

What Happens When We Die (Part 3) – 1 Cor 15:23-28

Email testimonies (:31)

1 Cor 15:23-28 – p.961 (Title Slide)

This is Part 3 of a multi-part series about what happens when we die

B/c we, of all people, need to live and think differently when it comes to death

We need to know the truth, and be a source of truth

Resting in the hope of glory ourselves, and proclaiming it to others every chance we get

The platform for which, comes from Paul's general timeline of history, here in v23-28

Starting at the end of v22, he says – *In Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” (Review)

First is . . .

The resurrection of Christ

Then, the return of Christ and the resurrection of his people

Then, the reign of Christ – during the millennium

Then the eternal state – or as Paul says it in v24, the end of life as we know it, and the beginning of life for all eternity (**Summary**)

And we found a few weeks ago, that right now, in between the first and second parts – the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ . . .

1. The souls of believers go immediately to heaven (2 Cor 5:6-8; 1 Th 5:10; Phil 1:23)

• **A place where Old Testament believers already are (Heb 12:22-24)**

Which means . . .

• **There's no such thing as soul-sleep**

• **There's no such thing as purgatory**

• **There's no use praying for the dead (Summary)**

Second, between the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ . . .

2. The souls of unbelievers go immediately to hell (Lk 16:19-26; 2 Pet 2:9)

A place of eternal conscious punishment for those who reject Christ; Where they . . .

• **And suffer for all eternity (Rev 14:11; Mt 25:46)**

• **Apart from God's presence (Mt 7:23; 25:41)**

• **With no second chance (Heb 9:27; Lk 16:26)**

The Bible says that after death, comes an irreversible decision by God, as to where you'll spend eternity (**Summary**)

That's review – the souls of believers go immediately to heaven, and the souls of unbelievers go immediately to hell

3. Then believers are resurrected at Christ's return (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 4:13-17)

That's the next part of Paul's general timeline, that he makes explicit in v23

In Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

When Christ returns, those who are his, those who know him as Lord and Savior – will be made alive; Resurrected from the dead (:38)

It's alluded to in the OT, promised in the New, and clarified in 1 Thess 4

Let's take each of those in turn

• The resurrection of believers was alluded to several times in the OT

Like when Job said in **Job 19:25-27** – *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, 27 whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.*

In my flesh I shall see God; It's an allusion to the resurrection of believers

And how about Is 26:19, where he's speaking to God and says – *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!*

And then there's Dan 12:2 – *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.******

The resurrection of God's people is alluded to several times in the OT

• And promised in the New

Like in **1 Cor 6:14** where Paul says – *God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.* God will raise us, just like he raised Jesus; It's promised

And again in **Col 3:4** – *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* Once again, it's promised

And Jesus himself said in **Jn 6:40** – *This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

Jesus promised to raise those up, who believe in him*****

It's alluded to in the OT, promised in the New . . .

• And clarified in 1 Thessalonians 4 – **1 Thess 4:13-17** – p.987

After giving instructions about life, Paul says . . .

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

At Christ's return, the dead in Christ will rise first – i.e. they will be made alive; their bodies will be resurrected

As fantastic as it seems, it's clear – in both the Old and New Testaments

It's true, and it's real – believers will be raised from the dead at Christ's return

All of which happens . . .

• **At the end of the Great Tribulation (Mt 24:21, 29-31)**

The Great Tribulation is an expression that comes from Jesus in **Mt 24:21**, referring to the days of intense hardship, most likely 7 years' worth, just before his return (:46)

There will be great tribulation [he says], such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no and never will be.

Immediately after which, he will return to gather his elect – those who are saved

That’s what he goes on to say in **v29-31** of Mt 24

Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . all the tribes of the earth . . . will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds [from all over the world], from one end of heaven to the other.

And we know from 1 Thess 4:16, that the elect who have died, *the dead in Christ*, will be gathered first; Resurrected first; It happens at the end of the Great Tribulation*****

And we’ll be resurrected . . .

- **With glorified bodies (Lk 24:36-43)**

This is where it starts to get cool

When Christ raises us from the dead, we get a new body; A new body just like Jesus

1 Jn 3:2 – *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* When Jesus returns, we will be like him

Phil 3:20-21 – *Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

By the same overwhelming power with which he rules the universe – our glorified bodies will be like Christ’s glorified body*****

One of the best descriptions of which, is his activity after he rose again, in Lk 24:36-43
As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my 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.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

- The first characteristic of our glorified bodies, is that we’ll be **visible**
Even though they didn’t know what they were seeing, they were seeing *something*
He even said – *Touch me and see*; He was visible; And we will be too

Second, we’ll be **tangible** or physical – able to be touched; Touch me he said, go ahead
And later on, Thomas did, didn’t he? He put his finger in the nail holes, and his hand in his side (Jn 20:27)
Which he could do, b/c Jesus’ glorified body consisted of *flesh and bone* (39); And proved it by eating a piece of fish
And since we’ll be like him, we too, will be tangible and physical in nature

But unrestrained by physical limitations

Now, I’m hesitant to say this definitively, but if we’re going to be like him like the Bible says – it’s quite possible that doors, walls, distance, and time, are no object
Just like they weren’t for him (:54)

Like in Lk 24:31 when *he vanished from their sight* – referring to the two men with whom he was sitting at a table

And then appeared a short while later to the disciples, through *locked* doors (Jn 20:19)

And then again, 8 days later through more locked doors (Jn 20:26)

We are given a *natural* body, but raised a *spiritual* one Paul says in 1 Cor 15

Quite possibly unrestrained by physical limitations, just like Jesus

Fourth, we’ll be **recognizable**; In Lk 24:39, Jesus said – *it is I myself; touch me and see*
IOW it’s me! It’s me! Implying that he was able to be recognized

That he looked similar in appearance to the way he looked before; And so will we
4 characteristics of our glorified bodies

- But that’s not it; Paul goes on in **1 Cor 15**, to say that – *The dead will be raised imperishable* [v52], *and we shall be changed.*

Imperishable, as in **free of sickness and decay**

We’ll never again get a cold, or the flu, or cancer, or disease – all aspects of our fallen world; We’ll never again have to struggle with disabilities; We’ll never again . . .

Have to fight infirmities; We’ll be just like Jesus – free of sickness and decay

And last, **full of strength and power**

1 Cor 15:43 – *It* [referring to our body] *is sown in weakness* [it exists in weakness right now]; *it is raised in power*. Power, as in, we’ll never again get tired

We’ll never slow down, get down, or run down

We’ll *mount up with wings like eagles*; We’ll *run and not be weary*; We’ll *walk and not faint* (Is 40:31); Forever (**Summary**)

When Jesus returns, those who believe, will be resurrected with glorified bodies – like that
It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been in the grave; It doesn’t matter how much you’ve decayed; It doesn’t matter how you died

It doesn’t matter if you were cremated, or decimated

By the power that enables God to subdue and subject the entire *universe* to himself – he will *raise* us like himself*****

And it’s going to happen . . .

- **In a moment (1 Cor 15:51-52)**

IOW we will be changed in an instant; Paul says in 1 Cor 15:51-52 . . .

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Just like that, when Christ returns – we will be changed; we’ll receive our glorified bodies; No more waiting and no more delay

Only change, in the twinkling of an eye . . .

- **To meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17)**

That’s what Paul said in 1 Thess 4:16-17 – *The dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*

As if getting a new body wasn’t enough, and getting it in a moment – we’re gonna be airborne; That’s what it says – we’ll *meet the Lord in the air*

Which isn’t the first time we’ve *seen* him since death – keep that in mind (:02)

- As a believer at that point – if you’ve already died, you’re already with him
Your *soul* went immediately into his presence, the instant you drew your last breath
You’ve been *with* him, you’ve been worshiping him, you’ve been talking with him, and
you’ve been waiting with him since the day you died

And now, he’s finally returning to earth, and you’re *still* with him
And when he comes, when he *descends from heaven with a cry of command, with the
voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God* (1 Thess 4:16) . . .
You receive your glorified body, while still in the air

- **Joined by those still alive (1 Thess 4:17)**

The souls of believers go immediately to heaven, and upon Christ’s return at the end of
the Great Tribulation – they receive their glorified bodies, in a moment, in the air . . .
Joined by those still alive

*The dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught
up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*
Those believers who are left standing after going through the Great Tribulation – will
meet those who have already died over time . . .
To receive *their* glorified bodies as well; We’ll be caught up *together*

What a day of rejoicing *that* will be, huh? No wonder we’ll sing and shout the victory
We’ll all see Jesus, *and* one another

- **And return with Christ to earth (1 Thess 4:17)**

HOW the rapture, our meeting Jesus in the air, and his 2nd Coming to earth – are one
simultaneous event
We’re going to meet the Lord in the air, and immediately return with him, to earth
That’s what the word *meet* means, in 1 Thess 4:17 – *we who are alive, who are left, will
be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we
will always be with the Lord*

The word there for meet, is “apantesis” in Greek . . .
And it was regularly used in extra-biblical writings of that day, to describe a welcoming
party that goes outside the city gates to meet an honored guest or royal dignitary . . .
And then escort them back into town
It means – leave to meet, and immediately return

- Which is exactly how it’s used in its two other NT occurrences
The first is Mt 25:6 where the wise bridesmaids *meet* the bridegroom, and escort him
back to his home . . .
And the second is Acts 28:15, when the believers from Rome travel south to meet up
with Paul, and escort him back to the city

It’s the same word, in the same kind of context, used here in 1 Thessalonians . . .
And *one* of the reasons, that as believers, we can expect to gather around Jesus in the
rapture, and immediately return with him to earth

The question is, when the roll is called up yonder, are you going to be there? **(Summary)**
I hope so; B/c that’s something worth anticipating; When we fly to Jesus, and live (:10)

Pray (Servers prepare) – Father, we live for that hope and that day; No wonder Paul said
to die is gain; So fill us and fuel us with these truths; And find us faithful . . .
As we remember the sacrifice, and anticipate the glories