

After Life - Adult SS - Lesson 1: Heaven

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Preacher: Andrew Kueh

[0 : 00] There we go. So look how the confession summarises the journey of a soul.! The bodies of men and women, after death, return to dust and see corruption.

! But their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, an immortal existence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.

Today, I want us to see why this is true. I want us to have the assurance and the confidence and the comfort, knowing that what the confession just said here, that this is what happens to a believer's soul after death.

And so the first thing we need to see is this, and the first point today, there is a heaven. There is a heaven. We often just kind of know and we just say that when a believer dies, they go to heaven. That's kind of our instinct to say that. So ask someone even on the street that's not in church today, ask them what happens after death. And the word heaven will probably be mentioned somewhere in there.

[1 : 24] And the confession says it too, doesn't it? The souls of the righteous are received into the highest heavens. But what is that? What is heaven?

Well, firstly, heaven is in creation. Heaven is in creation. How does the Bible begin? What's the first verse of the Bible? Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

First there was nothing. Then out of nothing, God made all creation. So, this is why I'm so excited. I can do this. Here we go. There we go. Thank you, Chris Kitchen, for driving to pick this up. There we go. Okay. So, first there was only God, no creation.

Then out of nothing, Genesis 1.1, he created all things, the heavens and the earth. So, God created all things. This is all things. Anything that is not God himself is in this circle, right?

[2 : 30] All things. Creation. And in that creation, there are two realms. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now, heavens can have three meanings in the Bible. The word heaven can have three meanings in the Bible. First, heaven can mean the sky, the clouds, the earth's atmosphere.

So, Isaiah 55. The rain and the snow come down from heaven. Okay. It's the sky. Or heaven can mean space, kind of like stars and the sun, moon, galaxies.

So, Genesis 1.14, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens. And then God created those lights, the sun, moon, and stars. Or, heaven can mean something not in this visible universe.

So, you have the highest heaven. That's 2 Chronicles 2. You have the heaven of heavens in Deuteronomy. It is a heaven outside and beyond these other two heavens.

[3 : 43] That's why Paul calls it, in 2 Corinthians, he calls it the third heaven. When he's taken up into the third heaven, he's talking about heaven. So, you have the first heaven sky, the second heaven space.

And then, kind of beyond that, not just kind of above that, but kind of beyond that, you have a special location called heaven, the heavens of heaven, the heaven of heavens.

And so, when God made all creation, the heavens and the earth, he made the visible universe with those two heavens. And he also made a special location in creation, a place called heaven.

So, this is all things, all creation. You have the universe here. That's what we can see. That's what we live in. But you also have a location called heaven.

And it's not part of this visible universe. It's outside, beyond it. And so, you can't physically travel there by a spaceship.

[4 : 53] But it is real. It is a location. And so, without our minds going too sci-fi, so don't load this too much in your mind with sci-fi things, but heaven is a different dimension of creation.

It's a different realm of creation. But what is heaven? Well, heaven is God's home. It's my next sub-point. Heaven is God's home. Heaven is a place where God specially dwells.

He's specially present in heaven. So, look at 1 Kings 8. Listen in heaven, your dwelling place, God. And Isaiah 63. Look down from heaven and see from your holy and beautiful habitation.

Heaven is always described as God's home. That's why we pray our Father in heaven. Now, that doesn't mean that God is only locked up in heaven.

Look at 1 Kings 8. I've got it there for you. Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you. God exists outside of creation. He exists everywhere in creation.

[6 : 03] So, Psalm 139 says, where can I run from you, God? But God has a special intensified presence in heaven.

It's his home. Which is just like the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament. So, God is everywhere, isn't he? At all times. But he specially dwelt in an intensified way in the temple, in the Holy of Holies particularly.

There was a location on earth where there was an intensified holiness and majesty and glory of God.

Where you could particularly and more directly come into God's presence. And it was even dangerous to enter the temple, do you remember? Because his glory was so present there.

Well, that is just like heaven. It's where God specially dwells. God's temple. Which is why heaven is also called God's temple. That's my third sub-point, C.

[7 : 11] Heaven is God's temple. So, look at Hebrews 8. I've got it written there for you. Look how Hebrews talks of heaven where Christ has gone to be our high priest. It says, Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

Heaven is the true temple. A minister in the holy places. In the true tent that the Lord set up. Not man. Heaven is the true holy of holies.

The true temple where God dwells. Specially dwells in creation. And the earthly temple and the tabernacle that we read in the Old Testament.

That's just a reflection, a miniature version of the true heaven temple. It's where God's glory is directly revealed in creation.

So, where do you go to to experience the full weight and brightness of God's majesty and glory?

[8 : 16] You go to heaven. It's the ultimate temple. And what happens in temples? Worship. Which is why heaven is a place where angels dwell and worship God.

So, look at Nehemiah 9. You are the Lord. You alone. You made heaven. The heaven of heavens. With all their host.

That's referring to the angels. Armies of angels. Host means armies. And you made the earth and all that is on it. The seas and all that is in them. And you preserve all of them.

And the host of heaven worships you. And in Revelation 4, we get a glimpse into heaven. Into God's intense presence.

And we see angelic beings worshipping God. And they cry out, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. And so, when God created the heavens and the earth, He created a special place full of armies of angels.

[9 : 27] And since the beginning of time, they have been worshipping and praising the triune God in His intensified presence. And this place is perfect.

The Bible never mentions any stain of sin or any evil or any suffering in heaven. There's never any mention of it. Because there's nothing in heaven to diminish God's glory.

And it's from heaven that God rules creation. Heaven is His home, but it's also His throne room. So, this is my next sub-point.

Heaven is God's throne room. So, look at Psalm 103. The Lord has established His throne in the heavens. And His kingdom rules over all.

Isaiah 66. Heaven is my throne. And the earth is my footstool. Heaven is where God's glory and His power is concentrated.

[10 : 34] And it's from heaven, from there, that He rules the rest of creation. Which is why, when Jesus is given all authority in heaven and on earth, that's why He then ascends to heaven.

So, Paul preached that in Acts 1 a few weeks ago, didn't he? He said, Jesus went to heaven to be enthroned and to rule over everything. And that's what Hebrews 8 says.

If you look back to Hebrews 8, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven. Sat just means enthroned.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth, in the flesh, in His glorified body, He is enthroned, along with the Father, ruling over creation together, being worshipped by angels in all His glory.

A Scottish theologian called John Duncan, he put it well, he said this, the dust of the earth, now sits on the throne of the universe. And so heaven is where Jesus is now.

[11 : 51] It's a location, because Jesus is physically there, Jesus still has a body, and that's where He is. But heaven, it's not in the visible universe. It's another realm, a spiritual realm.

And you can't fly there, but you can go there. God can take you there. And the Bible tells us it's here in heaven that believers go when they die.

And this is my second big point today. After death, believers go to heaven. It's important to see that after death, there is an afterlife.

And just to say, I'm going to stop for questions at the end. So, if you've got any questions, write them down, and then we'll stop at the end. So it's important to see that after death, there is an afterlife. There is an existence immediately after death, and before the resurrection.

So let's remind ourselves of this. This timeline. This timeline will make sense as the weeks go on.

[13 : 02] But here we are. The point of death, something happens. That there is an existence. That there is an intermediate state.

That's what we often call it. Line that up. And for the believer, what happens to us? We go to be with Christ.

So look what Jesus, do you remember what Jesus says to the thief on the cross as they're both dying? Wonderful words. Luke 23. Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

And think of Stephen before he dies. In Acts 7. He cries out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. At the point of death, believers go to be with Christ.

And where is Christ? In heaven. Our bodies stay here on earth. Our souls are separated from them.

[14 : 09] And our souls go to be in that heavenly realm. And that's why we often say, when a Christian has died, we might say, that brother, that sister, she's gone to glory.

Heaven is the place of God's glory. And we go there to be with Christ. And believers in the Old Testament, they knew this too. They didn't have as clear a grasp on it as we do in the New Testament.

It's kind of in, it's a little bit out of focus in the Old Testament, but it's there. This belief didn't just appear in the New Testament. Look at Psalm 73. You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will receive me to your glory.

Or Ecclesiastes 12. The dust returns to the earth as it was, but the spirit returns to God who gave it. And who goes to heaven after death?

Everyone who is in Christ. We are so united to Christ that we will always be with him. Nothing can separate you from Christ so that in death you will, you must go to Christ.

[15 : 24] And this is the greatest thing about heaven. It's the greatest joy and the greatest comfort. Just look how positively Paul talks about death for the Christian.

Philippians 1. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I'm to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me.

Yes, I can do good things while I'm alive in this body. Yet which shall I choose? I cannot tell. I'm hard pressed between the two, between living and dying. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

When we die, Christ in his glorified body, he will welcome us into heaven. And we will see him.

We will actually be with him. And it will be a positive, conscious experience. Now, we won't have bodies, remember.

[16 : 26] We will be spirits. And so we don't know what this will look like or how it will work. But we will be conscious. We will be aware.

And somehow we will be able to see and interact in heaven. And it will be us. It will be consciously us in soul form with Christ, joining with the angels, worshipping him.

And so two things to note here. Death is not deletion. Death is not being deleted.

We are not just atoms that, you know, when we die, we just kind of experience nothing at the point of death. It's kind of like, it's not like, you know, the TV turns off and it's just nothing, not even static. No, it's not like our experience just gets deleted and we finish. No, we are bodies and souls.

[17 : 30] And our souls continue to live. They can never be deleted. Souls are immortal in the sense of once they're created, they always exist. There is an existence after death.

And that goes for the non-Christian too. And we'll see that in a few weeks. So that's the first thing.

Death is not deletion, but also death is not soul sleep.

Death is not just kind of an unconscious sleep period where we kind of shut our eyes and then time goes really fast, a bit like when you're sleeping.

And then before we know it, we open our eyes and then it's the resurrection. It's not kind of like death and then we're just sleeping. Oh, didn't even realise, boom, it's the resurrection.

It's not that. No, that there is a conscious intermediate state between the two. And for the Christian, this state will be a conscious, joyous experience with Christ in heaven.

[18 : 35] It will be rest. And this is the next thing I want us to see. I want us to see what heaven is like. What is heaven like? Heaven is rest.

Look what believers experience in heaven. Revelation 14. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours for their deeds follow them.

we experience rest in heaven. It is rest from pain and disease and cancer and suffering and trials and persecution and anxiety.

it is true peaceful rest. And it's even rest from our own sin because look what our souls are like in heaven.

Look at Hebrews 12. The spirits of the righteous are made perfect. In Hebrews 12, it's talking about the heavenly Jerusalem here, the spirits in heaven.

[19 : 43] The spirits of the righteous are made perfect. death is the moment that sin is stripped from us. It's the moment that pull of temptation that we feel every day, it's the moment that that temptation goes.

We stop being sinners in heaven because no sin is allowed. it's too glorious in heaven. But, but, heaven won't feel like this weird foreign place to us.

I think sometimes we can feel that about this this glorious place that we can't even really picture but we know that there's worship and angels and God's presence. We can know it's glorious but sometimes our instinct is to think that it's kind of a weird foreign place to us.

A bit like you know, if you walk into a cathedral like you know that wow this is glorious but also you can feel a bit awkward in it. Maybe a bit uncomfortable, a bit nervous.

But no, heaven will feel like home. Look at 2 Corinthians 5. Yes, we are of good courage and we would rather be away from the body that means death, being separated from the body and death and be at home with the Lord.

[21 : 10] You know when you've been on a long journey, maybe you've been travelling for work, maybe you've done D of E, a big expedition, and it's been tiring and traumatic and you're just spent, you are just wiped out by the end of it.

But after that long journey, finally, you get to your front door, you open it up and you go into your house and you just feel like, oh, I'm home.

And everything feels right, doesn't it? Well, when we get to heaven and we get to be with Christ, it will be a feeling of, oh, I'm home.

the Christian has escaped the pains of this pilgrimage, this journey on earth and we get to just enjoy Christ.

And that is why the Christians in heaven are sometimes referred to as the church triumphant. Have you ever heard that? And the church on earth below is sometimes called the church militant.

[22 : 14] And that's because here on earth, we are still fighting. We're fighting against the world and the flesh and the devil. We're not at rest in this world, are we?

We have peace with God, our sins are forgiven, but we're not at rest. But the church in heaven, Christians in heaven, the church in heaven has made it to the end of this earthly journey and they have triumphed in their fight.

And that's why they're called the church triumphant. So actually, you can think of it like this. So this timeline still keeps going, but there are still, there's still the church on earth, the church militant.

And in heaven, it's the church triumphant. And this means something amazing for us now. All this means that heaven is a real comfort for us now. And this is my second sub-point, heaven is our comfort now. death is now. If you are in Christ, death is now completely transformed for you. [23 : 40] Death is not an unknown for us. Death is not a scary experience stepping into darkness. Death is not punishment.

No, death is coming home. we go to be welcomed, actually welcomed by Christ. Heaven is far better.

To be with Christ is far better than even your best memory here on earth. Death is to gain everything. Peter Pan, the great theologian, he said it best.

To die would be an awfully big adventure. That lost boy has nailed it. To be with Christ in glory, that is an adventure.

And so, we can have immense and real comfort knowing that there are loved ones who die in Christ, they are with Christ in heaven.

[24 : 45] We don't need to worry about them. We don't need to be scared because where are they right now? They are at rest with no pain, no sadness, joyfully in the presence of Christ, worshipping him, seeing his glory.

And he is looking after them better than we ever could here on earth. Now, at this point, I want us to address a really important question. What about our children?

What about infant children of believers who died maybe before they could talk or maybe before we think that they could understand the gospel?

Or maybe if they were still in the womb, what about them? Well, I want us to just look how King David responds when his young son dies to Samuel 12.

But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him. He will not return to me.

[26 : 04] Then David comforted his wife. David knows he is sure that after death he himself will go to glory and he knows that he will see his son there again in the glory of heaven.

And that is a reality that comforts him and his wife. But why does David have that assurance? Well, let's ask ourselves, who is the promise of heaven for?

The promise of the covenant and salvation and heaven, who is that promise for? Well, we need to really remember these words.

Take the words of Acts 2 in. For the promise is for you and for your children. the promise of heaven is for our children.

How does God view the children of believers? Whether that's one parent is a believer or both parents. Well, Paul calls them holy. Our children are holy, they are set apart by God.

[27 : 22] They belong in the covenant of grace. And so to them belongs the promise of heaven.

And so our default position when thinking about our children is not to worry if they were saved.

But actually our default position should always be to be assured that they are. The Canons of Dort, which is a bit like the Westminster Confession of Faith, it says it really well.

Canons of Dort 1.7 says this. Since we are to judge of the will of God from his words, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, not because they're sinless, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, because of the promises God has made them, in which they, together with their parents, are comprehended, they're all in the covenant of grace.

because of that, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children, whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy.

this is the comfort we have. Our children belong to Christ. For us and for them, Christ has prepared a place in heaven.

[28 : 46] and so when they die, they do go to be with him. Christ welcomes them, and so we have no reason to doubt the salvation of our children, that there's nothing to worry about, that they are cared for and happy and they are safe with their saviour in heaven.

And that goes for everyone in Christ. we cannot be separated from him. We are going to heaven when we die. And so for us, to die, it's to gain everything.

But it's not the end. Heaven is rest, it's true, peaceful rest, but it's not final rest. The souls in heaven still need to be reunited with their bodies here on earth.

And so the end is not heaven, the end is resurrection. And we're going to see that next week. I'll stop there, we can ask some questions.

We might need to stop a little bit early because it's Remembrance Sunday. Oh no, we're doing well for time. Yeah, we've got time for questions.