

Today we are considering the fundamental belief entitled, "Death and Resurrection". I don't like that first word, death. But the second word makes up for it, resurrection. Here is how our church summarizes the Biblical teaching of death and resurrection.

### **Fundamental Belief #26: Death and Resurrection**

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 146:3, 4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13; Isa. 25:8; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14; Rom. 6:23; 6:16; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 20:1-10.)

The high school years are a time, perhaps more than any other, when we notice our peers. We notice what they wear and say and what they are in to. If you have been through high school, think back, you can probably name the popular kid, the smart kid, the attractive kid, the athlete. You noticed. And perhaps more than any other time, our peers have influence on us during those high school year.

In the high school I attended there was one of those students, the kind that had a large influence and everyone noticed. His name was Brandon Moor. He graduated just before I began my freshmen year but his influence was still felt there. But his influence was felt at the school long after he left. Brandon stood out in all the ways you would want to stand out. He was an honor student, a star athlete, friendly, handsome, musical, and on top of all that, Brandon was a strong spiritual role model. He was pretty much everything that I wanted to be. I first noticed him when I was in elementary school and attended academy events where he would lead worship with his guitar. The band sounded good, and their spiritual life looked attractive. Though our time in academy did not overlap, I became close friends with his younger sister, so I got to hear about him and interact with him on occasion. As I did, my respect for him grew. He was active in summer camp ministry, and he was involved in spiritual leadership on his college campus, where he was studying theology. He took a year out for more ministry. He volunteered as an assistant Chaplain at an academy in Georgia. From a distance, I admired his life that was full of ministry.

One day his sister come over to my house unexpectedly. I greeted her in some lighthearted, goofy way. The surprising intensity of her emotions stopped me. It was not a time to be goofing off. That is when she told me, "Brandon is dead". Just three words. But they communicated so much. For a good while, those were all the words we could handle. They felt impossible. Gradually, she explained that he hit a stalled truck on the freeway at full speed. It shook our school community. For me and many others, it hit harder than anything ever had.

The emotions of grief are strong and scattered. You feel that sense of injustice, interrupted by the impulse to anger, that is then calmed by a wave of sadness. In the process of grief

there are two unwelcomed conclusions that we struggle to accept; life is short, and death is permanent.

Life is short. Brandon, the young man with a future so bright that we could all see it, was gone at 21 years old. It shook our school community. Death stings with extra strength when it comes to a young person, but the shortness of life is still felt when we lose someone in their 90's. Not long ago they were working in their career, they were young parents, they were children themselves. Our grief points out the shortness of life and the Bible confirms it.

**Job 8:9** “For we are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow.”

**Psalms 39:4-5** “O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”

**Psalms 103:15-16** “As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.”

Not only is life short, but the short time we have feels so fast. My memory tells me that I go to the dentist once a month. My calendar tells me I only go twice a year. But those six months fly by. Remember the Community Fair we just hosted? It was already over four months ago. The September 11 terrorist attacks are fresh in our memory. But enough time has passed since then that the average child born around the time of the attacks who continued in school has already graduated from college. If you are 44 years old or younger, then you have lived over half of your life in the post September 11 era. Do you remember the Kennedy assassination? Next month will mark its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Remember when you kids were young? How old are they now? Our short life flies by. We grieve that life is short.

We grieve that death is permanent. Sickesses can be healed. Setbacks can be overcome. Recessions are hard but we come out of them. Being separated from family is hard but you can come back. The teenage years were difficult, but you got through them. Challenging seasons end. While there is still life we can fight and find a way. But when death comes there is nothing, we can do to change it. It is a helpless experience. It is unwelcomed and often comes with no warning. It doesn't ask for our permission. It doesn't wait for our questions to be answered. There is a living person who is here one moment and gone the next. No amount of effort or demonstration or argument can change the fact. You can distract from grief, you can seek answers, and you can hold the most meaningful memorial, but you can't bring them back. So we retreat into denial because it is too hard to face that life is short, and death is permanent.

This kind of grief doesn't tell the full truth. Do you know the truth about death for those who love Jesus? It is the exact opposite. Grief says, “Life is short. Death is permanent.” God says, “**Death is temporary. Life is eternal.**”

We need a grief that is filled with belief. There is a big difference between the helplessness I feel in my grief and the hopefulness I can claim in the truth about death.

The things that you instinctively wish for in grief are the exact things God promises. To those who grieve that death has won, God promises a day when we can declare, “death is swallowed up in victory.” To those who feel the sting of death and wish that it would stop, God promises a day when we can ask, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” To those who feel the helplessness that nothing can be done to change the reality of death, Scripture announces, “Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Do you feel the need for a change? God has promised change that will bring us from a reality where life is short and death is permanent in a reality in which death is temporary and life is eternal. This change is sure, but it is not yet, and it is not for everyone. We find this promise of change in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

**Why is a change necessary?** (v50) “flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God”

The change is necessary because we cannot enter the kingdom the way we are. In the study of a previous fundamental belief, we reviewed the doctrine of the Nature of Humanity. We have a sinful nature. God doesn't bring sin into eternity. But he wants to bring us into eternity. So, a change is necessary.

Verse 50 clarifies further by saying, “nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable”. We need change because we do not have immortal souls. When we die, we sleep in the grave.

The dead are unconscious and inactive.

- **Ecclesiastes 9:5-6** For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.
- **Ecclesiastes 9:10** Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.
- **Psalms 115:17** The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence.
- **Psalms 146:3-4** Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.

God is conscious of the dead but the dead are conscious of nothing. Our security in death is not that we know things or have plans but that while we are unconscious, God knows us and has plans for us. The dead are in the same state as the unborn.

- **Jeremiah 1:5** “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

- **Ephesians 1:4** Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
- **Galatians 1:15** But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace.

We need to be changed because we are mortal, and God wants to spend eternity with us.

**Who is changed?** (v51) “we [the righteous] shall all be changed”

When the text says “we” and “all” it is referring to the righteous. There are 4 categories of people when Jesus comes; the righteous living, the righteous dead, the wicked living; and the wicked dead. Only the two righteous groups are included in the “we” that are changed.

The two groups of the righteous are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:15. The righteous living are “those who are alive. And the righteous dead are “those who sleep”. The Bible refers to death as a sleep (1 Thess. 4:13-18; Luke 8:52-53; John 11:11-26).

**1 Thessalonians 4:15** 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.

The wicked will not be changed because they won't live forever.

So, it is true for those who reject God that life is short, and death is permanent. But for those who accept him there is a change, death is temporary, and life is eternal. The change is not for everyone, and it is not yet.

**When does the change take place?** (v52)

The change happens in a moment. The Greek word used for “moment” is *atomos* (ἄτομος). It means an indivisible amount, the smallest you can get, the atom of time. God doesn't need time for his work to evolve. This change is instant.

The text tells us when that moment is “at the last trumpet”. In ancient Israel the trumpet was used for important announcements. Trumpets were used to call God's people to assemble, to announce war and judgment, and to announce certain holy days. The trumpet called the people to remember God and assured them that God remembered them. In general, Biblical trumpets are used to announce God's intervention in history. There was a blast of trumpet in the giving of the law on Sinai (Exodus 19:16; 20:18). The trumpet was a sound of victory. The walls of Jericho fell at the blast of the trumpet (Joshua 6).

In the book of Revelation, God marks his significant interventions in history with 7 trumpets. These are God's announcements for the people who dwell on earth (Revelation 8:13). The historical interpretation of the seven trumpets sees them as announcing judgments throughout history. The figurative 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet makes no claim to be the literal

“last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52. The classic interpretive timeline for Adventists places the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet as a span of time beginning in 1844. So, we should not equate the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet with the resurrection trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15. But I want you to notice that this 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet places us in the same timeframe as the resurrection trumpet.

Revelation 10:5-8 tell of the last trumpet, that there “would be no more delay” and that with the trumpet sound “the mystery of God would be fulfilled” (Behold I tell you a mystery). When the 7<sup>th</sup> (and last) trumpet is blown, it is accompanied by a voice that tells what the trumpet is announcing.

**Revelation 11:15** Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Each trumpet blast brings about change as God intervenes in history.

The literal resurrection trumpet will blast at the second coming as promised in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. This is the change that we are promised.

The common teaching of the immortality of the soul would suggest that we do not need the change. Or, if we do, that the change occurs in the moment of death when our inherently immortal soul goes to heaven. The text tells us where the dead in Christ are before the last trumpet. They are raised. Raised from where? The grave. We all experience the change together. The Bible tells us when to expect this change, at the second coming of Jesus.

**What is the change?** (vv52-54)

The text clarifies just what this change is by using several different words. It is a change from dead to raised imperishable, from living perishable to imperishable, and from mortal to immortal. This is that moment when the righteous are given that promised gift of eternal life. The change is from “life is short and death is permanent” to “death is temporary and life is eternal.” Humanity is mortal. At the second coming, God changes that.

God is working change in us all the time, which could cause some confusion about what this change is. The change at the last trumpet is distinct from the change we experience now in Christ. Back in verse 50 it told us that flesh and blood cannot inherit eternal life. There are two reasons for this. One is that we have sin.

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

So, you notice in the text that God took care of our sins. This is the change that we can experience now. But we have both sins and a sinful nature. Our sins are not acceptable for eternity and our sinful nature is not capable of eternity. The change at the second coming is not a new heart but a new nature. Oh, we need a change of attitude. God help us when we get grumpy. Oh, we need a change of habits. We do the thing we don't want and don't do the thing we want. Oh, we need a change of perspective. We need change in our vocabulary. We need change in our understanding. Praise God, all of this change is available to us now. We don't have to wait until that moment. But the change at the last trumpet is something different. It is not just a new heart it is a new nature. Praise God, his grace just keeps changing us! He wants us to live with him forever and he has a date set for when he will make that change.

I take comfort in knowing that we are not going into eternity the way we are. I don't want to live forever like this. I want to be changed.

I am eager for the change from death to life. Look around at our world and you can feel it, we need a change. We are reminded that we are mortal when we watch from a distance the Ukraine War with a death toll approaching 300,000. We are reminded that we need change when we hear of 3,500 people killed in a few weeks in the Gaza Strip. We long for the change when we feel the loss of the death of our church family and when death comes to our home families. We need a change! Death is real but it doesn't win. Things are about to change.

Verse 56 tells us that the sting of death is sin. Which means that even while we are waiting for the change, Jesus can take the stinger out because he can deal with sin.

Notice the victory in verse 57.

**1 Corinthians 15:57** But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a great conclusion to the teaching of death and resurrection. And then hear the final words of the chapter.

**1 Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

We have not experienced the change and we have great need of it. But still, we can be steadfast and immovable, because we know the truth about death. The truth about death for those who accept Jesus is this, death is temporary, and life is eternal!