Humanity and Eternity

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, we know that no eye has seen, no ear has heard what you have planned for those who love you and yet you've given us such a rich treasure trove of information and just an access to your will through your word.

We pray that you'd give us humble hearts to accept the things that are said in here, that you just open our eyes so that we could behold wondrous things from your word, Lord.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. So like I said, the topic today is human destiny and I just thought I'd open with a very famous quote.

So according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the first question, in fact, it begins with, what is the chief end of man? And the answer that they give is that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Now, this speaks of the purpose for which mankind was created. And that denotes kind of the importance of the progress of the study here, right?

[1:11] So we talked about the synthetic nature of systematic theology. We have to talk about creation, sin, Christ, and redemption in order to understand our broader topic, which is the image of God in mankind.

And now we're going to be treating of glorification and communion with God. Now, just a reminder, our broader thesis has been that humanity was created actually in God's image as God's very image itself.

That is, it pertains to the whole person, both soul and body. You know, remember from Genesis 2-7 that Adam was formed from the ground and then God breathed into him the breath of life.

That's all-inclusive. It's holistic. And that means it includes every moral, relational, corporate, spiritual, somatic, as well as intellectual faculty.

And that we also talked about last week a bit more how that means sin is also totally pervasive. And it's affected the entire human race.

[2:24] That we're, as it were, born sinners. We talked about that a little bit from Romans 5, 12-21. Sin entered in and despoiled the creation's relationship with God.

In fact, you'll recall Genesis 3-8, remember God shows up in the garden walking to find Adam and Eve and have communion with them and what did they do? They hid. This violated that covenant that God had created with them in Genesis 2-16-17.

And that meant that there needed to be a renewal of this image. A renewal that only Jesus Christ, who Colossians 1-15 says is the image of the invisible God, only he could affect.

Thus, Christians by the Holy Spirit, according to Colossians 3-10, have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.

And that's a pledge that we have from Christ of restoration of both body and soul. In 1 Corinthians 15-49, it says, Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Or Philippians 3, 20-21, For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly await for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble estate into conformity with the body of his earthly glory, by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.

Now, this leaves us with the subject of the future state of humanity. And at this point, our study diverges between two paths.

You'll recall last week we quoted Romans 6-23. It says, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And that's going to form a broad outline of our entire study for this morning. We're going to, on the one hand, talk about death and what it means to be dead, both in every possible and conceivable category, theologically speaking.

And then we're going to be talking about life, on the other hand, and what true, eternal life means. But, of course, both of those have to do with one destiny, one human destiny, which is to glorify God.

[4:54] Romans 11-36 says, For from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. The only question is, how? And once again, this takes us back to the garden.

In Genesis 2-16-17, that covenant I mentioned earlier, it says, The Lord God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may freely eat, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

And you'll recall that we talked, that spoke of Adam as our representative. He did eat, and in fact, even though it didn't look like it, he did die.

And that brings up the question, what is death? Death can be defined, biblically speaking, as a separation of something that has been constituted by God to be held in unity.

And this is written about going quite a bit back into church history by Augustine, and before him a church father named Lactantius. And they talked about these different categories of death.

[6:06] And this particular category is spiritual death. This is a spiritual death that Adam separates immediately upon sin. As a separation of the soul from God.

Genesis 3.8 said that they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

That was a break in the spiritual relationship. You know, the word there, to walk, that implies actually more of a presence and a communion with God that was broken when they hid from him.

as 1 Corinthians 15.22 says, in Adam all die. And note that that's not just a spiritual death, but that has also affected a physical death.

The curse of Genesis 3.19 says, by the sweat of your face you will eat bread till you return to the ground because from it you were taken. For you are dust and to dust you shall return.

[7:15] Note that of course God should have killed them physically, spiritually, and as we're going to see eternally at that very moment. This is judicial language here.

And he had a legal right as the supreme judge to kill them. However, he also had within the right of the judge what's called a temporal judicial relaxation.

He had the right to relax the law to effect a greater purpose. Of course, the law was going to be fulfilled and this is pointed ahead to by this animal skin sacrifice as we see in Genesis 3.21 where God kills the animal to clothe Adam and Eve.

And that speaks of the greater purpose that God had in view. A promised provision in the seat of the woman from Genesis that he promised in Genesis 3.15. As Romans 5.12 said, however, death spread to all men because all sinned in Adam's one transgression.

And that's demonstrable in that litany of repetition in Genesis 5 that says and he died and he died and he died in that genealogy. That speaks of the separation of the body from the soul.

[8:29] And that's most empirically demonstrable fact. All human beings die. Therefore, we're all sinners. By the way, this eminence to the body and the idea that the body itself is a part of the image of God that's affected by sin, affected by death, that's why we give eminence as Christians to the human body after death.

Augustine, Calvin, Bavink, and lately Al Mohler actually have all talked about this. Al Mohler in particular in relation to this idea of the incineration of the body of the king of Thailand it was a couple weeks ago to free his soul from his body.

He noted the difference between that worldview and the Christian worldview, noting the peculiarity of the dignity given to the human body after death. It's still in God's image and that's why Christian tradition has treated the body with a dignity after death.

Note also Ecclesiastes 12.7 it says this, Then the dust will return to the earth as it was and the spirit will return to the God who gave it.

And that speaks more so of the presence of the soul in the afterlife either in torture in hell or life in heaven which we'll talk about. But that brings up the subject of the intermediary state.

[9:56] Luke 16.19-31 as well as 1 Corinthians 5.1-8 talk about the fact that the soul continues to exist in the afterlife in one of these states or another.

In fact, it seems to even bear some sort of body-like form and that gets back to the idea of the essential nature of the body. You'll recall in Matthew 17.3 as well as depictions of the future in Revelation 6.9-11 that there seem to be humans walking around with some recognizable physical form.

We don't exactly know what that's going to look like. It seems to be a kind of temporary provisional body that's been given to us that isn't the same as our bodies here on earth.

But after our bodies have been separated from our souls after our death, it seems as though we're going to be able to interact with the environment in some sort of way like this and that we'll be in a way like the angels and how they're able to take on some sort of corporeal manifestation that's accidental.

It's only temporary. Either way, it's unavoidable that we're going to at some point face death physically as well as eternally.

[11:14] Hebrews 10.21 says, it is appointed for men to die once then comes judgment. That brings up that third and final category of death which is eternal death or it's also known as the second death which brings us straight to the great white throne judgment.

So turn with me to Revelation Revelation 20. I'm going to be reading Revelation 20 verses 11 to 15.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it from his presence earth and heaven fled away and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead the great and the small standing before the throne and books were open and another book was open which is the book of life and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds and the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death the lake of fire and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire.

[12:42] Now note here in this text which of course we can't get into in great detail but it's speaking of the resurrection not only of believers which is I think what we generally think about but also non-believers as well of everyone everyone in humanity as a psychosomatic a unity made in the image of God.

That is when it talks furthermore about death in this passage it's talking about the second death as a great separation not just of the soul from God but of both body and soul from God forever.

1 Thessalonians 1 9 says these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. And there's a chilling reality here in the what's called damnation eternal damnation separation of body and soul from God it's speaking of the continuation of the image of God even in hell and that's important.

Bruce DeMarist who's a famous theologian today contemporary says this hell represents sinners ultimate separation from the life of God. Hell's ultimate agony is that image bearers should have missed the lofty purpose for which they were created.

in fact it's Francis Turretin who has this chilling quote they are said to live forever that they may die forever.

[14:20] It's a living death and in Romans 9 22 in fact it says that in this state in the ultimate state here within God's destiny and purposes people are going to be augmented and fitted in their final bodily forms as vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

They're in a way glorifying God and receiving wrath which is a difficult theological truth and it's in fact a terrifying reality a fully sensible experience both body and soul Isaiah 66 24 for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be in abhorrence to all mankind.

In fact it was Lactantius who wrote about this and he says this quote because they have committed sins with their bodies they will again be clothed with flesh so that they may bear the sin suffering in their bodies.

That speaks of a retributive justice of direct equity between what people have committed in this life as sins and the eternal punishment they're going to be perfectly fitted to receive in all eternity.

In fact it was Augustine who talked about the agony of the soul and the body and this eternal kind of inability to function properly when reunited it's a disharmony that they can never ever get back that they'll always strive for and never make progress.

Luke 16 23 says rich man in Hades it says this in Hades he lifted up his eyes being in torment and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom and that speaks of the sight of the blessedness of the saints the idea that they can actually possibly even see into heaven see into the glories of heaven that they're missing out on but they'll have an eternal inability to reach it that is to say in summary this eternal state of the second death the eternal death speaks of the fact that we're going to be resurrected in body and soul those who are damned and they're going to have the image of God fitted perfectly to receive not communion with God but his wrath and eternal separation from him forever now that was the first point speaking of the three states of death spiritual death physical death and then eternal death and so we're going to turn to the second point which provides much more of a contrast which is eternal life in Christ eternal life in Christ and that speaks by the way of a quality not necessarily of duration

John 17 3 says this this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent or in the words of 1 Corinthians 15 49 which we looked at last week will be bearing the image of the heavenly in fact later on in that passage it says in verse 52 that in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed so there's a quality that's imparted there that is in that passage where it speaks of us being changed and we're going to be changed into conformity with Christ 1 John 3 2 we will be like him for we shall see him as he is or again as I quoted earlier Philippians 3 20 to 21 for our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly await for a savior the Lord Jesus

Christ who will transform the body of our humble estate into conformity of the body of his glory by the exertion of his power that he has even to subject all things to himself so you know I think it's helpful sometimes to just stop and ask why does the Bible focus so much on the physical resurrected body of Christ according to Luke 22 39 he's speaking to the disciples he says see my hands and feet that it is I myself touch me and see for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have that is to say he's saying there that it's the very same body that he died in when Calvin speaks of Christ's resurrection as the pledge of our coming resurrection in this mirror the living image of resurrection is visible to us that is to say when we see Jesus

Christ when he's walking around with his body and he's saying I have those piercings through my body that that's a vouchsafe for the very bodies that you're going to have in resurrection and that you can have confidence that as Job says that I will see God with my eyes and not another Job 19 27 these are newly resurrected bodies they're pure without corruption of sin that's why the passage we read earlier refers to them as heavenly or spiritual and here I have to commend the work of Francis Turids who I quoted earlier who just has this beautifully beatific vision of the heavenly state and I appreciate with him he's very biblical in his approaches he never makes a statement without first saying what's the biblical passage that's going to furnish this text for us he says this all defects will be removed from the bodies to which they have been exposed in this mortality but their essence will not be good that is to say there's a renewed image of

God a platform for communication with God immediately in his presence forever and in fact that speaks furthermore to the idea that there's a spiritual sight that we'll have of God that somehow will be transformed and have an imparted ability to directly see God revelation 21 22 to 23 I saw no temple in it that's the new heavens and new earth for the Lord God the almighty and the lamb are its temple and the city has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God has illuminated it and the lamp is the lamb that's a stunning passage and speaking of the immediate what's called the immediate beatific vision of God that we'll have and in that passage church speaks later of its implications to participation of the very divine nature of God himself writing this from this will afterwards flow a perfect likeness of the saints to God the fulfillment of their desires and of their perfect happiness to which it tends and in which is consecrated this is nothing else than a certain fusion and emanation of the deity upon the souls of the saints communicating to them the image of all his perfections as much as they can belong unto a creature wow but what's he saying well there's several other classical theological categories so whereas Adam was what they call he was able not to sin yet he did choose to sin and so he died afterwards as sinners as sinners we're not able not to sin so from our hearts being corrupted in Adam there is no good deed that we're able to do that can't result in sin even our righteous deeds according to

[22:38] Isaiah are filthy garments before God's sight however in this future state what the bible is speaking of here with the illumination and the filling of the glory of God and what Turretin is speaking of here he's talking about the fact that we will not be able to sin in the future and I'm speaking of moral necessity we'll always be present with the direct revealed glory of God you'll recall in fact that idea back in the garden of God wanting to walk to be in direct communion with Adam and before then was when he falls right so we see in fact in revelation a perfect restoration of the Edenic state made more permanent than had been in that first state again I know I've quoted him a lot already but Turretin says this the saints will find in God whatever is necessary for them for as he is infinite and the inexhaustible fountain of all blessings he also has that with which he can satisfy the necessities and desires of all the same one who illuminates feeds heals protects enriches and works all things in all or in the words of scripture itself revelation 22 1-5 then he showed me a river of the water of life here is crystal coming from the throne of God and of the lamb in the middle of its street on either side of the river was the tree of life bearing 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations there will be no longer any curse and the throne of God and of the lamb will be in it and his slaves will serve him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads and there will no longer be any night and they will not have need of the light of the lamp nor the light of the sun because the

> Lord God will illumine them and they will reign forever this is to say this is a real a very real platform upon which we can worship God forever into eternity and note in particular is another thing Turretin wants to devote a lot of time to Edwards devotes a considerable amount of time to in his writings as well this isn't just a static state I think sometimes we envision the heavenly state because of pop culture and whatever other influences out there as we're just kind of sitting on clouds strumming harps forever you know you'll see that imagery Ironic Turretin says well the heavenly state is going to be great we're going to be doing a lot of things like strumming harps that's the opposite of what I think when I think that we're doing a lot of really great things in heaven forever and ever and ever but his point was that we're going to have culture even in heaven we're going to have development of life we're going to have an exciting rejuvenated experience there's a dynamic and eternal growth in heaven there's going to be culture fellowship work and we're even going to enjoy food and drink that passage that I just read I think most probably that speaking of the fact that if we take that literally that speaking of actual fruit that we're going to have on this tree and that we're going to be able to in some way eat in a way that doesn't reflect corruption which is a fascinating concept in fact you even see cities here one of my former professors talked about the fact that creation begins in the garden and then we have this cultural mandate from God to grow and multiply and expand and be stewards of the earth right and we look at the end of creation we look at the new heavens and the new earth and it's a city a city that is made with these magnificent walls and in fact a new

> Jerusalem even more so however than that there is a perpetual growth a perpetual spiritual growth that comes with being in communion with God forever that is to say in a sense we'll be doing theology forever which I understand for some might be a tedious concept but in this sense it's a enlivening concept an invigorating concept as I quoted earlier John 17 3 where Christ says this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent and later in that high priestly prayer he says this which I quoted last week he's praying on our behalf and he's asking the father saying this the glory you have given me I have given to them that they may be one just as we are one I in them and you in me that they may be perfected in unity what's he saying here what he's saying the finite restored image of God is the very condition for our eternal participation in the divine in the divine glory yeah we'll get we'll get to that in a moment won't we let me just quote Jonathan

Edwards on this Jonathan Edwards says speaking of what he calls an increasing union and conformity through eternity he cites these verses and then he notes the following the image is more and more perfect and so the good that is in the creature comes forever nearer and nearer to an identity with that of God and the view therefore of God who has a comprehensive prospect of the increasing unity and conformity through eternity it must be an infinitely strict and perfect nearness conformity and oneness for it will forever come nearer and nearer to that strictness and perfection of union which there is between the father and the son wow that's a glorious truth I think what he's trying to say there is that with our renewed faculties in the image of God with our renewed platform for being able to partake of the divine nature to be able to commune with God to enjoy his presence that we're actually going to in some way in the eternal state forever and ever enter into the trinitarian communion that there is between father and son and in fact because we're finite beings right that's going to be an unending exploration and that's wonderful some people really throw around the difficulty of well we're finite and

God's eternal how is this really going to work in eternity you know well it's because we're finite it's because God created us and created us with these amazing faculties that we'll be able to never exhaust that communion with him forever and ever and ever there's a unending growth that is in nearness to and resemblance of God that will never be reached and praise God for that as Paul writes in Romans 9 23 will truly be vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory or in the words of Ephesians 1 6 we'll be able to praise quote to the praise of the glory of his grace for all eternity so it's that realm of grace that realm of participation in the Lord that constitutes eternal life and it's as I said it's a quality it's not something that is just duration but it's because of who we will be remade into the image of

God that enables us to partake in that heavenly glory forever and ever as his creatures [30:39] now I thought I'd give some points of application I've been doing that at the end of these sessions and I think the most direct one is to simply praise God right this is a glorious truth and it's humbling to realize that even though we were dead in our trespasses and sins that he in his grace decided to make us partakers of that grace through Jesus Christ and that's something that we can do now in fact we can actually enter into the same praise that we'll have in the eternal state when we praise God and we thank him and we live thankful and holy lives before him and in fact that brings us to a second point that Peter will actually bring up in 2 Peter 11 where he says what sort of people ought you to be in holiness of conduct and godliness and he's speaking there in light of the future state in light of eschatology and he's saying that considering we have that weight before us of Christ's imminence and his return and his coming back and we have all eternity before us that should impress upon us the need to want to be holy to want to be like him to want to conduct ourselves in resemblance of him and a third point that I would like to bring is that this has a very direct call to repentance

I wasn't simply giving all that talk about what death means just for the sake of being morbid that there really is a very valuable ability that we have to call people to repentance as this text here in Revelation 22 says right it ends with that call the spirit and the bride say come there's an open invitation to partake in God's glory forever and ever to repent and to place your hope and faith in Jesus Christ alone for in him alone comes the knowledge of God and eternal life so let me close in prayer and then we'll have some questions and answers heavenly father again this is a difficult subject to entreat upon this is the very threshold of your glory that we're talking about this is the eternal state and we know that you're limited and we'll never be able to on earth because of our limitations both sinful and created as we are now we'll never be able to fully comprehend that but we're thankful

Lord that you've enabled through your grace that we can contemplate that forever and ever and that we'll be freed and liberated in our hearts and minds to be able to explore you Lord humble us before you give us renewed vigor so that we can live lives that are exactly this amazing calling you've given us I'm sure you don't have any questions at all about the eternal state or what any of that meant I know that it was a lot go ahead if you just have any questions shoot a hand up Tyler I see why don't you go ahead you can have some questions first yeah so we were talking about the ability that we will have as creatures to be able to participate in God's glory to be able to love him right so God is a perfect creature right and he's able to it's hard for us to talk to him it's hard for us to be in communion with him to love him rightly everyone makes mistakes right only God makes mistakes and so only we make mistakes sorry only God doesn't make mistakes that's what we call bad theology but right so only we make mistakes but what we're talking about here is that God has created us so that someday we can love him better and we won't make mistakes and that's a wonderful truth that he's promised us in his word so in 1st

Corinthians when it says you know we will behold him and we will be transformed from his life one group glory into another it says something about the beautiful glory and the glory and the glory I was wondering when we have final statement we see him face to face ultimately changed between the night and have you know transformed to the glorious state how does that work when we see something become like it I've always wondered how does that underlaying that passage there's several things going on there it's probably speaking not just right of a physical sight it's a spiritual beholding that we'll have and there's the idea that God's glory is so effectual in fact it's talked about in 1 Corinthians 3 you kind of see it a little bit there if any man builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious, stone, wood, hay, straw each man's work will become evident the day will show itself because it will be revealed with fire the fire will test the quality of each man's work if each man's work which he is built on it remains he will receive a reward if any man's work is burned up he will suffer lost but he himself will be saved so as through fire and talked about the dwelling of God in people's bodies as the holy with the holy spirit so it's almost the idea that

God's glory is so powerful and effectual that when it shows up and you see it immediately everything that isn't pure and holy before him is purged away it's done away from his presence and all that remains is anything that's in likeness with himself and it's so theologians throw around exactly how this works they'll get into the really detailed metaphysics of it and I would encourage you to go ahead and try and find a copy of Turretin I think he's more biblical about it and he talks about it in depth in a very scholastic form but he gets really into the details of it if you want to really search out what does that mean I think he's written quite a bit about it that I found somewhat helpful yeah

I could be explain yeah you've talked about it being essentially this psychosomatic union yes right I suppose the question is something about how how do we end up the same beings after the resurrection as before death yeah because it seems like we spend at least some time in the intermediate state not being the same psychosomatic union right oh I thought you were going to bring up the cannibal question something I wanted to call the cannibal question that's a good one yeah so there is the idea that there's some sort of and again well I'll refer you to

John Cooper he's written a bit about the intermediate state and the idea of the holistic psychosomatic unity and he has a whole section on the intermediate state that he finds fascinating and he's the one that throws around that God's going to give us a provisional body but he ends the discussion by saying there's something about this state that I am not sure exactly how this works because you know the biblical teaching clearly says our great hope is that we're going to be resurrected in body and soul and we're going to be reunited then and it's this amazing renewal but that also Paul says to be absent from the body is to be present from the Lord and he talks about it as this wonderful state where if I die I'm going to be in God's presence that's wonderful but then you might reply to Paul but we don't have our bodies so how can we be experiencing any of that so I guess

I'm kind of punting on that one aren't I because the answer is there's something about that glorified state that we don't quite know yet but we do seem to have a kind of some sort of provisional body I guess that's what I'll say so that we can at least interact in some way yeah yeah yeah if I'm if what I am is this particular psychosomatic then I am not the psychosomatic being told by my soul in a different body yeah yeah but if I'm just my soul the body seems a whole lot less important yeah I mean that's something that you'd have to I guess you'll just have to ask God when you get to the eternal state how he works that out because the idea is that you're in communion with God and you're held by his power somehow and that's that's the only way that I have to answer that that question yeah sorry Ben I know that's not intellectually satisfying but it's it's what we've got yeah yeah yeah

I'll be honest about it yeah yes in the back we pray oftentimes so that we can be close to God to be in the earth and to basically I guess to be in a familiar place with God but I also hear people say that the place of the gospel will be in them is there a difference and is it a danger to have pray for one to be close to God versus to be part of you yeah I mean I think underlying that if I'm understanding you correctly is the understanding when we pray we're not necessarily calling God down from heaven that when we pray it's more like he's it's us humbling ourselves before him and lifting ourselves up to him so there's not necessarily a break between us making

God do something different when we pray but it's more like we're being conformed to him greater did that did that answer the question or to a certain extent okay I think sometimes fast like God has to and say oh yes there's a thing there's I can see somebody saying, you know, God is part of me now.

[42:48] Oh, yes. And all of a sudden, there's a, you know, I'm inspired. I am part of God now.

And you're served as a God, not part of God. Right, yeah. So that goes back to a very basic distinction of the creator versus creature, which is so fundamental to impress upon people.

Because people will assume that, won't they? They'll assume, they'll think, you know, God can be part of me. He can be part of who I want, who I wish, who I desire, you know. Whereas that's in a way you could almost respond when people say that, right, with Paul in Romans 1 when he says people have exchanged the image of God for the image of themselves.

And in that way, they're almost kind of putting God in, putting themselves in the place of God when they're saying something like that. Whereas we're able to actually give a pretty good rebuff to that and say, you know, well, the point, the goal of eternal life and blessedness is actually, like, humble submission before him and loving him in who we are without ourselves becoming God or not becoming God.

But we're able to love him and adore him and worship him forever, which is a whole lot better because he's a whole lot more than we are. Well, it's 9.45, so I think it's a good time to dismiss and matriculate upstairs.

[44:17] Thank you so much for coming out to the Sunday School.