

Life After Death

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. I'm Chris. I'm one of the staff here. Let's hope the technicalities are okay. Well done for surviving the rain. I feel like I'm at home from the UK.

It's great. We've been going through, starting this year, really looking at a series in 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection. And about what having an eternal perspective, having a sense of the way God is going to bring things to fulfillment means in our lives.

Because if we get the wrong idea about the future, then we're going to invest today maybe in a failing account which will not last.

And as a church, we may fail to live, as Eric talked about last week, with the radical bravery and the radical sacrifice that the gospel calls us to, if we don't have this picture of where he's taking us to.

So today we're just going to kind of continue this theme by thinking about what is the future that we have? What happens after we die? Big question.

[1 : 20] And as I talk to both Christians and non-Christians from different places, I've heard as many different answers as I've had probably hot dinners. And in the time of the Corinthians, maybe we can have a look at the first slide.

In the time of the Corinthians, they also had many answers. The Greeks around them, they would say that the human body was both physical and spiritual, and they were separate.

The physical body was bad. The soul and the spiritual was good. So sex, beer, work, that's physical. Prayer, meditation, worship, that's spiritual.

And the problem is the spiritual things are trapped inside your body. You know, a body which gets acne, gets wrinkles. And so it's a bit like being stuck in a lift.

And you know, you just want to be released. Death is the time when you get released, your spirit goes up, and you float away. That's what the Greeks thought. Body bad, spirit good.

[2 : 23] Now, in the West, more atheist, naturalist idea, which is increasingly possible, says, well, there's no God, so heaven is really on earth now.

You've got to enjoy life as much as possible now. So you go to LKF, you work for charity, you do whatever you feel like doing, as long as it makes you happy.

Because YOLO, you only live once. And truly human equals truly happy, so you can clap along if you feel that happiness is the truth, as Pharrell Williams might say.

Well, in the East, here you go, this is a brief history of philosophy for you, okay? So you're getting more than your money's worth, okay? Chinese culture. Well, it's a bit more complicated.

There are so many different ideas which come in, it's quite difficult to work out what's going on. But life is more pragmatic. Life is about getting stuff. And whether you're dead, you still need stuff for your journey.

[3 : 27] So you burn stuff to give to your people's servants, paper house. And if you're alive, you hope the dead spirits come back and maybe bless you as well. And it's this kind of continual cycle of getting stuff.

Now, when it comes to Christians in Hong Kong, I find many Christians are as confused. Some think that maybe we kind of, heaven is like an extended worship service.

You know, lots of singing, clouds, a few angels floating past. Maybe a bit more like the Greeks, though. I find others are very fascinated with heaven. Do you know what one of the biggest selling evangelical Christian books in the last decade was?

Heaven is for real. And it's a story about a four-year-old who kind of goes to heaven and comes back again. And it provides lots of kind of heavenly gossip, really, about things like, will we have wings?

Is the Holy Spirit kind of blue? Will we sit on Jesus' lap and have angels singing to us? And the thing is, we love all this stuff. But actually, it has nothing to do with the biblical view of heaven.

[4 : 33] Others of us, and probably most of us, may be too busy to have even thought about it. It's maybe only when we stop and face death that we actually stop and think, what really is the future?

And Paul, in this passage, he's facing the same kind of confusion. All these different ideas. And he wants to set the record straight to say, listen, what your future looks like and how you're going to live in the light of that counts.

And so I'm going to look at three things that he's going to kind of go through here. First of all, we're made to be glorious. Secondly, we've fallen short of glory. Thirdly, we will be transformed to glory. Okay? Made to be glorious. Fallen short of glory. Transformed to glory. Okay, what's that all about? Well, verse 35, it says this. Someone will ask, how are the dead raised?

With what kind of body do they come? Now, if you've not heard the series so far, this question shows that the Corinthians couldn't get their mind around the fact that Paul has said, we will be raised in our body.

[5 : 45] They couldn't get it. Because they thought, well, what kind of body do you get? Does it have acne and wrinkles like mine? They couldn't get it. And Paul says, you foolish person. You guys have got no idea.

No idea what you're talking about. And he starts using a little agricultural metaphor. He says, verse 37, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. He's likening God's creation. He's likening God's creation of us and our human rights to a seed, like this palm tree seed.

Beautiful seeds. And he's saying, if you take this seed and you bury it in the ground, then metaphorically it dies. It's buried. Now, do you think that seed comes out again in the same way after it's died?

And he says, okay, here's the seed. It's your physical body buried deep in the ground. And then transformation begins to take place. And he says, just as this seed is an embryo of a plant, well, then the plant and the fruit is so much better.

[6 : 57] But that's what he's saying. He's saying our lives, our bodies here are a kernel. They're similar, but they're so much gloriously different when you are resurrected from the dead.

And he gives a little biology lesson, okay? He says about creation. He says, you know when you look around the world, you see the world, and it's physical. It's a physical world, and there are lots of different kind of physical beings.

He says, basically, a tuna fish is not a giraffe. The sun is not the same as the moon. We have different kinds of bodies for different habitats, and each has a glory of its own.

The world around you gives you a little picture of the different beauty we will have with resurrected bodies. So he's saying when God created the physical world, he made it to be a beautiful reflection of himself.

Psalms 19 says, the heavens declare the glory of God. Let's take the picture off for the moment. You're going to get hungry.

[8 : 06] The heavens declare the glory of God. You know, when God made the world, he made day one to day six, and God looked at the physical world. He looked at the trees. He looked at the moon. He looked at everything. And what did he say? He said, that's good, right?

And then on day six, he then made human beings. And do you know what he said? He said, that's very good. Because God goes, wow, that is beautiful when he looks around at the world.

He makes Adam and Eve, and he makes them in his image to be a reflection of himself. And he says, that is beautiful. And it's meant to reflect, like a mirror, the beauty of God himself.

And the glory of God is the radiant beauty, power, goodness, splendor of his presence, and his amazing goodness to us.

Exodus 33, Moses asks, God, show me your glory. And do you know what God does? He says, okay, I will let all my goodness pass in front of you. And he says, I'm too beautiful for you to see, but you'll see my back.

[9 : 14] And then he passes in front of him, and he says, the Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. That is his glory, his character.

You know, when I was younger, I still do occasionally, but when I'm feeling happier, I walk along the road, and I'd smile at strangers along the road, just to kind of brighten their day.

You know, it's a miserable world. Let's bring some life into people's lives. And so I would go along, and it's fascinating how people respond when you smile at them. Have you noticed? So you go along, and most people feel so awkward that they suddenly look down at the ground, or they look away, they're like, what does he want?

Do you know? And, but just occasionally, after about 50 stony-faced, kind of miserable people looking on, you would then come to one person who, as they saw you smiling at them, their face would light up, and they would kind of beam back at you.

And do you know, that suddenly gives you, this is some kind of connection. And you go away just feeling like, wow, there is life in this world. There's this kind of joy, there's a spring in your step, because humanity exists.

[10:32] Okay? Now, I think that's a bit like what God's saying with his glory. He's saying, God smiles on us with his beauty and glory, and we were made to smile back.

And the world was made to say, wow, isn't God good? Psalm 8 says, God created us, and he crowned us with glory and honor.

And our glory, that smile that we reflect, is only found in that deep, intimate, satisfying connection, relationship with God. As we mirror his smile, we're to resound with worship.

Now, the thing is, as you look around the world, you will see glimpses of the glory of God, his smile reflected in the world. You glimpse it when you have that succulent wagyu beef, which just melts in your mouth.

You glimpse it when you watch the sunset over the mountains, and with your spouse or your friend, and you have that Kodak moment. You glimpse it when you see Messi dribbling with the ball and scoring in the top right-hand corner.

[11:41] You glimpse it when you see a daughter or son helping their aging parents tenderly along the road. You glimpse it when, after 60 years of marriage, you see an elderly couple lovingly shuffling hand-in-hand along the seaside.

You see glory and beauty around us in everywhere. And the physical body has a glory as well. Deep inside, you know, we're all attracted to beauty.

Now, our society tends to define beauty in certain kinds of ways, but adverts tap into, that's why we love them, they tap into that deep desire in all of us for beauty and loveliness and glory.

That's why if I said a new CG is starting up, and it's going to be led by a Brazilian supermodel, a lot of you guys, and probably some of you women, would be interested in joining.

Because beauty attracts us. We have a desire for beauty and glory, whatever that looks like for us. But every strain of glory, every strain of beauty is meant to be a beam which is meant to draw you back to the source of light.

[12:52] And that thirst and desire for the beauty that we all have, which we're attracted to, is actually a desire for the source of all beauty, which is God himself in his glory.

We were made to be glorious, to reflect him. Secondly, we are fallen short of glory.

In the Romans it says, We've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We're not who we should be. It says that though we could see this beauty of God in all of creation, we didn't honor him, we didn't give him thanks, but instead we turned away stony-faced and chased after our own things that we were focused on.

We wanted glory for ourselves, and we worshipped other things, which we thought were more desirable than God. In the Garden of Edom, Adam and Eve had the choice of life or death, and they chose death.

You know, like a flower that needs to turn to the sun for life, and if it turns away, it will die. So we turned away from God, and we wilted. And spiritual death, physical death, entered the world.

[14:07] Paul puts it like this in Corinthians. He says, What is sown, our physical created bodies in a physical world, are perishable. Perishable.

Your beauty fades, as does your memory, as I know. The sunset disappears. Your health will deteriorate, like your iPad battery. If you live long enough, we all have an expiry date.

Our lives are perishable. What is sown is weak, he says. We're weak, we get sick, and if you're not affected by sickness, you know someone who is. You know, cancer, autism, celiac disease, flu, aging.

Emotionally, we go up and down like a yo-yo. That's something as simple as someone forgetting your birthday, right? We're weak. We all are. And we're dishonored, it says.

Adam and Eve were naked in the Garden of Eden. And they were unashamed. But when they sinned, you know what happened? They ran and they hid. Because they had to cover themselves.

[15 : 15] And those people crowned with glory and honor, well, their crown slipped a bit. And I know that personally because that sense of even when I want to love my wife, you know, so often I just end up being insensitive.

Or saying the thing that I shouldn't say. Doing the thing that I shouldn't say. Doing the thing that I shouldn't do. And I kick myself and think, how could I be so stupid to do that again? And yet I keep doing it again and again and again.

Anyone know the feeling? Because it's sin still lives in me. And my father is Adam. And I'm naturally like him.

That's what he means when he says the body is natural. In 1 Corinthians 2 it says, the natural person does not accept the things of God. Natural is that struggle of selfishness that I constantly have when I'm concerned more with me than with others.

More with my glory than with God's glory. Trying to fulfill my own desires for approval, comfort, control, security by myself. And I look away from God to other things.

[16 : 21] It's natural. But when we live like this, we often live more like the atheist or the traditional Chinese model of life. Because actually this world is a world of if-onlys.

You know, I did a beach clean-up a couple of years ago with some colleagues from Fiona's company. And we went to Cheng Chao. And we did this amazing job of cleaning up this beach. There was so much rubbish on it. But we cleaned it up. We spent the whole day doing it. We finished it. It looked beautiful. It was a beautiful day. Beautiful, pristine beach. As we kind of got on the boat to start going home, suddenly I noticed something.

The tide was coming back in. Do you know how frustrating it is? When all the work that you have just done, the tide just is bringing it all back in again.

And this world is filled with what I said. I said, if only people wouldn't throw their rubbish in the sea.

[17 : 22] If only people would throw their rubbish in the sea. If only. If only. If only that vacation didn't come to an end. If only it wasn't work tomorrow and, you know, it's still the weekend.

If only I had a better job, not this job, a better job. And then when you get that job, then if only I had another job. If only my spouse was more sensitive, less critical, more caring.

And we compare ourselves to everyone else and we think, if only I had that thing. If only, if only, if only. And we think it'd be so much better if only I had that.

And I think that's why in Hong Kong people tend to change their jobs every two years. Because if only I get that one, then everything will be fine. We change our phones every, well, probably time Apple releases a new one.

Because if only I can get that, then my life will be better. And all the time we have so many things that we're chasing, chasing, chasing. And we think it's going to get better, but actually when we get in after a little while, we're like a school kid in the playground who gets a Christmas present, looks at the next door kid, they've got a bigger one and then they're disappointed again.

[18 : 39] And we're chasing sunbeams rather than looking to the sun to give us life. I don't know, what are you chasing at the moment? What's consuming your thoughts? C.S. Lewis says, That's what these glimpses of glory are.

That we long to be satisfied. Do you long for intimacy with your spouse? Well, you know what? Your spouse will never fully satisfy it.

Because that's a longing for Christ, the perfect spouse. Do you long for a fully satisfying job? That's because you're longing for a new creation where work is not so frustrating and you're not having to say, if only, all the time.

Do you long for physical health? Well, that desire is pointing you along the sunbeam to one day when God will restore and transform every single body who has trusted in him.

Is change possible now? Yeah, absolutely. Things can change now. But you know, sooner or later, the tide will sweep back in more stuff. And if your only hope is now, like the atheist, then you are going to be disappointed.

[20 : 16] And frustration will grip you. You know, I've discovered the more mature you are as a Christian, the more, like Paul, you groan. Anyone seen that?

The more you actually groan and you long for Jesus to return. Because you realize you are not all you should be. This world is not all it should be. And you long for him to come back and to transform and to restore it to what it should be.

That desire that I have inside of my heart for beauty, for glory, for restoration, for satisfaction. We're made to be glorious, but we've fallen short of glory in this world.

Thirdly, we are transformed to glory. Have a look at verse 42. He says, What is sown is perishable. It is raised imperishable.

What is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. In verse 48, As was the man of dust, Adam, so also are those who are of the dust, dead.

[21 : 29] As is the man of heaven, Jesus, So also are those who are of heaven. They will be resurrected and alive. Just as we've borne the image of the man of dust, We shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

What Paul is saying is this. For you to be fit for God's presence, For you to be transformed, You'll be transformed in different ways, a number of ways.

For you to be fit for God's presence, Which is what heaven is, His beautiful presence, Where you're intimately face to face in His throne room with the King of Kings.

There's no if-onlys there. If you want to enter there, You cannot enter in your earthly birthday suit. Because that's ragged and it's decaying through sin.

Just as a tramp cannot enter into Queen Elizabeth's presence. So you cannot enter in without a new transformed body. And it needs to be a spiritual body.

[22 : 34] And by spiritual body, He doesn't mean kind of like floaty-floaty in the sky. He means a physical body in a physical world That is animated by the living Spirit of God.

With such freedom that the chains that have held you in this life, The things which restrict you, Are broken forever. You can enjoy work fully without frustration.

You can eat buffet after buffet of the finest food and not get fat. Isn't that good? And you'd be satisfied with your body. Not looking in the mirror, Just thinking if only, If only.

Because there will be pleasure without a hangover. Intimacy without an end. Desire that is truly satisfied. Physical, But the Spirit of God animating us.

And this promise Of what we experience of living in this new body Can only, I think, be imagined by us. I mean, how do you imagine the unimaginable? But it's only by imagining and describing What our desires now thirst for.

[23 : 37] So the glimpses of glory that you see around Are just a taste of what God is going to do. C.S. Lewis in the Chronicles of Narnia, He has this right at the end of his books.

He says, This is my real country.

I belong here. This is the land I've been looking for all of my life, Though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia so much Is because sometimes it looked a little bit like this.

Isn't that beautiful? The reason we loved the old Narnia so much Was because sometimes it looked a little bit like this.

That is the promise of resurrection. But the only way you can have this transformed body And enjoy the satisfaction of glory and beauty Is through Jesus who lived in this other world.

[25 : 09] Where every desire was satisfied. He had no if-onlys. He was in perfect, harmonious, glorious relationship with his father. And yet out of God's great love for us, He left the glory of his father.

He took on a human body. He knew the pain, the full human experience. In agony, he died his death on a cross. Death, which was what we knew.

He died that we might come to experience that satisfaction with him. And he is the first human to defeat the natural body of death, Which restricts you and me.

He has a new physical, spiritual body That could cook breakfast, that ate fish, That could be touched, but could go through locked doors, But was free from every if-only which binds us.

His body raised a spiritual body, So that our tired old bodies could gain a new body, Which courses with life and vitality. More life than your three-year-old bouncing on the sofa.

[26 : 23] And as we see his smile, Face to face, We will be like him. And you know the amazing thing, Is that in heaven, In God's presence, And you know heaven comes down to earth together, There is a song, And it goes something like this, Worthy is the lamb, Jesus who was slain, To

receive power and wealth and wisdom and might, And honor and glory and blessing.

That's what they sing in heaven. Do you know why? Because there's only one man-made thing in heaven, Right now. On the body of Jesus, Are the scars in his hands and feet. Those ugly, painful scars, On the cross, Are transformed in heaven, Into the glory and honor of a war hero.

I remember once going to a conference, With a lady called Toni Erickson Tarda, I don't know if you've heard of her. And she's a lady, Remarkable lady, She'd been paralyzed at the age of 18, From the waist down.

And she had struggled, With depression and doubt, Suicidal thoughts. And yet she persevered through her life, Seeking through all the doubts, To live for God's glory.

She's ended up writing 40 books, Ended up learning how to paint with her teeth, And encouraging people all around the world, To trust in Christ. As we waited in the auditorium, She was wheeled out on the wheelchair.

[28 : 05] And suddenly, The whole of everybody in the auditorium, Stood to their feet, And erupted in applause, And cheers for her.

And it wasn't because of the book she wrote, And it wasn't because of the painting she painted. It was because, People saw a glimpse of the glory of a life, Which had been lived through pain, But they'd seen that those wounds, Had been transformed in some way, Into something that was so beautiful, That reflected something, Of the image of Jesus.

And that, Is something of what God is doing, To make us like him. That process of transformation, To be like him, Starts now.

Because it's little wonder, That when you see Jesus, The only reaction, Reaction we will have, When we meet him face to face, Is not like heaven is for real, And to sit on his lap, With angels singing to us.

That is not it. The Bible just shows you, That when you see him, We will erupt, With applause and adoration, Because he is so beautiful.

[29 : 25] Because his glory, His goodness, His grace, His mercy, Just hits you. Because you see the scars, You see the glory of God, In its full, Unadulterated glory.

And it is amazing. And the thing is, For each of us now, When we go through life, Many of us here, Carry scars, And wounds, From following Christ.

Some of you, Your marriage is tough. You know what it is, To have a spouse, Or kids, Who don't know Christ. And you cry, When is it going to happen?

Some of you, It's your workplace. It gets you down, And you're trying to honor God, In your workplace, And yet sometimes, You just feel like, You're drowning. Some of us struggle, With forgiveness.

Some of us struggle, With ungodly habits, That we're trying to break, We're trying to work, Through them, But we seem to fall. And the glory, Of the gospel, Is that, The resurrection, Tells you to persevere, To keep fighting.

[30 : 29] Because when you stand up, And you keep fighting, Looking to please Christ, Even though we fall, Every sacrifice, Is achieving a glory, That will surpass, Every wound.

And the Bible says, That every righteous act, Of God's people, Is woven into this, Beautiful garment. Every thread of your life, Right now, Is woven, When you live for Christ's glory, Is woven into this, Beautiful garment.

That you will wear, And display. And just as in a battle, That the wounded, Are treated as heroes, So in the light of Christ's wounds, Your wounds, Will be a source of pride, And honor.

You'll be like him. You'll be like him. And it's not just our physical body, It's not just our scars, But also, Our physical work, Will be transformed, To be like him.

You see, Here's the deal, When you go to work tomorrow, Do you realize, That nothing that you do, Or produce, Has any intrinsic worth, Of itself. Because if you cook a meal, Tomorrow, That meal is soon, Going to be gone.

[31 : 43] If you make a deal tomorrow, You know, In a few weeks, A few months, A few days, A few hours, That will be forgotten. What you do, What you do, Has value, Not because, The thing has value, But because of who, You're doing it for, I have, I have, A picture, A picture, This picture, Is, A beautiful picture, Well, I mean, It won't hang up, In some gallery somewhere, You know, If I found this picture, Lying on the floor, I think, Probably, You know, I might leave it there, I think, Oh cute, Some kid did it, But if it was still lying on the floor, And nobody claimed it after a while, Do you

know what would happen to it?

It would get thrown away. Right? Because, Honestly, It doesn't mean anything for me. But you know, If this is the picture, That your kid has done for you, You know what I see with parents? They display it on their wall. When visitors come around, They say, Look what my three-year-old did, With pride. Now, Is it because of the beauty of the picture?

It's because, It was done for you. Because you have relationship. And relationship, Makes the difference, In everything that you are going to do, Tomorrow, Today, The next year.

So when you go, To work, To work, To work, To work, To work, To work, To work, To work, Who are you doing your work for? Who are you doing your work for? Because our, Work, Was made to reflect God's work.

[33 : 45] He brings order out of chaos. A teacher brings order out of chaos, In the classroom. A banker brings order out of chaos, In the figures and financial markets. Parents bring, Order and routine, Out of the chaos of kids lives.

Working reflects God's work. But who are you doing it for? Because work is worship. It will either be done for the glory of God, It will be done for the glory of yourself, For the glory of your business card, For the glory of your achievement, For the glory of your own bank balance, The glory of your own self-worth.

But 1 Corinthians 3 tells us, That if you are making your work, Your study, Your raising of children, About yourself looking good, Getting that title for yourself, Thinking, Actually, I'm doing pretty well. But it's done for self, Not for Christ. And everything we do, Which is just done for me, Will, Like that picture, Just be thrown away. Burnt up. And we'll have wasted our entire lives.

Can you imagine, The tragedy, Of looking back on your life, Like some people did, In the cultural revolution in China, And just seeing all of your work, Your life's work going up in flames.

[34 : 57] That's a tragedy. And the tragedy is that some of us, Are making choices like that, Where we're living for ourselves. But the beauty, That God calls us to as a church, Is this.

If you see the depth of Christ's sacrifice for you, His smile on your life, His goodness, Then you will go into your workplace, Wherever you're doing, And you'll offer what you do tomorrow, As worship for Him.

Actually take a minute, Before you start your day, To say God, I want to give you this, To please you. Because that will change the way, Because you know, When I get stressed, When I'm tempted to make it all about me, You know, It becomes stressful, Because my reputation's on the line.

But whether you are successful or not, Whether it's frustrating or not, If you say, God, I want to give this for you, I want to live and work in a way, Which reflects your character, And your goodness, And your love, Then, Then, When Corinthians would say, It's like that picture, Your work, It doesn't matter if it's a success, Or a failure, It doesn't matter how great it is, If you're doing it with a heart for Christ, Then God will display it, On His wall, And He will show all the angels, Look what my child did, Look what my child did, And I think part of the rewards, Of the new creation, Will be the joy, Of being honored, By the King of Kings, For what we did in this life, In our weak, Perishable, Dishonored bodies, Knowing that it's only because of Him, Looking to Him,

His smile, To persevere, With whatever's going on in your life, Work for Him, Because the future is Him, Live to be like Him, Because that is our future, Let's pray, Father, You made us, To be, A little reflection, A smile, That reflects that of you, Forgive me when, I make the world about me, But your resurrection, It shows us, That the world is about you, But when we see, Those glimpses of glory, Help us to actually, Give you the thanks, Not just to take the credit, For the successes for myself, But to give you the glory, When things go well, When things go badly, To give it all to you,

[37 : 46] Knowing that you, You transform, And use, Whatever we've given, Not because we're trying to earn it, From your pleasure, Because you already smile on us, Because of Jesus, Help us to enjoy your smile, To remember your smile, As we go to work, As we go into our lives, Into our homes, Into our families, And to allow, That smiling face, Of Christ, To be what motivates us, To smile back at you, Thank you for your love, Your name, Amen, Amen, Amen,