

After Life - Adult SS - Lesson 4: The Return of Christ & Judgement Day

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Date: 02 November 2024

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[0:00] There we go. We've seen that there's an intermediate state after death, a state between the point of death and the return of Christ, where we exist in soul form.

So our bodies remain on earth, but we go either to heaven, if you're a believer, hell, if you're an unbeliever, in soul form. And then everyone is resurrected after that, believer and unbeliever, and then it's the final state.

And that's how eternity will be forever, never to change again. And for the believer, that's living in the new creation, in our physical, resurrected, perfected bodies.

And for the unbeliever, it's eternity, body and soul in hell. And so we've been following this timeline, but we've skipped something, haven't we?

Something critical. How do we get from this stage over here, this intermediate state or just life on earth, how do we get from this to the final state of new creation or hell?

[1:07] Well, today, we're coming to the missing gap in the middle. And we're going to find out what triggers all this final state. And we'll see it's the return of Christ and judgment day.

That's our focus today. We're going to peer into the future and see what will happen to the world and to us and to the church and to all people when Christ returns.

And the first thing to see is this. The return will mean the end of this age. So we're going to look at the first point today. The return means the end of this age.

So cast your mind back a few weeks ago to our session on heaven. Where is Christ now? Christ is in heaven, isn't he? So in Acts 1, he ascended into the heavenly realm bodily.

Do you remember? Where are my pens? There we go. You can see this at the bottom. So you remember God created all things.

[2:10] So this is going to be small. All things, all creation. And then you have heaven. It's one realm of creation. Hell is another. And then you just have the universe. That's the visible universe.

All other things. That's where we live. And so Christ is in heaven right now. Bodily. He's ruling from there over all creation.

He's growing his church. He's bringing his kingdom. He's sustaining atoms from this realm. And he's enthroned in heaven right now. But what is promised as soon as he ascends into heaven?

Look at Acts 1 verse 11. This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

As soon as he goes, Jesus promises he will return to this earth. And when he does, the Bible tells us that his second coming, so remember his first is Christmas, right?

[3:18] That's his first coming. But his second coming, when he comes down from heaven, that will bring a close to this age. So look at what the disciples asked Jesus in Matthew 24.

They're asking about the end times. What will be the sign of your coming and the close of this age? The Bible speaks of two ages.

I've added to our diagram here. I hope it's not complicated, but it's just getting fuller. So the Bible speaks of two ages. History is split into two ages.

This age and the age to come. And you hear that language a lot through the Bible. I've got some verses there, Matthew 12, Luke 18, Ephesians 1. You often hear this, this age and the age to come language.

And the age to come refers to this final state. Can you see it matches up with this final state here? You have the age to come. This is how eternity will be.

[4 : 22] And so it's marked, for the believer, it's marked by perfection and eternal life. It's the new creation that this is the age to come. And so from now until that point, things run as they are.

So life as we know it, which is, how is it marked? How is this life marked? It's marked by sin and death and opposition to God. Imperfection. We are in this age.

Okay? So remember, even if you go to heaven or hell, that earth still continues. Life as we know it still continues. And all of that together, that is this age. And so because it's marked by sin, Paul calls it in Galatians 1, the present evil age.

It's an evil age. And so this is how you can think of history. It's split into two parts. This age and the age to come. But what triggers the age to come?

How do we get from this current present evil age to the age to come? Well, the Bible says it's the return of Christ that closes this age and begins the age to come.

[5 : 42] So look at these passages I've written, I've got there for you. Matthew 24. What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? The second coming and the close of this age go together.

They are one event together. And look at 2 Thessalonians 1. Christ's return marks the end of evil and persecution and injustice.

And it's the point. It's the long-awaited relief for the church. And look at 2 Peter 3. The coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Christ's return triggers the purification of this current creation.

That's what the fire is referring to. It's not talking about being incinerated. It's talking about being purified. And his return, it marks the commencement and transformation, the beginning of the new creation.

[7 : 13] And look at 1 Corinthians 15. In Christ shall all be made alive. Remember, this is the resurrection. But each in his own order. Christ the firstfruits. Christ's return triggers the resurrection.

At his second coming, we will all be raised from the dead. And so there is a point in history when something cataclysmic will happen to the universe and to life as we know it.

Christ will return, bring a close to this age, wrap things up, and then he will begin the final state. History is wrapped up and a new history begins.

A few mic checks. There we go. And what we need to realize is this will be a real physical event in history. So remember Acts 1 again.

It's promised Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. How did Jesus go up into heaven? He was taken up physically, wasn't he?

[8 : 31] He had a physical body visibly taken up. The disciples saw him. And he will return physically and visibly from the realm of heaven to this planet.

That's why the language of this event is not only called the coming or the second coming, but it's also called his revealing or his appearing. There's a real emphasis in the Bible that this will be a public, visible event for every living creature to see.

It's something they must see. And it will be an awesome sight. So just listen to 2 Thessalonians 1. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

When he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed. Although heaven itself, the realm of heaven, it isn't actually kind of in the clouds up there. He could well appear from the clouds above. 1 Thessalonians 4 says he's going to descend from the air. And he's going to come in all his glory.

[10 : 07] With his army of angels surrounding him. And he will visibly appear in the full revelation of his glory and power.

It's Christmas time, isn't it? When Christ first came, how did he come? He came in a manger, didn't he? In all humility.

His glory was veiled. You can look at that little baby in a manger, but you wouldn't be able to tell that, oh, this is the glorious king of the universe. But when he comes a second time, there is no veil.

And there will be no doubt about his glory. And he could actually well be shining in his glory as he appears.

And when he does it, he will raise the dead. Believer and unbeliever, do you remember last week, it's all will be raised from their graves.

[11:11] He will transform creation and bring an end to life as we know it. And so for the Christian, this is the day of relief for the church. This is the day when all our troubles and sorrows will end.

And so it's what we're all longing for. This is the deep desire of the Christian for Christ to return. I mentioned this a few days ago in the Tuesday lunchtime service. So don't answer if you were there. But who knows what the final prayer in the Bible is?

I'll give you a clue. It's Revelation 22. Last chapter of the Bible. Anyone know what the final prayer is? Come Lord Jesus. And that's no surprise.

When Jesus comes, what happens? Sin ends. Bodies resurrected. Pain gone. Death wiped out. New creation begins.

[12:12] The Bible paints it as an awesome day. But it will be a wonderful day for the Christian. It's a day of Christian hope. History is heading somewhere, building up to something.

And there is going to be a climax, a resolution, a finale. And it's this. It's the return of Christ. But let me ask, when will this be?

We know this is to come. This is going to be an event in history. But when? Well, this is the second thing to see. The timing. The return. The timing. So when will this second coming be?

Well, here's the answer. Write this down. We don't know. Okay. Right. Let's pray. No. We don't know. So look at these passages. Mark 13.

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows. Not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. If you're going to ask, why not the Son?

[13:15] Come back in the summer. I'm going to do Sunday school on Christ. So we'll answer it there. Luke 12. The Son of Man is coming.

And an hour you do not expect. Acts 1. It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. And the Bible repeatedly tells us that Jesus is going to come like a thief in the night.

So think about that. What time does a thief break into a house in the night? What's the time? What time? You don't know, do you? That's the point.

It's a surprise. It's sudden. It's something you can't predict. If it was, then the thief wouldn't come in, right? Just like the second coming.

Now, the Bible does say that there will be signs and events in the build-up to the return. But we're going to get onto that next week.

[14:14] But even then, I'll give you a little sneak peek. Even then, even with then, we still don't know. We won't necessarily know if we're in those signs and events.

And so we don't know. But we need to realise this. It is a real date. It's a coming event in history. So if you have an iPhone, probably any smartphone, if you have an iPhone, on your calendar, if you zoom out to the year, you can scroll down to the future years.

And I once scrolled. I use my time really wisely. I once scrolled all the way to the year 5,000. Don't ask me how long that took. And I could have kept going. I think I just got a bit bored. You could have kept going.

It's kind of built into the programme. Which means, if you think about it, in your iPhone, there is a date in your calendar app where you can click on add event and you can type in Christ return.

And if I ask you to, do you want to repeat, just say no. You don't want to repeat that. So we don't know when, but it is real. It is coming. And that's why we should always live like it could come any moment.

[15:33] We should never think that we have time. Now is the time to repent. Don't delay anymore. But also, the return is going to trigger something else.

It triggers the final state. But something must happen at the beginning of the final state. The return of Christ triggers judgment day.

And this is the third thing to see. Judgment day. The return of Christ means judgment day. So when Christ returns, we've seen it's going to trigger the resurrection. And we know, think back to last week, we know that includes every single human being.

It's the resurrection of the just and the unjust. But it will not be the case that people will be raised and instantly sent to hell or they can instantly run around in the new creation.

No. At first, there will be judgment. And I want us to read Matthew 25. This is a key text about the return of Christ. Turn to Matthew 25, verse 31.

[16:48] We can't cover everything in this. But this is a really helpful insight into judgment day. Matthew 25, this will be 831 of the church Bibles.

Matthew 25, 31 to the end. This whole chapter is Jesus talking about the end of the age, the second coming.

We get a peek into the final judgment here. So Matthew, chapter 25, verse 31. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he will place the sheep on his right but the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food.

[17:57] I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink?

And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food.

I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. Naked and you did not clothe me. Sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?

Then he will answer them saying, Truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these. You did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.

[19:15] I just want us to see a few things from this. The first is this. When Christ returns, he will raise up all humans, everyone that has ever lived, and he's going to gather us all together.

Did you see that? Gather all the nations before him. And this could well be physically gathered into one place because we're going to be resurrected, standing in our resurrected bodies and seeing Christ visibly in front of us.

We don't know exactly kind of how it will play out but whatever it looks like, every believer and unbeliever will be gathered in some way before him. And second, Christ will judge every human.

Did you see? He will sort out who are the saved and who are the not saved. Those who are his sheep whom he loves and shepherds and laid his life down for, he's going to put to his right.

And those who are the goat, who never knew him, who never belonged to him, who never loved him, he will put to his left. Those whose sins are forgiven by believing the gospel and those who rejected the gospel.

[20:32] He will judge by separating them. And this is why we say in the Apostles' Creed, but we're going to say it later, I believe in Jesus Christ that he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

This is what we mean. It's this day, judgment day. And so he will publicly and openly announce who are the truly justified and who are the damned.

And from there, he will bring every Christian into the eternal life of the new creation and every unbeliever he will send to hell. And it also seems like he's going to send demons and the devil to hell along with him, if you remember our session on hell.

So look at Jude 6. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness, currently in hell, until the judgment of the great day.

And so he's going to judge them on those days, on that day. And in Revelation 20, the devil was thrown into the lake of fire and suffered, tormented day and night forever and ever. So the devil and demons, fallen angels, are going to hell along with the unbeliever.

[21 : 50] And so when Christ returns, we need to realise that there will be a day of judgment and on that day all evil will be purged and wiped out from this creation.

And so it's no wonder that this point of judgment day coincides with the beginning of the new creation. You need to destroy the germs in order to have a clean house, don't you?

Well, you need judgment in order to have the new creation. Well, this is why, and this is why Christ's return, this is why it's our comfort.

We know that we will be saved on that day and we know every wrong will be made right. Every sin and crime and evil that was done behind closed doors and no one ever knew about it.

All those sins that never got punished in this life, all those crimes, all those unsolved mysteries, it will be judged. No sin will remain uncovered on that day.

[22 : 55] And for every injustice, we know for every injustice in this life that there will be final justice. And when is it? It's on this day. And the third thing we need to see is that this seems to all occur on a day.

So the question of how long will this take? Well, this event is often referred to as a day. So you've got the day of judgment, Matthew 10, the great day of their wrath, Revelation 6, the coming of the day of God to Peter.

Well, sometimes it's just called the day. 1 Corinthians 3. And so this could well occur within the span of a day, kind of an actual judgment day.

But we're not entirely certain. Sometimes it's referred to as the hour of his return. So we're not entirely sure the exact length. But the impression we get is this, that the resurrection and judgment are linked together.

They occur at the same time. And the judgment will be a climactic historical event. Not a drawn out process where some people kind of get judged first and then some run around the new creation but then they're brought back and then they have to go to hell.

[24 : 08] It's not going to be a process like that. No, judgment is the first thing that happens in the final state. And the fourth thing to see is that this will be public.

Right now, the world doesn't know, doesn't acknowledge that Jesus is king. that they don't know that they should bow to him. We tell them in the gospel, we plead with them, but Jesus isn't acknowledged in this world.

But on this day, when he returns and all the nations are gathered before him, everyone who mocked him or ignored him or persecuted him, they will see him face to face and they will finally realize who is king.

Now, they won't worship him at that point but they will know who is the real king. And so, the return of Christ means judgment day.

But what will that judgment be like? What will Christ say and do on that day? How will he judge these things? And what does it mean for the believer to be judged on that day?

[25 : 25] If Christ has already paid for our sins, if we're going to be resurrected along with the unbeliever and we're all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, what does that mean if our sins have already been paid for?

Well, what we need to see next is this. Judgment day means that Christ will dish out different degrees of punishment and rewards.

And I want to finish with this and we can stop for questions at the end. So, judgment and rewards. So, the language the Bible uses is that we will be judged, every human, believer and unbeliever, we will be judged according to our works.

So, look at these verses. And before we dive into this, if you feel I'm heading in an uneasy direction, don't worry, I'm not going that way, let me assure you, your sins are paid for by Christ.

The judgment's already been determined for you in Christ, okay? But I want us to see this, just let's see what the Bible says. So, Romans 2 verse 6, he will render to each one according to his works.

[26 : 38] 2 Corinthians 5, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, all of us, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Romans 14, for we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, so then each of us will give an account of himself to God, an explanation for what we have done.

And Revelation 20, I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done.

Let's just see here that there is a link between what we have done in this life and how Christ will treat us on judgment day. So the books will be opened, this is the book of God's knowledge, right? God will recall everything we have done, every word, thought, deed, intention of our hearts. And we're going to be consciously aware of it because we will have to give an account, an explanation. [27 : 53] We don't know how that will work, we can't really even guess, like is it going to be a video or are we just going to mentally recall it? We don't know, but this will happen. And Christ will treat us in a way linked to all that we have done, judged according to our works.

Now, to see what this means, let's break this down. Let's just focus on the unbeliever first, okay? This means the more severe your sin, the worse the punishment you will experience in hell. Now, all sin deserves hell, even the smallest, slightest, but there seems to be different degrees of punishment in hell. So, Jesus even tells a parable about this, Luke 12, and that servant who knew his master's will, but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given of him, much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

there seems to be a punishment in hell in accordance with someone's sins. So, the worst the sin, the worst the experience in hell. But also, there seems to be a link between knowledge of the gospel and the severity of the punishment.

[29 : 30] punishment. So, the one who knows the master's will, this is the gospel. In Matthew 13, when Jesus is talking about the parables, this knowledge, this responsibility, it's the gospel, essentially.

So, the one who knows the master's will, the gospel, but ignores it, will suffer more than someone who has never been told the gospel. Both sinners, both guilty, but different degrees of punishment. which is a sobering reality, isn't it? It should make us all think, okay, now I know the gospel, what am I going to do with it?

But that's Jesus' point in these parables. And so, if we try to map it onto this, there's going to be a temporary punishment in hell, in the intermediate state, but after judgment, there's going to be full, specific, body, and soul punishment according to an unbeliever's works.

Okay, but what about us? What about the church? If we're going to be a part of this judgment, and we are sinners, what will that mean for us?

[30 : 48] Well, it'll mean this, and this is the first thing, and I really want you to remember this one. first, when Christ opens those books on that day, our sins won't be in there.

They have already been written into Christ's book and already judged on the cross. He remembers our sin no more.

There's no condemnation. We are completely covered in Christ's righteousness. righteousness. And so, on that day, our sins will be publicly declared forgiven.

The whole world will see that we are justified, but when Christ moves us to his right hand and calls us his sheep, he will say, yes, these are the ones I've died for. All their sins are covered. They are my sheep.

And so, right now, we already know what the outcome of judgment day is for us. There's no doubt of your salvation on that day. It will all be because of Christ, his cross and his righteousness, you will be saved on that day, that there is no condemnation now or ever.

[31 : 55] But at the same time, we will be judged according to our works, but in a good way. Christ will see our good.

He will see our good Christian works, that the love we had for him, the love that we had for each other, the fruit of faith. He will see that and he will say those works show you that you are mine. That's the fruit of a saved life. All those works, that life can only come from faith. And so, we won't be saved because we've done good enough.

Christ won't be like, okay, how much good have you done in this life? Okay, now you're saved. No, we'll not be like that. We're only saved by the blood of Christ, but our works will be evidence in Christ's scales to show that we are saved by his righteousness, not our own.

But also, it seems like we will have different rewards in the new creation. I could spend a lot of time on this, but I'll have to be quite quick.

[33 : 14] The parable of the miners in Matthew 25 and the parable of the talents in Luke 19, in both these parables, the servant who is given a lot and does a lot with it, so given God's will, given the gospel and does a lot with it, is given a greater reward by their master.

So one servant gets to rule over five cities, but the one who did a lot with what the master gave him, they're going to rule over ten cities.

And Galatians 6 talks about reaping what we sow. Our works are going to have a payoff in the new creation. 1 Corinthians 15 talks about different degrees of glory.

And so in the new creation, there seems to be different degrees of glory. So let's be clear, everyone will be glorious and perfect, but there will be different rewards for different Christians linked to the fruitfulness of their life, to what they've done with the gospel that they've been given.

So think of it like this way, we're all going to have full cups in the new creation, right? If you all have a cup, and when it's full, you're perfect, you're joyful, you are so satisfied.

[34 : 32] we're all going to have full cups, but everyone's cup will be a different size. We won't feel lacking in any way, but it will be different.

And we don't know what that will look like, what that degrees of glory will be like, maybe ruling over more or less land in the new creation, I don't know, maybe you have a house closer to the throne of God, I don't know.

But it does say here, your faithfulness to Christ, your faithfulness to Christ, it won't be ignored on that final day.

Your perseverance and your labours and your sacrifices for the kingdom, it won't go unnoticed. And it may not be the big names of the church who are going to be rewarded with those great rewards in heaven.

That faithful missionary family from the 19th century, who nobody's heard of, and their ministry never boomed, and they think that they achieved nothing in this life, but they were so faithful and loving and persevered and went through so much for Christ and lost so much for him, but loved him all the way through, it's people like that who will probably be given much in the new creation.

[35 : 56] And let's be clear, this isn't salvation by works, okay? Even these rewards are by God's grace. God doesn't need to bring us into the new creation, and he certainly doesn't need to give us degrees of glory, no.

He doesn't need to do this. And so think of this, this is an encouragement for us. In the best way possible, our works will follow us into the new creation, our sins will be forgotten, the old will pass away, but your faithful labours, they will be graciously rewarded in heaven.

And so this life still matters for the Christian. And on that final day, when Christ moves us over to his right hand and calls us his sheep, we will know that we are only standing there because Christ on the cross won this eternal life for us.

and in all his grace, he will say to us the words that we all long for, well done, good and faithful servants. Welcome to the new creation.

I'll stop there and open up to questions. Thank you.