

‘The God who wants to take us with Him.’ (7)

I was having dinner the other day when all of a sudden, a knock came to the front door. When I opened the door there were two religious people standing there and they asked me, ‘if I could spare a few moments to talk about Judgement Day?’ And for some strange reason all I said to them was this, ‘I’m sorry I’m kind of busy right now, but to be truthful with you, I’m not a big fan of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Terminator series anyway.’

Now we all know that Judgment Day is a reality and we know that because the Scriptures time and time again reminds us that one day Jesus is coming back. You remember what happened in **Acts 1** after Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come upon His apostles with power. **Acts 1:9** “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” Before their very eyes, says the Bible, Jesus was taken up from the watching disciples.

So, it isn’t hard for us to understand why they just stood there gaping up into the heavens. This was no every day event, watching someone ascend into the heavens. And as the disciples are memorised by what’s happening in front of them, I can imagine them thinking to themselves, He’s left us, **when will we see Him again?** And so, two angels appear in front of them and say in **Acts 1:11** “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

And loved ones, from that day to this very day, the church, His church, has been waiting for the bodily return of the Christ. **But exactly will happen when He returns?** Well **first** of all when He comes, **He will resurrect the dead.** In **John 5** we find the religious leaders of the day criticising Jesus because He claims to be able to free men from spiritual death.

And in **John 5:28+29** Jesus said to them, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.”

Before the **Second World War**, there was a grave in Germany sealed with a granite slab and bound with strong chains. On it an atheist had inscribed, ‘**Not to be opened throughout eternity.**’ Now atheists and unbelievers alike can think that once you die that is the end. But Jesus Himself openly declares to the world that He will resurrect those who are dead.

The apostle Paul also speaks of this general resurrection in **Acts 24** when he’s addressing Governor Felix. **Acts 24:15** “I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” Paul here says both the righteous and the wicked will rise from the dead. So straight away we see that when Jesus returns there will be a resurrection of the dead.

But what else will happen when He returns? Well, when Jesus comes back, **He will destroy death.** **1 Corinthians 15:25+26** “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death”. Paul tells us that Christ is reigning now and that He will reign until He destroys His last enemy, which is death. In other words, death is destroyed by resurrection.

Aren’t you looking forward to that day when there will be no more dying, no more sorrow when a loved one passes away? Paul also says in **1 Corinthians 15:54+55** “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Now for most people in the world death is a horrible topic and the very thought of dying someday frightens them. But not for the Christian, because the Christian understands that it’s at the resurrection, at Christ’s coming that **‘death will be swallowed up in victory’.**

But what else will happen when He returns? When Jesus comes back, **He will transform and glorify the bodies of those who belong to God.** The Bible tells us nothing about what will happen to the bodies of those who have rejected God but it does speak of the glorification of the bodies of those who are His.

1 Corinthians 15:51+52 “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed”. Paul says that the Christians who are alive when Christ returns will be gloriously changed.

He says the same thing over in **Philippians 3:20+21** “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”.

Paul says that those Christians who have died will be raised in glory and deathlessness. And the big question which many people ask is, **what will our new bodies look like?** **1 Corinthians 15:42-44** “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

Loved ones whatever we think our new bodies will look like is almost irrelevant in the grand scheme of things. But we do know this much, our new bodies will be glorious and our new bodies will be suited to their new environment, that’s why Paul uses the words ‘**spiritual body**’.

But what else will happen when He returns? When Jesus comes back, **He will judge mankind**. Christ claimed that the Father has given Him authority to judge mankind because He Himself is man. **John 5:22** “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.”

John 5:27 “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

Now can you imagine what it must have been like to be a religious leader and hear Jesus say those words? Jesus is declaring to His enemies that they were in the presence of the Judge who would judge them in the last day. And He says, because He is the Son of Man, God wouldn’t judge the intelligent creation whom He created in His own image, until first He Himself had become a man in the Person of the Son. In other words, because Jesus was a man, and experienced life as a human, we have the assurance that His judgment will be more merciful, righteous, and just.

The apostle Paul insists that the judgement of the world is as sure as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **Acts 17:30+31** “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

In other words, the guarantee that the Judgment is coming is seen in the heart of the Gospel. The proof that Judgment Day is coming is seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself. And loved ones, there is no need for us to worry over questions we can’t find fully satisfying answers to because God is judging us by Jesus Christ. That means everyone, everyone without exception, will be treated fairly.

When Abraham is negotiating with God about destroying the city of Sodom, Abraham is a bit concerned about the possibility of righteous people living there. He says to God in **Genesis 18:25** “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Abraham knew in his heart of hearts that God would do the right thing.

And we today as Christians also know in our heart of hearts that the Judge of all the earth can be depended upon to do what is right. Loved ones, God will right all wrongs, nothing will be overlooked and no one will be cheated. In the parable of the sheep and goats in **Matthew 25** Jesus says that those who didn’t practice what Jesus taught, that they “will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” according to **Matthew 25:46**. And so, on Judgment Day God will do what is right and some will be sentenced to eternal punishment whilst those who did practice what He preached will be blessed with eternal life.

But what else will happen when He returns? When Jesus comes back, **He will give back to the Father the authority He was given**. The one we know as Jesus Christ left aside the glory and privileges of Godhood when He took manhood upon Himself.

Philippians 2:5-7 “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Paul says rather than continuing to exercise equality with God, He became God’s servant. And because He was such a faithful servant to God and man, the Father gave Him the honour of ruling mankind.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all”.

In other words, when Jesus has defeated the last enemy and completed the work the Father gave Him, Jesus will surrender the authority given to Him. And in Him as mankind’s representative, mankind will acknowledge his subjection to God.

But what else will happen when He returns? When Jesus comes back, He will take His own to live with Him in heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 “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”.

1 Peter 1:3+4 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”

You know loved ones, the truth is this, the Bible says precious little about the precise conditions in heaven but there’s been so much nonsense taught about it, it’s a wonder anyone wants to go there. Some have the feeling it’s a place where people float around on clouds, bored stiff and eternally beating on harps. Others have seen it as an eternal monastery where the inmates eternally chant hymns and pray.

Some Bible pictures like we find in Revelation 21 have been taken literally and applied to heaven. We read about a city with golden streets and jewelled walls, but we always need to remember that this is simply picture language, it’s not literal. But if we understand anything concerning heaven, we certainly understand that God is alive with life. He won’t be narrowing our lives when He takes His people to heaven. Our lives will be fuller, larger and deeper there.

Ephesians 1:18-21 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

Paul says that the world beyond our own has kingdoms, powers and authorities, just as ours does. There is no knowing what marvellous things are ahead for God’s people in that mysterious other world. There isn’t a reason in the world to believe that human history is the sum total of God’s wondrous workings and purposes. And it won’t really come as a surprise to us if we learn that earth-history is only one little part of a grand purpose of God which defies description.

And whatever else is true, we know this much is true. There’ll be no death there, there’ll be no children cowering in a corner trying to hide from a drunken father. There’ll be no quiet, incurable wards where people cough their way to the grave in pain. There’ll be no racism there, no beatings and humiliation for people of the ‘wrong’ colour or ethnic background.

There’ll be no drug or alcoholics making a shambles of their lives while their fellow-humans make fortunes through their pain. There’ll be no rat-infested ghettos to drive families to despair, no children weeping in the night because their parents are breaking up and no men driven to near madness by greedy landlords and unemployment. There’ll be no war-mongers there, no stockpiles of nuclear or chemical weapons. There’ll be no husbands, alone and broken-hearted, deserted by selfish wives and no wives, used and then tossed aside like a worn out shoe.

God will be there and Christ Himself will be there. And the great people of human history will be there, people like Moses, Abraham, Paul, Elijah, Esther, Mary the mother of Jesus, Peter, John, Noah, Sarah and Hannah. All your friends and family who have said ‘Yes’ to Christ will be there. And so there will be life there, real and full and rich, life beyond our most cherished dreams. There will be multiplied millions of wonderful things to be discovered.

We won’t be floating around in the clouds playing harps loved ones.

When we get to heaven, we will have purpose and place there. Whatever is necessary to make and keep us fully human and fully alive will be there. Let me ask you, **don't you want to go there?** Paul says in **Philippians 1:21-23** **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."**

You see most people have two great fears, **first** of all they are afraid they might die tonight and **secondly** they are afraid they might live tomorrow. You see, dying frightens them and living has no passion. Then there are people like Paul, they have a passion for living and they have a passion for dying. And if you were to ask them which one they would choose, they couldn't answer because they have a passion for both. Paul says that, **'Christ gives us the hope and courage for dying.'**

Have you ever heard some of the things we say around the time of death? When someone is dying, people say, **'It doesn't look like they have got long to live.'**

A man had a check-up and then went in to see his doctor to get the results. The doctor said he had bad news and worse news for him, which did he want to hear first? The man was a bit taken back and said, 'he guessed he'd hear the bad news first'. The doctor said, 'The bad news is that you only have twenty-four hours to live.' At this the man jumped up, totally flabbergasted and distraught. He paced the doctor's office and complained, 'Twenty-four hours to live? I can't possibly get my affairs in order that quickly. I can't believe this, it is incredible! What could be worse news than this?' The doctor said, 'The worse news is that I was supposed to tell you this yesterday but I forgot.'

Let me share something with you loved ones, nobody in this room has got long to live, everybody here is terminal. **Do you know what I am?** I am a dying man, talking to a room of dying people about the only Person I know that can give us life, none of us have got long to live.

A guy bumped into his old friend whom he hadn't seen in many years. He asked, 'How's your wife doing?' He replied, 'She's in heaven.' Without thinking, he responded, 'Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.' Now it's really is a shame when someone dies and they aren't a Christian, **but why do we think it's a shame when a Christian dies?** What about this phrase, **'Well, there probably better off? 'Probably!' Paul says, 'Not probably, they are far better of'. Paul says, 'I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far.'**

Let me ask you this, **what is a tent?** A tent is not your home. A tent is a place you sleep in because you're going somewhere else. Then you fold up that tent, you pack it up, so that you can go where you are going too. That's what Paul says, he said, **'This isn't my home, this isn't where I belong, because I'm ready to go home.'**

Why did Paul want to die and go to Jesus? Maybe part of it was to release the kingdom pressure, maybe part of it was the burden of the churches. But the main reason Paul wanted to go was simple, Paul wanted the company of Christ. Paul says, **'When he goes, he's going to have Christ like he's never had Him before.'** He's going to have union with Christ, He's going to have that fellowship with God like God wanted it in the beginning.

Do you ever get homesick for heaven? Do you ever just hurt inside to get to heaven? If you're a Christian this morning and you don't have those desires for heaven then maybe it's because you need to improve your personal relationship with Jesus. We need to get to the point, where we are so obsessed with Christ and so in love with Christ that the thought of having more Christ just makes our heartache. Christ is coming back loved ones, and no one and nothing can stop it from happening.

You see mankind was created in the image of God, mankind messed up because of sin. But God didn't give up on us, He came to pursue us in love, and He came in form of Jesus the Christ. He wants all of mankind to turn to Him in order for Him to live with His people and they in turn to live with Him. He sent that message over and over again through people like Noah, Abraham and the Israelites. And He still says today through His church that He loves us and wants to bless all of mankind.

The question is, **where do you want to spend eternity?** Because you can't wait until Jesus returns to decide where you want to spend eternity because when you die it will be too late. You have to make that decision whilst you're still alive.

Psychologist **William Marston** asked three thousand people, 'What have you to live for?' He was shocked to discover that ninety-four percent were simply enduring the present while they waited for the future. They waited for something to happen, waited for 'next year,' waited for a 'better time,' waited for 'someone to die,' waited 'for tomorrow'.

In other words, they were unable to see that all anyone ever has is today, because yesterday is gone and tomorrow exists only in hope. If you're not a Christian this morning then you need to do what all Christians needed to do and that's simply submit our lives to Him in the here and now.

And like we looked at in our previous sermons you need to step out in faith. You need to step out in trusting repentance and be immersed into a relationship with Jesus Christ as He has urged us all to do. And then with the people who have already said 'Yes' to Christ, you will enjoy life with God as we love and serve Him and the world He loves.

And like all of us who joyfully look forward to the day when God's purposes here on earth are accomplished. We will join Him in the life and adventure planned for us in another world. **Why not say 'Yes' to Jesus today?**