

L. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

*What Does the Bible Say?*

“What Happens When I Die? (Part 5)”

*The Final State—The New Heavens and Earth*

II Peter 3:1–13

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We will be looking at three texts of Scripture in this concluding study of what happens when you die. We'll start by looking at II Peter 3. This has been a five part series. We first had to answer the question, why will you die? Unlike a Darwinian atheistic point of view that says death is part the life cycle, death is not a part of the life cycle for death is an enemy. Death is an intruder and is not built into Genesis 1 and 2. There is no such thing as a natural death. Death is an enemy that Jesus had conquered and it is here because of sin. The wages of sin is death. In other words, there is no death until there is sin therefore death is not until Genesis 3. That is what the Bible teaches us.

There are three kinds of death (physical, spiritual, eternal). The word death is Thanatos and it means separation, an unnatural separation, a rending apart from what ought to be one piece. It is like two threads in a cloth being torn asunder. We are made up of physical and spiritual. You have a body and a soul or spirit or mind or heart which are multiple terms referring to that part of you that is made in the image of God that makes you, you. That is then united to your body. Adam is made of the dust of the ground but it's only until God breathes into him his soul that he becomes a living being. The body can die but the soul cannot. The only One who can kill both body and soul is the One who creates both body and soul and that is the Lord.

As a pastor I've been by many bedsides and we are under no obligation to prolong death but sometimes the sense of the moment is wondering if the person is dying or is there something happening. I remember being beside the bed of my father-in-law with my wife beside me and the doctors were encouraging us to pull all the plugs. I told my wife I felt like he was still there and that it wasn't because of the machines that he was still alive. Six days later he walked out of the hospital and was able to see his next grandchild the next year. We could just sense that. I don't think you disregard the medical insight that is there but what makes a person living is the presence of the soul that enlivens it and makes it living.

When does the soul enter the body? I'm a simple man so I like simple answers. It enters the body when that person becomes a living being. When does that person become a living being? That person becomes a living being at conception and the soul is in the body. That is why David, the psalmist, counts his sin record at the beginning of conception in his mother's womb because that was his beginning, when he became a living being.

That is also why the body is so important. We're not Greek who say the physical is bad and the spiritual is good so they whole point of life is to escape the physical. No! When God made the body it was good. When He made the soul and spirit it was good. He united them together and that was good. He made us to be immortal. He not only makes us born again spiritually but He will born again this body at His second coming and raise it up fit for a new heavens and a new earth.

Right now you have a very distinct movement where this body is just an instrument. You can declare it to whatever you want it to be, for that is what is behind all the transgenderism

going on today or those who want to be black instead of white. In our society today it is ok for people to declare themselves whatever they want to be. That is first of all, man in rebellion against God for it is someone saying they will be who they want to be and not what God made them to be. Secondly, this is Gnosticism back visiting us again, where the body is just an instrument that one doesn't have to be captured by it but they can declare it whatever they want to be.

If your body is just an instrument and it's not really part of who God made you, then all the women who give birth to a child in a hospital could go home with whatever child they would give them. But that's not what you'd want for you would want the baby you gave birth to because they were made in your image in the womb. Now will we adopt children? Absolutely, but when you give birth you won't just walk out with any baby. We have been so corrupted today because we've lost our world and life view that starts with the doctrine of creation from which comes the doctrine of the fall. The first thing from the fall is death which is the unnatural separation of the soul from the body but Jesus has won the victory over death because He has won the victory over sin.

So besides the physical death there is also spiritual death where we are born separated from God. We were dead in our trespasses and sin. We were born with a spiritual nature of total depravity. We're not absolutely depraved because God keeps us from being as evil as we could be and that's called God's common grace but we're born with a depravity that permeates all of our existence. When you are born again the Spirit of God permeates all of your existence so you can walk in the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit.

The third death is eternal death, where God says 'depart (separate) from Me you workers of lawlessness, for I never knew you.' Right after we looked at why there was death in this world we then looked at what happens right after the moment you die. The moment after a believer dies the body goes to the grave and the soul goes to what is known in the Old Testament as Sheol and in the New Testament Hades, the place of the dead. Hebrews 12:22–24 says that the soul of the believer goes into the presence of the Lord perfected in perfect righteousness and in this passage the souls of the martyrs are crying out before the Lord in His presence. It is absent from the body then present with the Lord is our soul going into His presence once we die physically. It is that part of Hades, the place of the dead, that is in the presence of the Lord where the believer goes. It is also called paradise, Abraham's bosom, the highest heavens, Mount Zion and the heavenly city of God.

When the unbeliever dies they immediately go into torment. It is that aspect of Hades called torment. Peter says in Acts 2:31 about Christ, *[31] he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.* Jesus' soul went to Hades but didn't stay and His body didn't stay in the grave. He descended to the place of the dead, Hades, shouting out the victory to those who rejected the Gospel and shouting the victory of the promises in Him to those who believed in Him and then His body rose on the third day.

That place is an intermediate state, not a forever state or ultimate state. When will we go to the final state? That is initiated when Jesus comes again. When He comes again all who have died will be brought before Him and the bodies will be raised both believers and unbelievers. They will be united to their soul and stand before God. Those who are written in the book of Life will be brought to a new heavens and a new earth. Those written in the books will receive the judgment of their sins in a place called hell. This is the eternal, irrevocable,

irremediable place of punishment. While Jesus was on this earth two thirds of what He talked about dealt with the reality of hell.

In this study we'll look at what happens to the believer when they go from the intermediate state to the Judgment Seat with their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life and then into eternity, a place called the new heavens and a new earth with a new body. We are not going to speculate about this. We will look at what the Bible says about it by looking at three passages of Scripture. So let's look at II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:1–7 says *[1] This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, [3] knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days (which began when Jesus ascended) with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

In other words, they are saying everything has continued as it has been since the beginning. That is called the doctrine of uniformitarianism – somehow there was this perfect ball and everything has continued as it has since the beginning and it's just kind of moved forward. Peter says they neglect two things when they think this way. One, is the doctrine of creation. Everything didn't just begin at creation for God formed the heavens and the earth. He formed it by His Word through waters above and below. Then man fell into sin and God brought a deluge upon the earth called the flood of Noah. Yes, I believe in a universal flood. I believe the evidence of a universal flood are universally found over the earth. So everything has not continued like it has from the beginning. When He deluged it with water He brought a partial judgment upon the earth, even as He secured Noah and his family.

Then God made a promise not to ever again destroy the earth by water but He will destroy it by fire. So now the earth, its sin record and its curse is being stored up for the coming of Christ, the victorious Savior, coming not to bear our judgment as He did in the first advent but coming this time to bring judgment upon the ungodly. Another thing that will happen at this coming is the swallowing up of the present heavens and earth with fire. The same God who acted in creation and in the days of Noah will act in the second coming of Christ.

Do you see the flow of this? There is creation, then the fall into sin and then man's depravity begins to move and then God saw that man's heart was only evil, always, continually and God was grieved that He had made man. Noah found favor so God ordained the pouring out of judgment upon this world. It is not a final judgment but one of discipline and warning that has both love and warning of sin that is present. He puts Noah and his household into an ark. He seals the ark and then pours the cleansing judgment upon the sinful earth. Then the waters recede from His judgment. The ark is then opened and Noah and his household are deposited in a cleansed heavens and earth by the hand of God. Then the sin nature begins again and it spreads throughout all the world.

Romans 8 tells us that the whole creation is groaning to be delivered by the hand of God. This time God's cleansing hand will be with fire. What is the ark or more precisely who is the ark when He comes back? It is Jesus and by the Spirit you have been sealed in Him. In that

day you will be deposited in the new heavens and the new earth for it will be Christ and His Household that will be deposited in a transformed heavens and earth. So when people say ‘all is as it has been’ that is not true for they are suppressing the truth. Let’s continue in II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:8 says [8] *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* This is not a formula. He is trying to communicate something to us and that is God doesn’t fit in the time box. God made the time box. You can’t define God by what He made. So God made the heavens and the earth but He is omnipresent. He is not confined to the heavens and the earth. He is infinite, not finite. He made finiteness. He is eternal. He is not immortal for He is more than immortal. Immortal has no end and eternal has no beginning. So He doesn’t fit in the time box. When did God begin? That’s the wrong question because He began beginnings. He started the beginning and has declared the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end. He is above the time factor and therefore time does not control Him. He has created the time whereby He is accomplishing His purposes so let’s continue in the passage.

II Peter 3:9–12 says [9] *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* (Jesus hasn’t come back yet because all His people haven’t come to saving faith yet and the Gospel hasn’t gone to all the nations.) [10] *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

[11] *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!*

How do you hasten the coming of the Lord? I pray John’s prayer in Revelation. I know God’s purposes are tied to my prayers but my prayers don’t control God. I don’t pray because I think I’m informing God of something He doesn’t know. He knows everything. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve prayed God would come before this coming election. I have reasoned with Him as why I want Him to do this over and over again.

Moses did this with God. I think God delights when His people reason with Him from His Word about all the issues of their heart. Let all your requests known to Him and reason with Him. The Lord says ‘come and let us reason together.’ It’s kind of like when your children come and talk to you about anything and everything. He is fully aware of everything but He delights and somehow it is tied to the prayers of His people. So what is the prayer of John that you pray all the time? “Come quickly, Lord!” I pray this all the time.

So how do I hasten the day of the Lord? I do it by evangelism because Jesus will come back when all His people have been saved. Last year God allowed us to lead 99 people to Christ of the 300 plus that joined this church. I have a tendency to think that the next person I hear that has come to the Lord is the last one. Out there somewhere is the last person that is going to be saved. Thirdly, I believe we can hasten the Lord through our commitment to world missions because He won’t come until the Gospel has been preached to all the nations through which He’ll bring all of His people to Himself. So those are ways we can hasten the coming of the Lord – prayer, evangelism and world missions.

I don’t live for this world. I use the things of this world to praise His Name for all of His good gifts but I don’t want to live for this world. I want to live for Him. I want to live for Godliness and not worldliness. Such is an absolute fool who will look to this world for only

what the new heavens and the new earth can give you. I want to hasten the coming of the Lord and be faithful with Godliness in the Lord. So what are we waiting for?

II Peter 3:13 says [13] *But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.* There will be no ability for sin to dwell just righteousness. Does that mean that everything in this earth will disappear? It will disappear in that fire and then God is going to speak into existence a new heavens and a new earth. No! I believe God is through creating. The new heavens and new earth will not be an act of creation but recreation. It will be just like your new body – it won't be a new created body but a resurrected transformed body. This dissolving is then rolling it back out with no sin curse and no groaning. Now we'll have a new home – paradise regained – with one change and that is no ability to sin because in that day we won't be like the first Adam. We will be like the second Adam. The accountability group I meet with now I'll be able to meet with when I get to heaven but it won't be for accountability. I won't need to flee temptation anymore and I won't need to kill the old man every day. So I will be in the new heavens and the new earth.

The Greek language is absolutely astounding and I'm so glad for faithful seminaries that make our preachers learn Hebrew and Greek so that they can read God's inspired Word in the original language. While the Hebrew language is so filled with pathos and emotion, there is such clarity in the Greek. So to emphasize the new heavens and the new earth, the word new there actually means something brand new and not just new. The word for new here means something new refurbished, new renewed. So the old heavens and old earth is dissolved into a transformed, not *néos* (new) but *kainos*, heavens and earth and will have a continuity with the old heavens and old earth, except that the sin has been burned out by the fire of God in the new heavens and the new earth. This becomes our home.

Think of it this way for a moment. There are two ways I like to divide up or outline the Bible. One way is very simple. It is creation, fall, redemption and consummation. Creation is in Genesis 1 and 2. The fall is Genesis 3. Redemption is Genesis 4 to Revelation 20. The consummation is Revelation 21 through 22. I think that is the way you can look at this. God created and everything is good – Genesis 1 and 2. Then comes the fall and that penetrates all of humanity and all of creation. There was a momentary moment of cleansing and refurbishing with water. So there is the progress of sin and redemption from Genesis 3 through Revelation 20. Then there will be a final judgment of cleansing and renewal and transformation into a new heavens and a new earth with fire. That will come when Jesus comes again for judgment and then the consummation when we will have the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21 and 22.

Let's now go to Revelation 21. Here is the judgment. This is highly symbol language. Revelation 21:1–4 says [1] *Then I saw a new (kainos) heaven and a new (kainos) earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.* (Sea is bad and here it represents sin and evil, river is good – the Gospel is the River of Life) [2] *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem* (where a believer goes when they die), *coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* [3] *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.* (Paradise is regained for eternity with no sin to interrupt.) [4] *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

The former things are the old heavens and the old earth and the dominion of sin that was upon it, the groaning, will all be no more. Romans 8:22 says [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* The word groaning in this verse is literally saying that the creation is standing on its tip toes, wanting to know what's coming. I want to be delivered to it. Then creation will be delivered into this new heavens and new earth, with no sin and no consequences of sin. They will all pass away.

Revelation 21:5–8 says [5] *And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."* Also he said, *"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* [6] *And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. [7] The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. [8] But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."*

Revelation 22:1–5 says [1] *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city;* (according to this there is only one street, the main street, no back alleys or streets of gold, just one street of gold) *also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [3] No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

Will the street be actual gold? Again there is so much symbolism here and I think it is here to teach us things but I think it will be greater than gold. I love the story about the guy who had a lot of gold and was negotiating with Peter asking if he could bring all his gold. Peter said 'Why do you want to bring paving material?' I think part of the lesson of the street of gold is that we live and die for gold here on this earth but the new heavens and new earth in the presence of the Lord will be so great that we walk on gold there. We have something much more precious.

I Corinthians 2:9–10 says [9] *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— [10] these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.* The symbolism is there to heighten your anticipation but it will be much greater and more glorious than anything you see.

People ask me after looking at Revelation 22:5 if I believe there will be a moon and sun and I do believe there will be a moon and a sun, but in the presence of God we won't need it. Sin is gone and the brightness of God's presence will fill us and we will reign forever and ever.

We will end up having six studies on this because I want to tell you about the body you will have and I want to answer the question of whether believers appear before the Judgment Seat. I will tell you that they do but I will tell you why when I get to that study. Can you imagine the glory of that new body we'll have? Why did He create that? He gave His Son for you and the same God who made you in His image and gave you this home, even though it is marred by sin, just imagine the home He is making for us that is not marred and will never be marred by sin because He loves His people through His Son, Jesus. He has provided us this new heavens and new earth, therefore what do we say?

Philippians 1:21 says [21] *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Can you imagine where we are headed to? That is gain! Psalm 116:15 says [15] *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints,* all the way to glory! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could spend together in Your Word as we work our way through these texts trying to understand these things so that we might think Christianly, live for Christ and know that to die is gain. Now we get to see a little bit about this gain through Your Word. Father, I can imagine some of what this new heavens and new earth will be like because I'm living in this present heavens and earth and it will be transformed into the new heavens and the new earth. What will it look like when I no longer have to look through it with an 'old man' clouding my eyes?! Eye has not seen and ear has not heard. What will it look like unstained by sin and its curse and what will it be like to be in Your presence forever in the new heavens and the new earth? We will be worshipping You with the nations that are healed by the Gospel and with a people who have their robes washed in the blood and we'll celebrate the triumph of the Lamb for we are more than conquerors. Thank You, in Jesus' Name, Amen.