



LIFE After Death

What is our ultimate hope as followers of Jesus? What are we waiting for? Romans 8:11 tells us that the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead is now living in us. As N.T. Wright says, "What happened to Jesus at Easter happens to all Jesus' people." The Spirit of God in us is a guarantee of all that is to come. We look forward to the resurrection of our own bodies and the renewal of all things. Jesus is making all things new! Our hope is the life that is endlessly before us in God's new creation, where heaven and earth become one! In this hope we were saved. In this hope, we grieve, we suffer, we pray, we serve, we love.

REALLY? • ROMANS 8:11, 14-25 • Katie Fowler • April 8, 2018

I spent Easter morning in a cemetery once. The church I grew up in held a sunrise service in a nearby cemetery. I remember walking through that graveyard with my dad before the service began. It was still completely dark out and we stumbled our way to the site of the worship service. There, surrounded by graves, we worshipped the One who walked out of His grave. There, surrounded by reminders of death, we said things like, "Death, where is your victory?" I am sure there were some in that congregation who had buried loved ones in that very place. For some, very recent and fresh grief. I bet most of us have memories of a cemetery. Whether you are a Christian or not, maybe you are here searching. And haven't you wondered...what happens after life? After death?

There in the cemetery, there we worshipped, there we proclaimed the truth of Easter—Why do you look for living among the dead? He is not here. Christ is Risen. More than anything else, I remember this about that Easter service so many years ago: We left in the light. We came surrounded by darkness. But we walked out of that cemetery surrounded by light. A new day was here. The resurrection of Jesus is like a new day dawning—a day that has begun and will one day be fully here.

You see, through the resurrection of Jesus on that first Easter morning, something new has been unleashed. Something new is happening. Happy Easter, indeed! And this new thing has everything to do with you and me, with all those who are in Christ. In fact, with all of God's creation. Today we ask a simple question. In the face of death, what ultimate hope do we have in Christ? What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for us?

As we explore our passage from Romans, we find this: one day death's defeat will be complete. Death's defeat will be complete, for as Jesus was raised from the dead, we will be raised from the dead. All things will be restored. The reign of death will be undone. Here it is, verse 11, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you (Romans 8:11)."

Jesus, God in the flesh, came proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom. Of God's rule coming to earth as it is in heaven. But then this proclaimer of good news was betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified. But on that third day—after all hope seemed lost—on that first Easter morning, God raised Jesus from the dead. On that morning, the women went to the tomb and it was empty. And Jesus, the Risen One, appeared to His followers—to Mary, to Peter and the others, later to more than 500 eyewitnesses. Christ is Risen. And what the Apostle Paul wants us to see is this: Everyone who belongs to Jesus, the

Spirit of God lives in you. The very Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. This is astounding. As you enter into that hard conversation this week, as you face those difficult, trying circumstances, as you go about your Tuesday—the very Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you.

But Paul wants us to see something specific here in his letter to the Romans. Because God raised Jesus, He will raise you too. We are resurrection people. We will rise because, in Christ, death dies. Certainly, we already have new life in Christ. We *have been* saved. It's the image of baptism—of dying with Christ, dying to the old and being raised to new life. That's already true of us who are in Christ. But we also *will be* saved—we have a future hope. In the Apostle's Creed, believers declare "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

What are we saying? That first Easter morning, Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb. He wasn't a ghost. He said to His disciples, "touch me and see." To Thomas, He said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." He took a piece of fish and ate it in their midst. This was no hallucination, this was Jesus physically, bodily raised from the dead. Still very much Jesus and yet transformed, His resurrected body. Verse 11 says, "He who raised Christ will give life to your mortal bodies."

Our ultimate hope in Christ is not some immaterial hope. The Christian hope is substantive. It's the resurrection of our bodies. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, God will raise us from the dead. Death is an enemy, make no mistake. But this enemy will be defeated. The deathblow has already been delivered in the resurrection of Jesus. One day we will rise because, in Christ, death dies. Can you believe that? Trust that in the middle of grief and loss? Standing by a grave? Death's defeat will be complete. Like Christ, our bodies will be redeemed, transformed, glorified. You and I will spend eternity running, laughing, conversing, reigning with Christ, worshipping God. In bodies free from sin, free from death.

This might raise questions for us—what exactly will our bodies be like? We recognize there is mystery involved. We understand only in part. As 1 John 3:2 says, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." When those who are in Christ die, immediately we are in the Lord's presence. And one day, Christ will come again and we shall be like Him. We will rise.

How can this be? How can we know such things are in store for us? Because we are children of God and God's Spirit lives

inside of us. Hear again verse 15, “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.” We come right into the presence of God. Nothing can separate us. Ever. Not even death. Fear can grip our lives, keep us up at night, consume our thoughts. But we don’t have to live in fear anymore. Something new has begun in Jesus Christ, remember? We have been made sons and daughters. And by the Holy Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.”

I have tried very hard to teach my son Luke to say mama. “Repeat after me...” and on and on. But you know what he keeps coming back at me with? Dada. Abba is the Aramaic term for father. It’s a term of intimacy. It’s the very term that Jesus used to refer to God the Father. And by the Holy Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.” This Father who raised His Son from the dead will raise us too. And when we are tempted to forget, His Spirit whispers, “death’s defeat will be complete.”

Then it gets even more astonishing. If children, we are heirs. I went to an adoption ceremony for some of my friends. I have been to a few actually—so much joy in that courtroom as the judge walked us through the legal procedures of finalizing the adoption. The point is made: if you adopt this child all the rights and privileges of a legal child are now this child’s. The judge raised the question, do you agree? Gladly my friends—every one of them have said *Yes! All that we have is theirs. Yes!*

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:17-18).” Glory is coming.

Scholar N.T. Wright says, “Until at least the late eighteenth century, many tombstones and memorials were inscribed with the latin word *resurgam*, which means ‘I shall arise.’...That was why people were buried facing east, so as to rise to meet the Lord at his coming.” On that day that Christ returns, light from the east will break—a new day will be fully here. God’s Kingdom fully here on earth as it is in heaven. And you and I shall arise. What is endlessly before us is life. Life with God forever.”

Last week on Easter, Pastor Tim said that Christ stands up and stares at death and says *no more!* One day that *NO* will reverberate through all of creation. Death’s defeat will be complete. God is not like the small child who so carefully builds his tower out of legos only to later smash it to the ground. God so loved the world—this creation He made—that He declared it very good. What Paul writes of is the renewal of the earth—not the destruction. What is endlessly before us is life as it was meant to be—all of creation healed, made new, restored.

Revelation 21 is one of my favorite passages. There John has a revelation of what God will ultimately do, a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. “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. 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. He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new (Revelation 21: 3-5).’” Christ is making all things new. Our ultimate hope is heaven coming down. Heaven and earth made one. And Remember, this new day, it’s already begun. The Kingdom is breaking in. Here and now.

So we throw ourselves into the work of this Kingdom, we join God in what He is doing in India and Mongolia. We come alongside the Family Connections Center at the Helen Hunt Campus. We create works of art and beauty and truth. We invest in our neighborhoods. And anybody can get in on this. We go around preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, of coming home again to God, of being made new, of sins forgiven. The new day has already begun but it’s not yet fully here. In our passage we read, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22).

When humanity fell, rebelling against God, the ground itself was cursed. We inhabit a broken world. But I don’t need to tell you that do I? We are headed to a day when the curse will be no more. But we aren’t there yet. And the image in our passage is that of groaning—groaning as in the pains of childbirth. When I was in labor with our son Luke, we got to the hospital before I could be admitted. They had us walk the floor of the maternity wing to help move the labor along. And I had to stop at times because of the pain. At one point, Chuck, my dear, dear, dear, sweet husband, turned to me and said, “does it hurt?” I will let you just *guess* what I said in response. Groaning in the pains of childbirth. But it’s not just creation. It’s us too. We too groan.

In his book, *Lament for a Son*, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff describes his pain and grief after losing his 25-year-old son, Eric, to a rock-climbing accident. “With every fiber of my being I long to talk with Eric again. When I mentioned this to someone, she asked what I would say. I don’t know. Maybe I would blurt out something silly. That would be good enough for a beginning. We could take it from there. Every day I wonder, and some days I doubt, whether that talk will ever take place. But then comes that insistent voice: ‘Remember, I made all this and raised my own son from the dead, so I can also....’

I know, I know. But why don't you raise mine now? Why you did you ever let him die? If creation took just six days, why does re-creation take so agonizingly long? If your conquest of primeval chaos went so quickly why must your conquest of sin and death and suffering be so achingly slow? When I say my first words to Eric, then God's reign will be here."

God's reign, God's Kingdom fully here. We are headed towards that day. Today, we stare a grave. But the empty tomb of Jesus says, "Death's defeat will be complete." For the unleashing of God's new creation began that Easter morning, and one day, will be fully here. For in this hope we were saved. I was thinking this week about that phrase we say: Hope for the best. With a sort of resignation, maybe with fingers crossed, let's hope for the best. We tell ourselves we can't control the outcome; all we can do is hope for the best. That may be true for us. But not for Jesus Christ, the one who holds the keys of death. He is the firstborn among the dead.

What we have is not resignation, but expectation, eager expectation. He is going to do it. The Lord will come again. He will make all things new including us. Not resignation, but expectation. In this hope we were saved.

I want to close with this: in the prophet Isaiah, we find words of hope, foretelling a day when God will swallow death in victory. "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation (Isaiah 25: 7-9)."

Those words will be on our lips one day. When death's defeat is complete, as the Lord so tenderly wipes the tears from our eyes, we will say, surely this is our God. This is our God who sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus who died for us. This is our God who raised Jesus from the dead. Vindicating His beloved Son and declaring Him the Lord of life. We will look around in the redeemed creation, new heaven and new earth, taking it all in, and with the deepest of joy, our home forever with God, saying, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the Lord, let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

STUDY GUIDE

"IN THIS HOPE" • ROMANS 8:11, 14-25

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read together our passage for the week, Romans 8:11, 14-25. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one more time together. Pray for your study of God's Word.

- What do you notice about our passage? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- Re-read verse 11. In your own words, what is the Apostle Paul saying?
- What does it mean to be an heir of God and co-heir with Christ? How does this truth change the way you live today?
- Re-read verses 22-23. What does it mean that creation is groaning? In what ways do we as followers of Jesus groan?
- How would you respond to the following question: What is our ultimate hope as followers of Jesus?

Going Deeper: What is a word, phrase or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

God passionately cares about the world He made, the world He is redeeming. God calls us to join Him in His redemptive work. How can we grow in our love for God's world? What specific practices help grow us and shape us to better love and serve God's world? In the midst of serving and loving those around us, how can hope in Jesus sustain us?

IN: Connect With the Family of God

As you feel comfortable, share one area in your life where you need hope today. Pray for each other that the Lord would fill you with deep expectancy and hope.