

**(Personal Eschatology)**

## I. Introduction

- A. If anybody asks me about Bible prophecy and the end of the world, it brings up a lot of really powerful memories for me.
  - 1. I remember sitting in a large audience in Chicago, and famous prophecy preacher was telling us Jesus would come again by the end of the year. I was a sophomore. In high school. I did not expect to see the end of my sophomore year. Yeah, that was special.
  - 2. I remember a movie called "Thief in the Night". It scared me. It was all about people not being ready when Jesus returned. So that when he returned, they were left behind. It was pretty creepy.
  - 3. Another memory is a whole bunch of predictions of who the Antichrist is. I was taught he is already alive, and you can name any major politician of that era, and somebody was saying that person was the Antichrist.
  - 4. There were books. There were giant charts.
  - 5. I remember sitting in an auditorium and listening to a speaker explaining atomic bombs. He explained how the US had missiles pointed at the USSR. The USSR had missiles pointed at the US. There was a military philosophy called MAD which stood for Mutual Assured Destruction. We won't launch at the USSR and they won't launch at us, because that means mutual annihilation. A lot of hope there, for a 15 year old, right?
- B. I grew up in an era of unrestrained second coming mania. It was crazy. There was good stuff and bad stuff in this.
  - 1. The bad stuff was emotional. I was taught in a way that made me afraid. It took away my future. It made me disinvest in my future. And it gave me no certainty that I was ready to meet Christ. I kept getting asked about it over and over and over again.
  - 2. The way I was taught introduced more doubt than confidence. So, for me, the Second Coming did not produce confidence or joy.
- C. But there was good stuff in all that Second Coming craziness for me too.
  - 1. I actually received some very solid theological training in what the Bible says about the return of the Lord.
  - 2. That was the good stuff.
  - 3. Think of all the topics we have covered so far in this series. The Antichrist. The Rapture. The Tribulation. The Millennium. The Return of Christ. Rewards. The Eternal State. Judgment Day. The Covenants and Israel. I was learning about all that stuff back in high school. The seeds were sown then. Those seeds have grown up. And I hope they are bearing fruit.
- D. So, my memories of Second Coming teaching are a mixed bag. A whole lot of bad memories. A whole lot of good memories.
- E. One more good thing. I think I have learned how to teach on this topic without giving too many bad memories. I hope so at least. I hope you have been encouraged. Welcome to part 9 of our series called EndGame. What does the Bible say about the end of the world? What does the Bible say about the Second Coming of Christ? That is what we have been talking about.
- F. I hope this series has encouraged you. The Bible has a whole lot to say about the future. Today, we will wrap up the series. I hope it's been awesome for you. Here's our topic for today.
  - 1. *Then What Happens?* Actually, that's a way of decoding the real title. The real title is:

## II. Personal Eschatology

- A. Eschatology is a theological term. When you study what the Bible says about the future, you are talking about eschatology. This whole series called EndGame has been a series on Eschatology. So eschatology is about what happens in the future.
- B. Personal eschatology is about what happens in the future to you. Sixty seconds after you die. Sixty minutes after you die. Where will you be? What will be happening to you? What does the future hold for you, personally? Step by step what is your future?
- C. In the Midwest, there is an old tombstone with these words:
  - 1. Pause, stranger, when you pass me by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so you will be. So prepare for death and follow me.
- D. Apparently, somebody read these words and scratched some graffiti underneath:
  - 1. To follow you I'm not content until I know which way you went. So here goes. Are you ready for this? I mean this teaching, not for your death... the teaching?

## III. Personal Eschatology

A. *What is Our Source?*

*The Bible is our only source for what happens beyond the moment of death.*

- 1. The reason why the Bible is the only source is because death is a one way street. Other than a supernatural resurrection from the hand of God himself, death is a one way street. Once you pass that divide, there is no coming back. Since there is no coming back. The Bible says:
  - a) *"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27).
- 2. When you die, a series of events begins to happen. These events mean that there is no going back. Death is the portal to the next phase of existence. And the only way we know what is beyond the portal is through the Bible.
- 3. The very God who created everything on the other side has revealed all we need to know, and all we should know about that other side. He has revealed these things in the Bible. There is no other source.
  - a) But that doesn't stop people from seeking other sources.
  - b) CHANNELLING is one example. People go to a medium to speak to a loved one who has died. Only they are not speaking to a loved one who has died. It is counterfeit. The counterfeit is coming either from the medium, who is lying, or from demons, who are lying, or from both.
  - c) In the Bible, King Saul consulted a medium. He asked her to conduct a seance. He wanted to talk to the prophet Samuel who had just died. The whole thing is weird and horrible. God was not pleased. And not long afterwards, Saul is dead.
  - d) It is never God's will for people to consult with mediums. God flat out prohibits this. He says no. Why? Because we get all the truth we need from the Bible. Channelling opens a conduit to evil, and to demons, and to the dark side. Stay away.
  - e) I would say the same thing for REINCARNATION. This is also called Transmigration of Souls. Because they say souls migrate from life form to life form. Reincarnation makes us all recyclables. I would say the same thing for PAST-LIFE MEMORIES. They are not past-life memories. They are either hallucinations, or they are figments of one's imagination, or they are demonic. They are simply not from God. Stick with the Bible.

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- f) This also rules out NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES. I know this is sensitive. That moment of transition from life to death to what's next — that moment is shrouded in mystery. Maybe a believer can sense the nearness of the Lord. Maybe an atheist can sense the nearness of darkness. I don't know. But what I do know is that these experiences have nothing to say to us that we can use. The mind is in an altered state. The visions are unreliable. The experiences are unreliable. The messages are contradictory. And don't forget the wildcard. The wildcard is that demons are always ready to whisper lies. Did you see a bright light? Yes? Was that God? Maybe. Was that the devil who makes himself appear as an angel of light? Maybe.
4. No channelling. No reincarnation. No Past-life memories. No near death experiences. To go to any other source is playing with fire. It is dancing with demons. God prohibits it. Don't do it.
  5. Our source is the Bible. It is authoritative. It is sufficient. It is enough.
  6. So what does this Bible actually say about what happens to a person when you die.
- B. *What is Death?*
1. This is what Scripture teaches:
    - a) *"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him."* (2 Corinthians 5:8, 9).
  2. This verse defines death for us. The background info is pretty clear. As a human, you have three parts to you: body, soul, and spirit. Your body is made of matter and molecules. Your soul and spirit interact with matter and molecules but go way, way beyond them. So this is non-matter essence — or your immaterial essence. Your soul is your personality: mind, will, emotions, self-consciousness. Your spirit is your interface with God.
  3. So what is death? Death is what happens when YOU are absent from the body. In other words, when your soul and spirit depart your body, we call that death.
  4. This was not God's plan A. God's plan A was immortality for you and me, body, soul, and spirit. But we blew that when we sinned. Sin galloped into the world, and death can riding on its back. So, this horrible split will happen, and your body and soul and spirit will go their separate ways.
  5. Your body goes to the grave. In the grave, the matter decomposes. Dust to dust. But, as we shall see, even that dust has a destiny too.
  6. Your soul and spirit go immediately to be with the Lord, or to not be with the Lord. Which is our next topic.
  7. But what is death? Death is the moment your identity, your personality, your mind, memories, all of that... *Death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body.*
  8. Death basically triggers the launch sequence of your personal eschatology. Then what happens?
- C. *What are the Two Destinies?*
1. There are two destinies. The whole Bible is very clear on this. Jesus summed it up in a very powerful way:
    - a) *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."* (Matthew 7:13, 14)
  2. One way leads to destruction. One way leads to life. One way is heavily populated. One way is sparsely populated, relatively speaking. There is this binary thinking in Jesus. In the Bible. And it should be in the church. The elevator is going up, or going down. It's not standing still. It's not going sideways. One way or the other. Two ways.
  3. How do you know which way it will be for you?
  4. You know which way it will be for you by answering one simple question: What have you done with Jesus? Who is he to you? Is he just an example? Is he just a teacher? Is he just a fairy tale or a myth? All of those are the wrong answer. It is elevator down.
  5. But if you can say Jesus is my Savior. I have received him. I have trusted him. My hopes are in him. All my eggs are in the Jesus-basket, so to speak, then you can have confidence. You don't have to keep your fingers crossed.
    - a) *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."* (1 John 5:13)
  6. You don't have to keep your fingers crossed because you know if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior or not.
  7. Two doors. Two paths. Two destinies. Everyone goes either through the door of life through faith in Christ, or through the door of destruction through unbelief.
  8. So there is the path of belief, and the path of unbelief. Let's break down the path of unbelief first.
- D. *What Happens on The Path of Unbelief?*
1. I do not want to dwell on this. I do not want to shy away from this either.
  2. The first funeral I ever did was for a person on the path of unbelief. I am twenty years old and a pastor. One of the kids in my Awana clubs lost his mother. The family had no connection with God. No connection with church. Nothing. Just a kid in junior high in Awana. That boy asked me, on behalf of his family, if I would do the funeral. I said yes, even though I was freaking out inside.
  3. The plan was a simple, short, graveside service. No church, no chapel, just graveside. I prepared a little talk. I put on a suit. I grabbed my Bible and my notes.
  4. The day of that funeral was like the heavens opened with rain. Dark clouds. Stinging biting wind. Heavy rain with big drops soaking everything. Unrelenting.
  5. Only a few people showed up to this service. There was the kid, all tearful. A few family members. I remember getting out of my car, and hurrying over to the hearse. The funeral director met me with a giant umbrella. He could barely hold onto it. Everybody was wet. Everybody was cold. Everybody was depressed. Everybody was miserable.
  6. I'm twenty years old, and I'm all those things too, plus I'm nervous.
  7. An older pastor-buddy of mine said, "Bill, ask the funeral director which side the head is on, and stay on that side." So I asked, and he pointed the correct end of the casket. Then he came up beside me with his giant umbrella, and we started walking side by side. And the pall bearers followed. And a handful of people followed them.

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8. Gloomy skies. Heavy rain. Face-biting cold. It smelled like grass and sod and wetness. We were soaked. Blustering wind.
  9. We're walking through these headstones. I'm leading the parade. The funeral director is leading me. He's a crabby old man. He leans in to me and says one sentence. "Make it fast."
  10. So we get to the grave site. The hole is dug. The workers are standing off to the side. They place the casket on a frame over the hole. The funeral director gives me a look that basically says, "Hey kid, it's your turn, and you better remember what I said."
  11. So I made it fast. I read Scripture. I said some words. I said condolences. I said a prayer. We were done.
  12. I don't remember anything I said, but I do remember this: hopelessness so thick you could taste it.
  13. I can't be anyone's judge. I can't see anyone's heart. I can't tell what a person believed about Jesus years ago. But let me just assume that what I was told was true. This woman had done nothing with Christ at all.
  14. We were standing in the rain. What was she standing in? What was her experience?
  15. What happens on the Path of Unbelief? Let's outline that now.
    - a) The first thing that happens is Sheol.
  16. *Sheol* is a Hebrew word. *Hades* is a Greek word. They mean the same thing. This is the place that people go when they die, whether in faith or in unbelief. It's not all bad down there. It's not all good down there. There's a good part. There's a bad part. Here's what Jesus teaches:
    - a) *So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." But Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf [abyssos, abyss] fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us."* (Luke 16:22-26).
  17. So, let's make our map of the abode of the dead from this. Hades/Sheol has a good place. This is called Abraham's Bosom (v. 23). Jews also called this Paradise (Luke 23:43, the thief on the Cross). This is a place of joy.
  18. Hades also has a bad place. This is called Torments. This is where the rich man went.
  19. In between is an abyss. This is translated either great gulf or bottomless pit. Same Greek word with inconsistent translation. The devil will be thrown into here for a thousand years, so it's probably something like a black hole or creepier.
  20. When a person on the path of unbelief dies, they go to the same place the rich man went. They go to the bad part of Hades. They go to what we commonly call hell. Their soul goes there.
  21. Where do you think their spirit goes? Their spirit goes nowhere, because they are spiritually dead. They have no interface with God. The circuits are fried, and they are doubly dead.
  22. Notice, Jesus teaches us this person is conscious.
    - a) This person has cravings. This person has a tortured conscience.
    - b) This person's destiny was irrevocably fixed. This person knew his destiny was just.
  23. So, what comes next for the person on the path of unbelief?
    - a) *Step One: Death — body to the grave.*
    - b) *Step Two: Torments — soul to Hades, a temporary waiting room, still being populated*
    - c) *Step Three: Future Resurrection — a reunification of soul and a reconstituted body.*
    - d) *Step Four: Judgment Day — the Great White Throne*
    - e) *Step Five: Lake of Fire — this is the Eternal State.*
      - (1) *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:14, 15).*
  24. I am talking about all this in an academic way, but I want you to know I feel emotional pain. This is not popular, I get it. There are no warm fuzzies here, I get that too. People object. People get mad. Yes. I understand. Nobody likes this.
  25. But we don't like this because we don't have our minds screwed on right. Because if we all understood grace, we would all get that if there is a God of justice in this universe, this is what every single sinner has coming, welcome to the club.
  26. The holiness of God will blaze forth, and those who have not been sheltered by the blood of Christ will be consumed, and that is the only thing that can balance the scales of cosmic justice in the end.
  27. This is the path of unbelief. I hope and pray that you are not on it. Our whole church exists to make sure you are not on it.
- E. *What happens on the Path of Belief?*
1. Having been part of a whole lot of funerals, I can say there is a huge difference between services for Christians and non-Christians. There is a joy, and a confidence for Christians. This thing isn't final. There will be a reunion. Death doesn't get the final say.
    - a) *"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:54, 55).*
  2. The whole thing is different. So, now, the good news. What happens when a Christian dies, step by step?
    - a) *Step One: Death — body to the grave. (The similarities end here.)*
    - b) *Step Two: Skip Abraham's Bosom (Paradise) — which is now empty.*
      - (1) Jesus died. Jesus rose again. Jesus walked on earth for a while. Jesus ascended to heaven.
      - (2) When he ascended to heaven, on his way up, he visited Abraham's bosom. There were all the believers of ages past. Abraham was there. Daniel. Esther. Ruth. Sampson. Adam. Eve.
      - (3) He led them to heaven. He led them in a triumphal procession. Something like the Rose Parade only a million times better.

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- (4) Remember, Jesus is both human and divine.
- (5) He is the first human to enter the presence of God. His presence makes every other human presence possible. He is our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20). He is our first fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20). So paradise is empty.
- (6) That means, when you die, you won't go to Paradise. No. Instead, you go straight to the presence of God.
- c) *Step Three: Face to Face My Redeemer — welcome home, good and faithful servant.*
- d) *Step Four: An Intermediate Body — this is a strange teaching in 1 Corinthians 15, but you will have a temporary body, so that you're not just a soul and spirit.*
- e) *Step Five: The Judgement Seat of Christ — evaluation for reward.*
- f) *Step Six: The Rapture and Resurrection — you come down with Jesus in the Rapture, and receive your permanent body, your Resurrection Body.*
- g) *Step Seven: The Love and Fun and Laughter and service to God of Heaven.*
- h) *Step Eight: The Second Coming — you get your pony and join heaven's armies at Armageddon*
- i) *Step Nine: Ruling and reigning in the Millennium.*
- j) *Step Ten: Watching God unroll the New Heavens and New Earth*
- k) *Step Eleven: Heaven. This is the eternal state.*
  - (1) I really like a little poem that says:
    - (a) *The stars shall live for a million years, A million yers and a day.*  
*But God and I will live and love, When the stars have passed away.*

F. *The Journey's End*

1. I would like wrap this message, and the whole series, on a high note and a higher note.
2. When all the end times events have rolled out, there is one more thing God will do.
  - a) *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)*
3. The Eternal State begins with a coronation day for Jesus. The man who wore the crown of thorns will wear a crown of glory. They drove him to his knees before his accusers. Now all the universe will kneel before him. Mighty angels, shimmering in ever-changing colors, will bow. The demons will be there too, and the devil, blinded by the inexpressible glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will be there. I will be there. All the believers of all the ages past will be there. All those who rejected him will look on him whom they pierced, and their regret will have no end.
4. The Father will unlock the vaults of heaven, and the wealth and treasures of the cosmos will be poured out at his feet. This One whose love never wavers. This One whose power to forgive knows no limits. This Savior who was scarred, and bloodied, and who one dark day carried the weight of the sin of the world — this same Jesus will stand with such a weight of glory and treasure and love and friendship and joy and honor and blessing and majesty poured out at his feet, that human language is inadequate to express it.
5. And God will crown him. God will crown him King of kings. God will crown him Lord of lords. And the applause will begin. A shout of joy. A shout of acclamation. A cry of praise will gush from our lips. Every promise is fulfilled. Every evil is vanquished. Every tear is wiped away.
6. Jesus Christ the King steps into glory and majesty with a shout of praise to echo from one end of the cosmos to the other, and to resound for all the ages long.
7. And just when you think it cannot get any better, this glorious, radiant, breathtaking Almighty King will turn his eyes to you.
8. To you, Christian, as if you were the only one there.
9. He will smile. He will hold out his hands. He will call you forth. Because the great promise God makes to you is not just heaven. It is that in heaven, you will share even the unspeakable glory of Christ.
  - a) *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18).*
  - b) *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)*
10. We shall be like him, and he is transcendent in glory.
11. For the person who follows God, this whole world is alien territory. Even your highest happiness is the faintest whisper of what's coming.
12. You will swim in an ocean of joy in the presence of God, waves of happiness crashing upon you.
13. You will dive into delights so immense earthly sorrows will fade into oblivion and earthly pleasures will seem like toddler games.
14. You will shine as a spectacle to dazzle the angels.
15. You will step into your fathomless inheritance, flashing an all-access pass to the vaults of heaven.
16. You will walk on streets of gold.
17. You will run to the arms of Jesus — your Savior, Deliverer, Champion, and Friend — for an embrace of overwhelming love.
18. You will join in the ear-splitting applause for the absolute perfection of every twist and turn of providence.
19. You will raise a cheer to Jesus, grateful beyond words for the nail prints in his hands and feet — as inexpressible joy finds expression, and it's still not enough.
20. You will take your seat at God's table, for a feast to honor the One who is worthy of all glory, and honor, and praise.
21. Let the party begin. A party to end all parties. Pure joy. Infinite happiness.
22. Hallelujah... Jesus Christ is coming again.