

Resurrection: Life After Life After Death

All Things Made New: Jesus Leads The Way

“There is a day coming when the old will pass away. Every wrong will be right, no more darkness, no night. The Son will light the way.”

The entire Christian faith rests on this foundation—first and foremost, the resurrection of Jesus himself, and then the promised resurrection of those who belong to him. Paul calls Jesus *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (1 Corinthians 15:20), meaning his resurrection is the beginning and guarantee of what is to come for all who follow him. He goes before us so that we might share in his risen life.

It’s no overstatement to say that if the resurrection didn’t really happen, Christianity unravels.

No matter how profound Jesus’ teachings or how compassionate his miracles, without the resurrection, there is no victory over death, no assurance that sin has been dealt with, and ultimately, no enduring hope. Without it, Christianity becomes merely a philosophy or moral framework—interesting, perhaps even inspiring—but ultimately powerless to transform or save.

Christians may speak passionately about better ways to live, the wisdom found in Scripture, or the hope the gospel offers—but if there’s nothing beyond the grave, all of it rings hollow. If Christ did not rise, and we will not rise, the story ends in the grave.

Yet, as the Apostle Paul declares, Jesus truly did rise – and those who trust in Him will rise too. Death, then, is not the end.

But it does raise some honest questions: What happens in the meantime? What takes place in the space between death and resurrection? Is there life after death—and if so, where is it? What is it like? How long does it last?

Life After Life After Death

As it turns out, the Bible doesn't spend much time describing what we often call *life after death*—that is, the temporary state of existence between death and the final resurrection.

Instead, Scripture places far more emphasis on what might be called *life after life after death*: a renewed, embodied life that begins with resurrection.

Paul offers a hint in 2 Corinthians 5:8 when he writes, "*To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord.*"

Yet while some interpret this verse to mean that, upon death, a believer is welcomed into Christ's presence while awaiting the resurrection, Paul's words are first and foremost pastoral—offering assurance in the face of death—and, ultimately, affirm the broader biblical hope of being fully and completely united with Christ in the life to come.

Paul does not speak with uncertainty or fear, but with confident longing. He would "*prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord,*" not because he rejects life in the present, but because he knows that being with Christ is the ultimate goal—the full and final union for which all creation longs. For Paul, this is not an escape from life, but its fulfillment: the culmination of redemption and the heart of Christian hope.

He expands on this just a few verses earlier in 2 Corinthians 5:1–4, describing our earthly bodies as "*tents*"—temporary, vulnerable, and wearing out. In contrast, he speaks of a "*building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*"

His imagery suggests that death is not the end of our story, nor is it merely a spiritual continuation. Instead, death is the passageway through which we are prepared to be clothed with something far more permanent—immortality wrapped in glory.

And this is key: Paul makes it clear that our ultimate destiny is not to be **unclothed** (disembodied), but to be **re clothed** with resurrection bodies—“*so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*” (v.4). In this way, resurrection is not a reversal of death, but its complete undoing.

The ultimate hope—not just of Paul, but of all the apostolic writers, and indeed the entire sweep of the biblical narrative—is the renewal and restoration of all creation, including humanity, culminating in God dwelling fully and finally with his people.

The New Testament authors look through death and beyond it, with a kind of prophetic immediacy. They anticipate this glorious fulfilment with what feels like an Einstein-Rosen bridge-like perspective—seeing resurrection and new creation as the next great moment after death.

There is remarkably little concern for mapping out the timeline or explaining what happens in the interim; their eyes are fixed firmly on the end of the story, where all things are made new.

“I Tell You Today, You Will Be With Me In Paradise”

Another passage that seems to speak to the temporary middle space—*life after death*—is Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, who implored him to “*remember me when you come into your Kingdom*”. Jesus replied (as is translated in many English translations), “*today, you will be with me in paradise*”.

However, when we take the Bible's broader narrative seriously—one that places resurrection, not disembodied heaven, at the centre, I think a better reading of Luke 23 is *"Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise."*

With no punctuation in the original Greek, the phrase could be read either as: 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise,' or, 'Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise.'" I think the second reading seems a logical rendering of this verse, shifting the emphasis away from "today" being the moment of arrival, instead placing it on the assurance of what's to come.

Jesus' words in Luke 23:43 are a beautiful declaration of salvation, not necessarily a detailed explanation of what happens after death. Further, they are words of assurance to a man facing impending death that this will not be the end. Jesus offers the promise of belonging, presence, and hope in the new creation—*paradise* (Revelation 2:7), where the tree of life is found—the final, eternal dwelling place of God with his people. Paradise becomes a resurrection reality, not an interim destination.

Yet whether we understand "paradise" as a temporary rest in God's presence or a pointer to the resurrection to come, the heart of the promise is the same: **you will be with me.**

What, Biblically Speaking Is Resurrection?

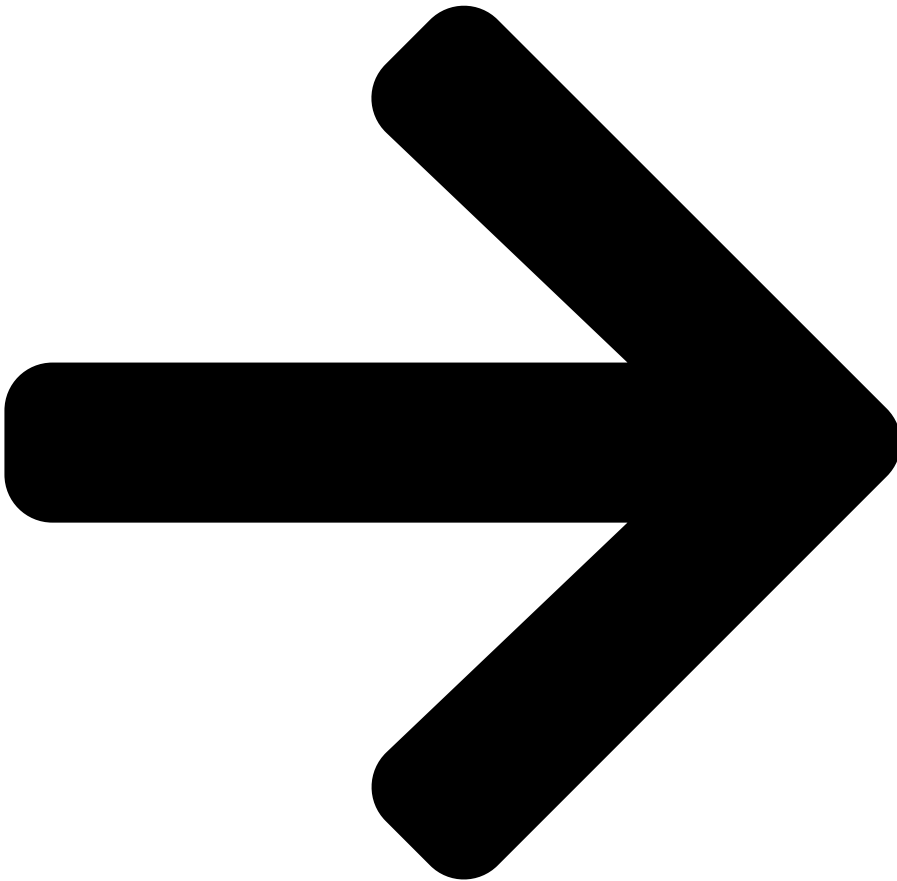
The Bible contains several stories of people being brought back to life, but these moments—though extraordinary—are not to be mistaken for resurrection in its fullest, biblical sense. They are acts of divine power, but not the fulfilment of the Christian hope.

Resurrection, in the biblical sense, is not simply about coming back to life. It is being raised into a new, eternal,

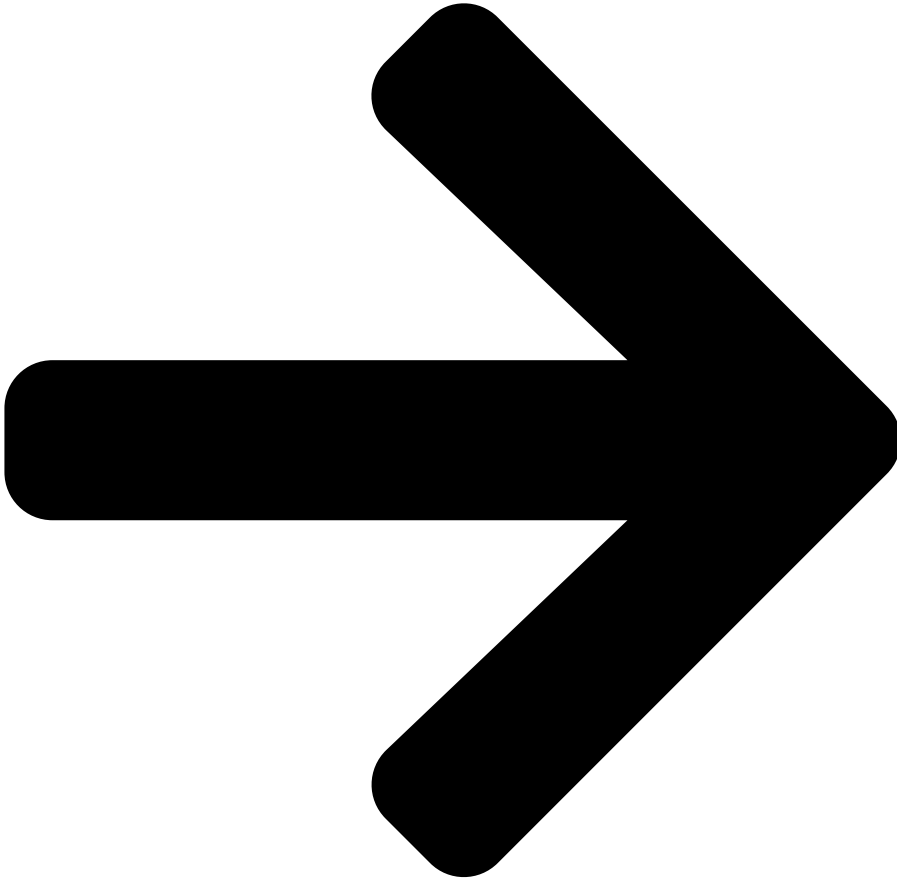
and glorified existence—life; abundant, full, never-ending, transformed life. Life *after* life after death.

Let's unpack the difference by comparing the resurrection of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus:

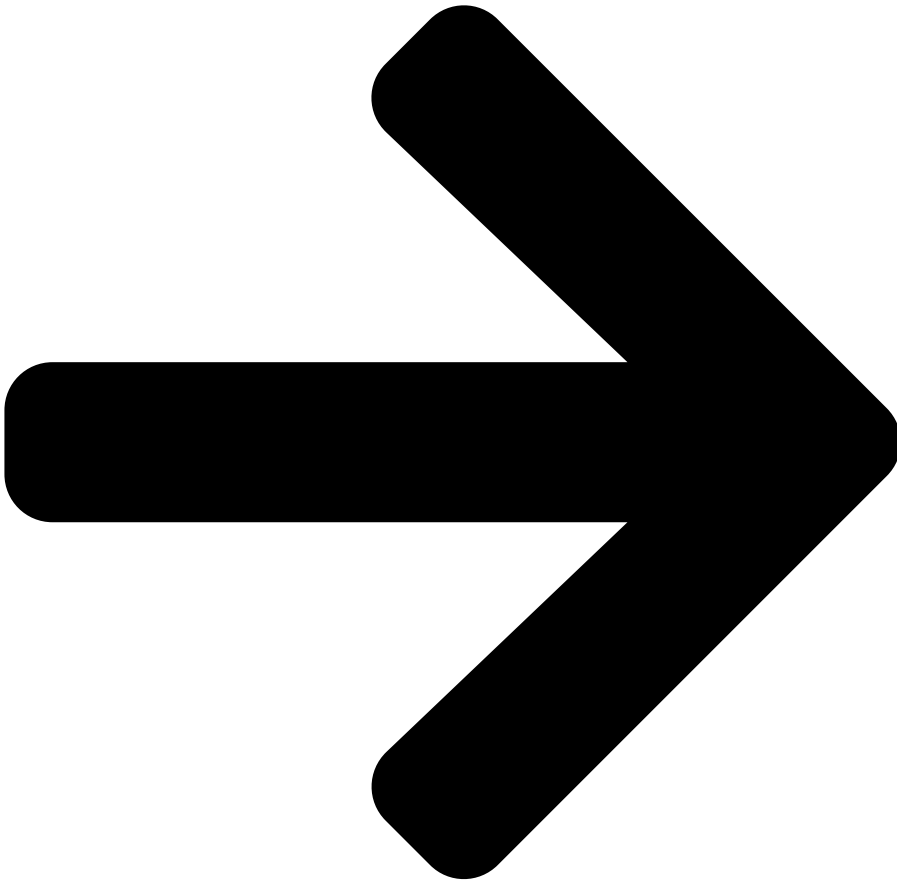
1. Lazarus: Still Mortal



When Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, Lazarus came out still wrapped in his grave clothes—a sign that he had returned to the same kind of physical life he had before.

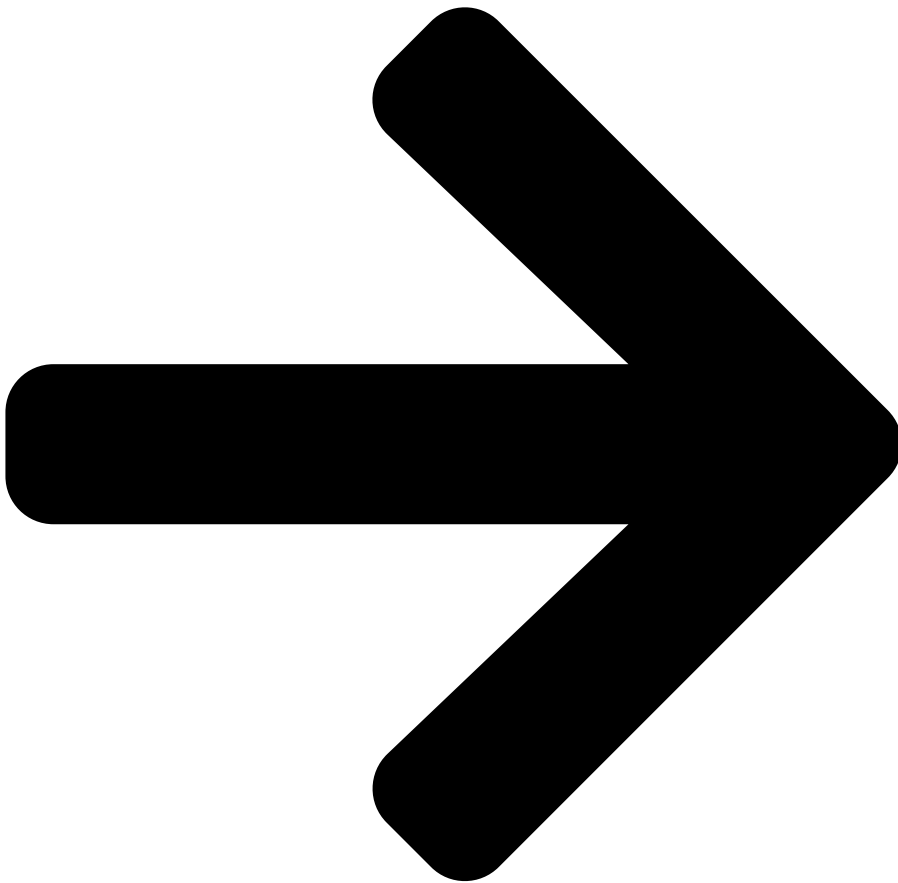


He would need to be unbound (John 11:44) and eventually, he would die again.

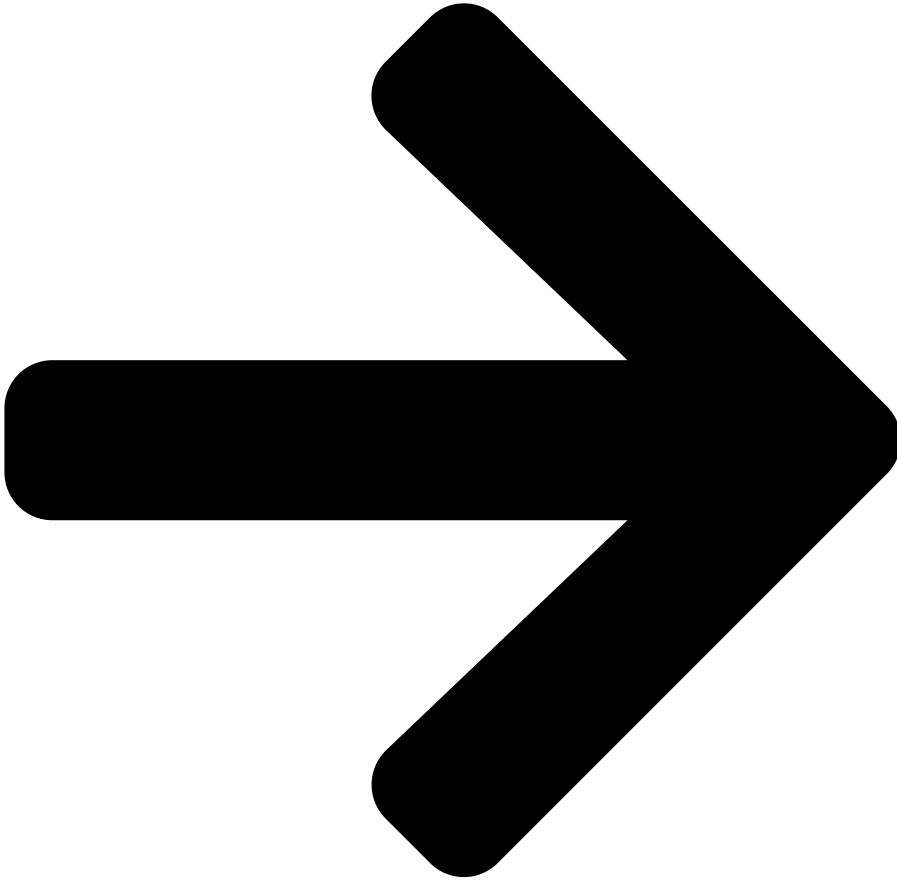


His body had not been transformed; it had been restored.

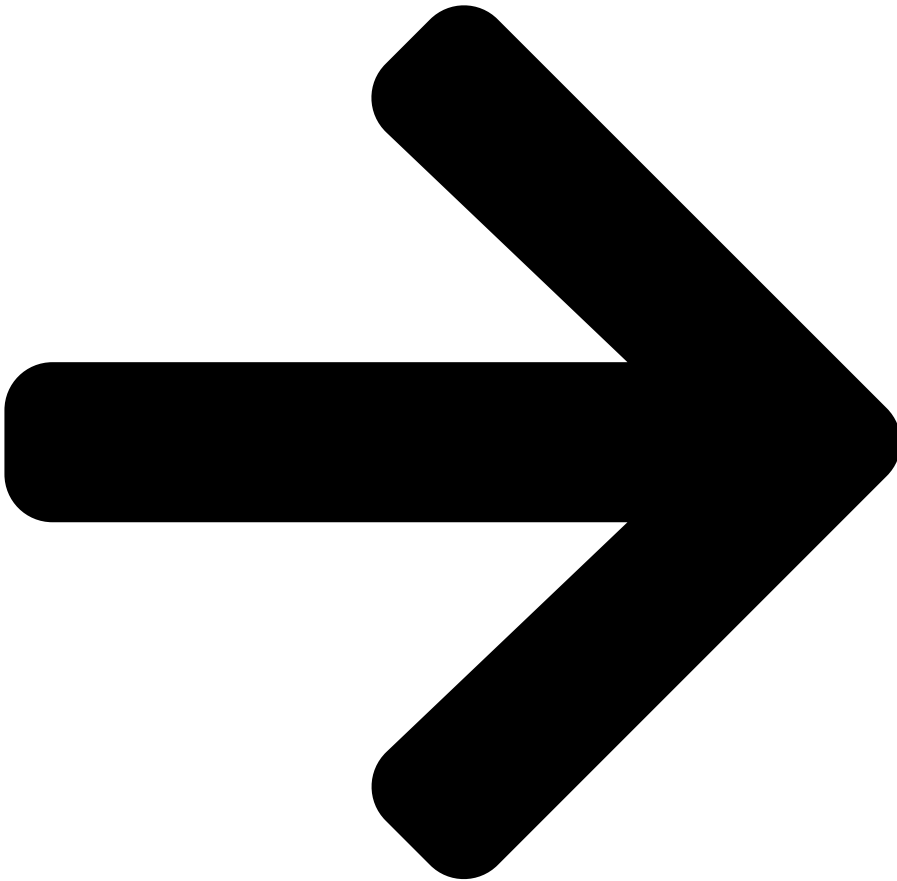
2. Jesus: Transformed, Glorified



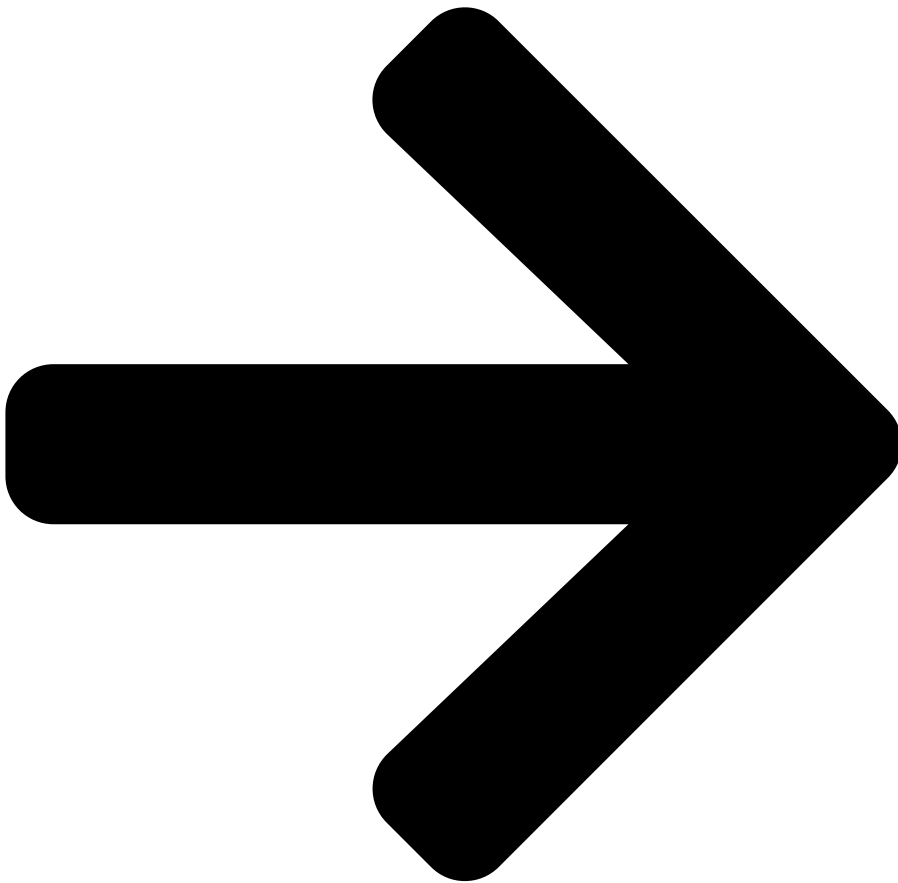
After Jesus' resurrection, the grave clothes were left behind, still lying in place (John 20:6–7). The cloth that had been around his head was folded up by itself—as though his body had passed through them.



Jesus wasn't merely brought back to life; he was raised into a new kind of life.



His new body could be touched and could eat, but it also passed through locked doors (John 20:19) and was no longer bound by the limitations of mortality.



He would never die again (Romans 6:9).

This contrast helps us understand the Christian hope more clearly. Resurrection, as shown in Jesus, is not just about returning from death but stepping into a completely new, eternal kind of life. It's a promise of transformation, not just restoration—a future where death no longer has the final say.

So Do We “Go To Heaven” When We Die?

Heaven is less of a specific *location* and more of a specific *reality*. It is God's space and God's reality, the place where God's presence is fully manifest. Heaven is often described as the throne of God—the seat of His rule, glory, and holiness, a real and eternal realm distinct from Earth.

Jesus often spoke about the *Kingdom of Heaven* – it was one of

the central themes of His teaching. The phrase appears 32 times in the Gospel of Matthew. In the other Gospels, the same idea is expressed as "*the Kingdom of God.*" These two terms are interchangeable, both describing God's rule and reign.

Jesus taught that the Kingdom had already begun with His coming. He told His listeners, "The Kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:20–21). Yet, at the same time, He instructed His followers to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). This shows that the Kingdom is both present and future – already inaugurated, but not yet fully complete.

Jesus' teachings revealed not only the reality of God's authority and reign, but also included stories and parables that illustrated how people are called to live under the rule of the Kingdom of Heaven – a way of life He outlined most clearly in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Bible paints a beautiful picture of where this is heading. Heaven is God's space. The Kingdom is God's rule: heaven will one day come fully to earth (Revelation 21:1; Romans 8:21). The goal is not for us to go 'up' to heaven, but for heaven to come 'down' and fill the earth. It won't be a vague, spiritual afterlife, but a renewed and restored creation – where God dwells with His people, and where those who belong to Him live in resurrected, glorified bodies, forever.

In the meantime, while we wait and if we die, what happens? If heaven is God's space, and God's Kingdom, arrived in part but not in full, and if we have entered into that Kingdom, in part but not in full, what happens at the moment of death?

Here are a few thoughts – shaped, I think, by the flow of the biblical story:

The Middle Space: Life After Death

We are estranged from God and in need of forgiveness. But we are also mortal and in need of rescue from the power of death.

The gospel – the good news – doesn't just tell us that we *can* be saved, but also what we're saved *from* and what we're saved *to*.

Biblically speaking, humanity faces two ultimate destinies: eternal life in the *Kingdom of God* and eternal separation from God, often framed in Scripture as "*the second death*" or "*hell*," the just end of a life lived apart from grace. By default, due to sin, all are on the path toward death and eternal separation from God.

The *gospel* is that Jesus came to rescue us from that default destination. He lived, died, and rose again so that we could enter the Kingdom of Heaven – not because we earned it, but because He offers it freely to those who trust in Him.

The New Testament speaks powerfully—and often—about the dramatic change that takes place when we come to know and believe in Jesus. It's more than a change in beliefs or behaviour. It's a transfer of identity and belonging. Scripture describes it as moving from death to life, from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of light, from being "*children of wrath*" (Ephesians 2:3) to becoming beloved children of God.

This isn't symbolic. It's spiritual reality.

Paul puts it plainly: "*You were dead in your sins... but God made you alive with Christ*" (Colossians 2:13). Once disconnected from God, we're now fully alive, not by our own effort, but because of His mercy and love. The Spirit of God Himself comes to live in us (Romans 8:11), bringing new desires, new strength, and new life.

Jesus called it being born again—a spiritual rebirth that starts the moment we believe. And He gave us this promise: "*The one who believes in Me, even though they die, yet will they live*" (John 11:25).

This is the miracle of salvation: not just forgiveness, but resurrection. Not just turning over a new leaf, but becoming a new creation.

What does this mean for believers? Does some part of them, made fully alive in Christ, live on after death?

I believe the answer is yes.

The spirit that has been made alive in Christ **will go to be with Christ** "*and then, when Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (Colossians 3:4).

When someone puts their faith in Jesus, their spirit is made alive—born again by the Holy Spirit—and that new, living spirit continues on after death. Paul writes, as we looked at earlier "*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:8), and Jesus promised, "*The one who believes in Me, though they may die, yet shall they live*" (John 11:25).

This doesn't mean we enter a vague, floating existence. Our truest self—the spirit made alive in Christ—is kept safe in His presence. Scripture doesn't explain exactly what this experience* is like, or how "conscious" it may be, but it assures us that we are fully known, fully loved, and fully held by Christ. And from the perspective of the person who dies, the next moment they experience is **resurrection life**.

So no, we don't go to "heaven" in the way we often imagine—floating in clouds, harps in hand, for all eternity. But yes, if we are in Christ, we go to be with Him. And we wait, with hope, for the day when heaven fully comes to earth, when we receive our *heavenly resurrection bodies*, and everything broken is made new.

This is the unshakable hope of every believer: not only life after death, but life *after* life after death with Jesus, and the restoration of all things.

A Final Note

If you are reading this article (and thank you for being here!), and aren't yet a believer and follower of Jesus, this raises something important. Something we all feel, whether we talk about it or not.

Mortality is our clue and our warning.

We were never meant to die. Deep down, we know this – which is why death feels so wrong, even when it's expected. Our bodies aging, our loved ones passing – they all point to a world that's not as it should be. Death is a signpost, reminding us that things are not yet made right.

But it's also a warning. Life doesn't go on forever, and the choices we make now matter. The gospel is not just about comfort after death – it's a call to turn, to trust Jesus, and to step into the Kingdom life now. Because one day, the waiting will be over. The King will return. And heaven will come crashing in.

“What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” | 1 Corinthians 15:50-55, NLT

*The Bible speaks about mind, body, and soul, but not always in the neat, Western categories we often use. Rather than dividing people into “parts,” Scripture tends to speak of humans as integrated beings.

Embodied: We don’t have bodies—we are bodies.

Relational: We’re made to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

Integrated: Our thoughts, actions, desires, and spiritual life are all connected.

Still, the Bible *does* use these words—*mind*, *body*, and *soul*—and each has a role in describing different aspects of who we are. In the Bible, spirit (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*) is most often described as:

- The breath of life from God (Genesis 2:7),
- The life force or animating presence that makes someone a living being,
- And, in believers, the part of them that responds to God, especially once they’ve received the Holy Spirit.

So, when a person dies, the spirit returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7), but Scripture doesn’t say much about it being *conscious* or *active* on its own. Personally, I think the best understanding of life after death for a believer is this: a person no longer exists in full personal consciousness. Their spirit, not just their life force but also the part of them that has been united to Christ, returns to God, their body to the dust, with their full personhood preserved in God’s keeping—awaiting resurrection (Colossians 3:3–4). This isn’t *nothingness* or *oblivion*—it’s rest. And from the perspective of the person who dies, the next moment they experience is resurrection life—life *after* life after death.

Bible Passages To Explore: 1 Corinthians 15:20–22, Romans 6:5, Philippians 3:20–21, 2 Corinthians 5:1–4, 8, John 11:25–26, Colossians 3:3–4, Revelation 21:1–4, Romans 8:18–21, Ephesians 2:4–5, Colossians 2:13–14, John 5:24