

What Do We Do With This?

Message on "...the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"

Introduction

- Here we are—at the close of our twelve week series on the Apostles Creed.
 - x. I'm not sad, but only because of how excited I am for what's coming next.
 - i. I won't spoil that, for now. We'll talk more about it soon I'm sure.
- But as we are closing our series, we need to remember that it's not yet closed.
 - x. We will discuss some *very* important material today.
 - xx. This closing stanza of the Apostles Creed, which declares that we believe in "...the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."
 - xxx. This topic matters a great deal, because people readily recognize the concept of eternal life—which is only a part of what this stanza covers—as one of the most obvious doctrines of Christianity.
 - i. Someone might know nothing else about Christianity, but they know that Christians believe they will live forever...usually followed by the qualifier "in Heaven."f
 - xv. While this stands as one of the most recognized doctrines of Christianity, it is also one of the most misunderstood, by Christians and people outside the Christian faith.
 - i. And this misunderstanding has serious consequences. The concept of eternal life, when deployed carelessly, can do incredible harm.
 - v. Between the widely recognized status of this concept, and the danger that comes from misunderstanding it, we have good reason to pay close attention to what Scripture teaches on this subject.

Scripture

- So what does Scripture teach on "...the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?"
 - x. After all, the Creed is not Scripture. It merely reflects the truth of Scripture.
 - xx. Therefore, we should ask from which passages did the authors of the creed develop this concept?
- We'll start in the book of 1 Thessalonians.

x. Paul wrote this letter, with the intent of instructing a relatively young church on how they should live as followers of Christ.

xx. In the midst of some explicit instruction on how to live a life that pleases God, we find these words: from 1 Thes. 4:13-18.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. **14** For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. **15** According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

xxx. When I read this passage, I see where the authors of the Apostle's Creed got their basis for their final stanza.

i. "The dead in Christ will rise first." Other parts of Scripture affirm this concept, but we see here a basis for the resurrection of the body; not just Jesus' resurrection, which the Apostle's Creed also addresses, but ours as well, those who are faithful to God.

ii. As to "the life everlasting," we see that Paul instructs the Thessalonians that "we will be with the Lord forever."

xv. We see where the authors of the Creed got their ideas.

i. But I'm not satisfied. I don't just want to know that these things happen. I want to have some idea of what they will be like.

ii. Just what will it be like to "be with the Lord forever?"

iii. Thankfully, Scripture doesn't leave me—or you—hanging.

- When trying to understand more of how we will experience the eternal presence of God, our clearest glimpse comes from John's Revelation of the Kingdom of God, aptly contained in the book of Revelation.

x. When we discuss John's Revelation, we are talking about one of the most subtly complex, intricate portions of the entire Bible.

i. Yet even the short time we spend with it today reveals vital truths about what it will be like to "be with the Lord forever."

ii. We'll look at some snapshots of John's Revelation, and unpack what they mean for us as we consider this question of eternity.

xx. Revelation 4: 1-11. Comes just after John hears specific words to some contemporary churches:

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." **2** At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. **3** And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. **4** Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. **5** From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits[a] of God. **6** Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. **7** The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. **8** Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,'[b]
who was, and is, and is to come."

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

11
"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

xxx. And from Revelation 7: 9-10.

9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. **10** And they cried out in a loud voice:|

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

- Let's pause for a moment and unpack these passages.

x. What is it like to “be with the Lord forever?”

xx. First—it is an experience of worship. Throughout the book of Revelation, people worship God. They do so freely, exuberantly, and collectively.

i. Worship is the proper response when confronted with the full presence of God, because in many ways of the second point we glean from this text:

xx. The presence of God is mind-blowing. His presence extends beyond what we can hope to comprehend. The first passage we read emphasizes this fact:

i. “A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne?”

- What?

ii. “The one who sat [on the throne] had the appearance of jasper and ruby.”

- Huh?

iii. And what's going on with these creatures? One is like a lion, but has wings, with eyes all over them?

xxx. This is John trying to grasp the impossible, and confine it to human language.

i. I mention this mainly to set up our next passage, which contains reveals truths about living in God's presence more stunning than anything we just read.

- From Revelation 21:1-8.

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **2** I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **4** ‘He will wipe every tear

from their eyes. There will be no more death^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

6 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life.**7** Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. **8** But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

x. And finally, from Revelation 22:1-5.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. **3** No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. **4** They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. **5** There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

xx. This should stun us. This should knock us over. This should inspire in us wonder and awe like nothing we have ever known.

i. More than emerald rainbows, more than figures that look like gemstones, more than lions with wings that are covered in eyes, this should stun us.

xxx. John tells us that, when we are with the Lord forever, “there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain.” “There will be no more night,” which in contemporary iconography signified fear, danger, and violence.

i. These things—the things that will be absent from existence when God reigns as he should—define our present lives.

- Our world, the cultures of our world, the powers that be in our world, do every possible thing they can to stave off death, to push mourning out of the spotlight, to cover over and numb pain.”

- We try to distract ourselves from the fact that this world is broken, that sin has marred God’s beautiful creation, from the structure of the very universe down to the way we treat each other every day.

xv. But God, when he comes again in his glory, doesn't cover over those things. He doesn't hide them, or obscure them. He annihilates them. "There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

v. What will it be like to "be with the Lord forever?"

i. It will be more glorious than we could possibly realize. Everything painful, hurtful, **WRONG** with this world will be replaced with its beautiful godly opposite. Things will be as they should be, as God always meant for them to be.

- But I don't think just knowing this is enough.

x. I want to go one step further. I want to ask: "What do we do with these truths?"

i. What do we do with this future hope, this promise that when we are "with the Lord forever," things will be so much more glorious than they are now?

xx. To answer this question, I want to turn back to 1 Thessalonians.

i. This time, reading from chapter five.

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **2** for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. **5** You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. **6** So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. **9** For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. **10** He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

xxx. In light of this future hope, Paul calls the Thessalonians—and we should heed this as well—to "not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober." Further, the language Paul uses in verse eight—calling us to put on various truths of our relationship with God—speak of preparedness. They speak of the need to take action, and to equip ourselves accordingly.

xv. From this, I draw two things we should consider in light of our future hope of eternal life with God.

i. First—we should not be passive. The promise of eternal life with God is not an escapist safety hatch for the people of God. We are not to sit back, confident in our own salvation, waiting for our promised reward.

- Because the promise of eternal life with God does not negate a single word of the rest of Scripture. Jesus' call for us—that we would go into all the world, baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all of Jesus' commands—still holds.

- We should not grow lazy, waiting for God's return, because we remember all of Revelation 21:6-8.

6 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life.**7** Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. **8** But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

- Yes, God' faithful will receive our eternal reward. But judgment still stands for those who remain far from Jesus and his salvation.

- God has called us to declare freedom to those captives, those trapped in their sin and the lies of this world.

- We must remain vigilant in this pursuit in light of the promise of God's eminent return.

ii. As we remain vigilant, though, we can also be encouraged by the promise of eternity with God. We should encourage each other.

- Paul says as much: he calls us to “encourage each other with these words,” speaking of the fact that we will “be with the Lord forever.”

- So when we are weary at the hardships of this life; when we wonder if our efforts to advance the gospel will bear fruit; when we wonder how we are to carry on in a world full of so much death and pain and hurt, we can encourage each other.

- We can declare to each other the truth that, when God reigns following his glorious return, these things shall be made right.

iii. In light of the fact that we “will be with the Lord forever,” we remain vigilant in doing God's work, and we encourage each other in the trustworthy promise of the eternal life to come.