being. And I will fix you. Let's pray. zab In