

Wipe Away Every Tear

Impact Series: Resurrection Weekend, April 3 and 4, 2021 | John 11:17-27
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WHAT HAPPENS TO US WHEN WE DIE?

Stephen Hawking called life after death a fairy tale.

Stephen Hawking, of course, was one of the best-known physicists since Albert Einstein.

Hawking liked to consider big questions like the origin of the universe and time travel.

In an interview in 2010, Hawking made it clear that he had concluded that there is no life after death. He said¹:

"I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."
- Stephen Hawking

Some people agree with Hawking.

They believe in a strictly material universe where we are able to observe everything that exists.

Such a universe leaves no room for the spiritual, which means life ends completely at death.

Therefore, we must be courageous enough to accept our end and live as if the time we have left in this life were the only time we have with which we can do, be, or accomplish anything.

Others of us act as if we agreed with him. We ignore what comes after death.

At some point, Hawking's statement becomes a statement of faith.

Hawking's statement wasn't **science**; it's **belief**. He **believed** that there was no life after death.

Stephen Hawking died in 2018. His beliefs about life after death are now a **hope**. He died hoping that he was right about life after death because, if he is wrong, then he is completely unprepared for life after death. And being unprepared for life after death has consequences.

What happens to us when we die? Respectfully, I disagree with Stephen Hawking.

Yes, I disagree with Hawking because I don't want to cease existing; I want to live eternally. However, my desire to live eternally doesn't come from fear, but because God created me to live with him forever. My natural desire to live indicates that there may be something more.

I also disagree with Hawking because the Bible tells me that there is life after death. The Bible has a lot to say about death, what comes after death, and the future beyond death; and the Bible is a reliable guide to the future because it's true.

And I disagree with Hawking because Jesus proved that there is life after death, and he showed us what that looks like. In other words, get ready for some Good News today!

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2011/05/16/136358335/stephen-hawking-heaven-is-a-fairy-story>

JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

Jesus' friend Lazarus became ill.

When it became apparent that the illness was significant, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus. They hoped he would come and heal Lazarus.

Instead, Jesus stayed where he was for a while longer.

Jesus announced a few days later that he was ready to go. Lazarus had died, and his death would give all Jesus' disciples an opportunity to put saving, believing faith in him.

When Jesus arrived in the village, he had a conversation with Lazarus' sister, Martha, in John 11:17-27.

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Martha heard that Jesus had arrived and left her sister, Mary, in the house with guests who had come to comfort the family.

As soon as she saw Jesus, Martha challenged him. If he had arrived sooner, Lazarus would have lived. However, she still had faith in him.

Jesus told Martha that her brother (Lazarus) would "rise again." What was he saying?

Martha responded that she knew Lazarus would be resurrected at the end of time.

That's when Jesus made the astounding claim, "I am the Resurrection and the Life!"

Then Jesus asked Martha if she believed this truth. Can you imagine the thoughts that raced through Martha's mind? Imagine the miracles she had already seen. Did she believe that Jesus was Lord of life and Lord over death?

Oh, yes. She believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. She believed that he was the one whose reign was breaking into the world and changing everything we ever knew.

And she showed it by racing to get her sister. Something memorable was about to happen.

Mary got up quickly and headed out to Jesus.

Mary was crying; the people with her were crying. Jesus started crying. The thought of his friend's dying was painful for him too. It mattered to him.

When Jesus arrived at the tomb, he told them to take the stone away.

Martha objected that Lazarus had been in the ground for four days and would smell.

Jesus told her that if she had faith, she would see the glory of God.

As they took the stone away, Jesus prayed.

Then Jesus commanded, "Lazarus, come out."

Lazarus came out of the tomb, alive. God is stronger than death!

As Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Strictly speaking, Jesus didn't resurrect Lazarus. Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead to life, but Lazarus eventually died again.

However, when Jesus rose from the dead Easter morning, it was something else altogether.

When Jesus rose on Easter morning, his resurrection shook the ground. He was raised with a glorious body. He didn't simply come back from the dead; he beat death!

Jesus was resurrected to new life with a new body. Paul describes the relationship between our old bodies and our resurrected bodies as being like that between a seed and a plant.

If we are followers of Jesus, we will be resurrected someday and have glorious, perfect bodies, free from the effects of sin, free from the hold of evil, and free from the power of death.

It's just as Jesus said in **John 3:16**, the most famous verse in the Bible. Jesus said that if we have faith in him, then he will give us eternal life:

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life.**"*

JESUS GIVES US ETERNAL LIFE.

Eternal life gives us a future.

The Revelation (the last book in the Bible) gives us a picture of what the future will look like.

Jesus will have defeated sin, death, evil, and all the forces of darkness in all of creation.

On the other side of that victory, we live with God forever.

Those of us who follow Jesus will be resurrected and live in a place that God has prepared for us forever.

Creation itself will be resurrected. Old earth and old heaven will pass away; they will be replaced by New Heaven and New Earth. The picture the Bible gives in Revelation 21 and 22 is absolutely beautiful. If you've ever heard of pearly gates and streets of gold, they come from those two chapters, and that is just the beginning.

Most importantly, there will be no more death. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain. God will wipe every tear from our eyes. That's eternal life.

Eternal life gives us hope.

It means that death is not the end for us. We aren't just computers that switch off when the components stop working.

This belief changes everything when someone we love dies. If they are followers of Jesus, then they do not cease to exist; they have eternal life ahead of them, and we have hope for them.

This belief also changes everything when we die. If we are followers of Jesus, then we will not cease to exist; we have eternal life ahead of us, and we can face death with hope.

Eternal life gives us courage.

If death isn't the end, then we don't have to fear death.

If we don't fear death, then we have no reason to fear life.

And if we don't fear life, then we are dangerous (in a good way) for the Kingdom of God.

JESUS CAN GIVE OTHERS ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH US.

I've got an important date to share with you today: Tuesday, December 4, 2046.

I went to a calculator online recently. It asked me a bunch of questions.

Then it told me the date when I should die.

Tuesday, December 4, 2046, is the day when I am expected to die.

Now, God has a sense of humor, so I'm pretty sure that Tuesday, December 4, 2046 will be the safest day of my life. If I am still alive on that day, I'm pretty sure I will make it to Wednesday, December 5, 2046. God doesn't like to be told what to do.

But Tuesday, December 4, 2046, is a reminder to me that if Jesus doesn't come again before then, at some point I will die.

The day I die is the day when everything I believe will be tested.

I'm not afraid of that day. At one time, I was deeply afraid of that day. Since then, I've seen enough people die that I know death itself is nothing to fear.

And I know that what waits for me on the other side of death is eternally good.

More importantly, I've learned that I can trust God with whatever comes next. Even death.

But there is a date in each one of our lives that is coming. What's the date in your life? And the fact that there is a date in each one of our lives means that we have some things to do today:

Don't leave here without certainty.

Eternal life waits for those of us who are followers of Jesus.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, today is the day for you to begin following him.

It's a very straightforward process. In some ways, it's as easy as ABC. A: Admit that you have disobeyed God. B: Believe that Jesus died to pay the price for your sin and that he rose again from the dead. C: Choose to follow him for the rest of your life. Make that decision today.

If you begin following Jesus today, then you will know certainly that eternal life is yours.

Don't leave here without purpose.

The question we all want to ask ourselves is, "What am I going to do with the days I have left between now and the day I die?"

When we become followers of Jesus, we start living for a new purpose. Instead of living for ourselves, we are living for God.

Here at Valley we think about how we can impact the world for Christ.

Will you live for God for the rest of your life?

Don't leave here without hope to share.

This is a day of Good News: Jesus was resurrected from the dead. He is alive, and he is Lord!

As a result, we get eternal life. We can face death because we know what comes next and are not afraid. That's the real hope we live with.

And the hope we have is available to others. Our family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers can all have what we have. They can have abundant life now and eternal life later.

Don't leave here today without hope that you are eager to share.

Death is not the end. **Christ is risen!**