



HEAVEN/DEATH/HOPE

SCRIPTURE VERSES (NIV)

Isaiah 25:8-9

⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

⁹ In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Matthew 5:17-19

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 13:29-33

²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

Jesus' Sorrow for Jerusalem

³¹ At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." ³² He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' ³³ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

John 14:2-4

² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

Revelation 21:4-7

⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

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LIFE DOESN'T END WITH DEATH

Rick Warren — September 8, 2015

“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.” (Romans 8:11 NLT, second edition)

As believers, we have hope because we are going to live forever. Death is not the end. There is more to the story! One day your heart will stop beating, and that will be the end of your body. But it's not going to be the end of you.

You were made in God's image. You were made to last forever. This is not all there is. Why do we have hope? Because no matter how bad it seems on Earth, it's just for a while. We're going to spend trillions of years on the other side of eternity with no more sorrow, no more sadness, no more sickness, no more suffering.

The Bible says in Romans 8:11, *“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you”* (NLT, second edition).

As a pastor, I've stood at the graveside of hundreds of families, and I know the difference between people with hope and those without. You can see it in their eyes. I've seen the terror in the eyes of people without hope. They're thinking, “This is all I have. It's over. I will never see this person again. It's done. That's all there is to life.”

I compare it to the thousands of people I've seen at funerals of a believer. They know this is just a transition step. They're going into real life! They're going to be with God for eternity. There is hope because they know they will be reunited one day. For a believer, death is not leaving home. It's a homecoming.

In Jesus Christ, you live a life of no condemnation. You're forgiven no matter what you do. It's a life free from domination. You're set free. You can change. God is changing you for the good, and then you live a life with no termination. You can live forever!

Talk It Over

- ◆ Salvation in Jesus Christ makes all the difference in eternity. How should it affect how we live our lives?
- ◆ What have you been set free from in this life because of your salvation?

YOUR HEAVENLY CHEERING SQUAD

Rick Warren

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1 NLT)

Home field advantage can mean everything in sports. Teams who are at home often have a far better record than those on the road. When a team has someone cheering them on, they can often outplay their ability.

The Bible says that you, too, have an audience cheering you on. Hebrews 12:1 says, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us”* (NLT).

Nothing you do is private. You have an audience. Heaven is watching. But, more importantly, you have a cheering section. The Bible says that everyone in Heaven is cheering you on.

You probably realize that God knows everything. The Bible says *“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth”* (2 Chronicles 16:9 KJV). The Lord doesn't miss a thing. He knows your ups and your downs — your everything. He knows every thought you have.

But you're also surrounded by “a huge cloud of witnesses to this life of faith.” Moses is watching you. Abraham is watching you. Every believer who has ever lived is in the stands watching you live out your faith.

And they're cheering you on. When you're scared, they're rooting for you to be courageous. When you want to give up, they're urging you to keep going. When you feel insignificant and forgotten, they're in your corner.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What does understanding that God knows your ups and downs change for you?
- ◆ Who do you think is among your cloud of witnesses? Are there friends or family who have gone on before you?

WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE?

Rick Warren — March 24, 2015

Grace is the gift that keeps on giving, because one of the benefits of grace is eternal life. *Romans 6:23* says, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (NLT, second edition).

Have you ever wondered what Heaven is going to be like? The Bible tells us that Heaven is going to be these four things:

1. A place of reunion, where we are reunited with other loved ones who have accepted the grace of God.
2. A place where we are rewarded for the character that we developed and the way we served other people here on Earth.
3. A place where we are reassigned to do new work based on our SHAPE (Spirit, Heart, Aptitude, Personality & Experience). We will be given new assignments that we love to do and that use the gifts God has given us.
4. A place of release, where we're free from all pain, suffering, sadness, sorrow, grief, depression, and loneliness.

It's going to be a wonderful place! And it is God's gift to you. There's one catch: You have to accept it.

If you get a gift and you don't unwrap it, it's a worthless gift. You need to realize that Jesus Christ makes this grace gift available to everybody, but it is also customized specifically for your life, because God knows exactly what you need.

One of the most brilliant people I've ever met is Peter Drucker, the father of American management. Everything he writes is printed in the Wall Street Journal. He's a brilliant man who has written dozens of books that are textbooks. He's been a mentor to me for a number of years. I asked Peter one day, “How did you become a Christian?” He said, “When somebody first explained grace to me, I realized I was never going to get a better deal.”

You're never going to get a better deal than the grace God offers to you today. Open your life to the grace of God through Jesus Christ. It's your only hope!

Talk It Over

- ◆ How does the eternal benefit of God's grace change your perspective on life?
- ◆ Why do you think God requires us to accept his gift of grace?
- ◆ Who can you tell about the best deal they will ever be offered?

GOD SHARES YOUR PAIN

Rick Warren — December 24, 2015

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.”
(Psalm 34:18 NLT, second edition)

I don't know what pain you're in this Christmas. I certainly don't know what caused the pain. But I know that God understands it. God is not some distant force. Nor is he callous. The Bible teaches that God enters into our pain. And he doesn't just care about your pain; he feels it, too. He shares your pain. The Bible says, *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed”* (Psalm 34:18 NLT, second edition). I can know this even though I don't know anything about your pain. Why? Because I know God. And I know the Trinity — Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each part of the Trinity is active in your life as you experience pain.

First, your heavenly Father shares your pain.

God understands and shares your pain because he wired you. He's the one who gave you the ability to experience pleasure and pain. The Bible says it like this: *“He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do”* (Psalm 33:15 NIV). He understands emotions because God is an emotional God. The only reason you have emotions is because you're made in God's image. If God didn't have emotions, you wouldn't have emotions.

Second, Jesus understands your pain.

Jesus understands your pain because he's been there. He's suffered, too. He's been betrayed, abandoned, and fatigued — just like you. He came to Earth and lived a fully human life. He experienced everything we experience in human form. The Bible says of Jesus, *“This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do”* (Hebrews 4:15a NLT, second edition).

Third, the Holy Spirit prays for you as you experience pain.

The Bible says, *“The moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayers out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans”* (Romans 8:26 MSG).

The Bible says when you're in pain, the Holy Spirit makes prayers for you out of wordless sighs and aching groans. He understands your pain. He knows what you're feeling. And he turns those feelings into prayers.

If you're hurting, you don't have to go through it alone. God understands your pain because he created your emotions. Jesus knows your pain from firsthand experience. And the Holy Spirit is praying for you.

Talk It Over

- ◆ God never leaves you alone to deal with your pain. How do you respond to that?
- ◆ What pain have you dealt with where you had difficulty believing God was right there with you? Why?
- ◆ Who in your life needs to hear this message? How can you share it with that person?

HOW DO YOU GET GRACE?

Rick Warren — March 10, 2016

Heaven will be amazing. You'll be reunited with loved ones who know the Lord. You're going to be rewarded for your faith. You're going to be reassigned a position of work that you love to do. You'll be released from pain, depression, despair, shame, and guilt.

You'll rejoice and party for eternity!

Spending an eternity in Heaven is a free gift that you never need to earn. You can only get to Heaven by the grace of God. It's the best deal anyone will every offer to you.

But there's a catch. The Bible says, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13 NIV).

To receive the grace of God, you have to call out to him. You have to accept the amazing grace of God.

If you were to find a gift on your table tomorrow morning and you left it there for the next year wrapped and unopened, that would be pretty dumb. A gift is worthless unless you actually accept it. The same is true for God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. It means nothing to you unless you accept it.

And God longs to give you the gift of his grace. The Bible says, "*The Lord longs to be gracious to you*" (Isaiah 30:18a).

God isn't mad at you. He won't reject you. The Bible says God is ready and willing to give you his grace and secure a future for you in Heaven.

You just have to accept his grace!

Talk It Over

- ◆ Think of someone in your life who needs to hear about the good news of God's grace. What do you think is keeping this person from accepting God's free gift of grace?
- ◆ What about you? If you've never accepted the grace of God, what is holding you back?
- ◆ Why do you think God doesn't just accept everyone into Heaven no matter what they believe? Why does he want you to do something about it before you have a place in Heaven?

HOPE

“Insider” G. Campbell, Jefferson City, MO — May 1, 2017

I was listening to some music earlier and they were singing about how we BELONG to Christ. It makes sense to me that I belong to Christ, but I wanted to know exactly what the Bible said about this. Mark 9:41 *“For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.”*

One of the things I’ve learned in the past five or so years is the importance of Greek when it comes to the New Testament. A fundamental layer to my studies that I never knew existed. So I looked up “ye belong to Christ” to see what that phrase meant in its original language. This is what I found:

The Greek word is pronounced ‘este’ and is a second person plural present indicative verb. The tenses in Greek are important in order to understand what the author was saying. So this is a present tense verb, present tense means this is a continuous action. So I BELONG to Christ, now, and will continue to BELONG to Him in the future. The mood is indicative. This means that the action (us BELONGING to Him) has occurred, is occurring, or will occur. This is a fact. Once we BELONG to Christ, we BELONG to Him for good.

For me, as a felon, that is a comforting thought. To know that I have been forgiven for the things I’ve done in my past and I now BELONG to Christ. I am HIS and He is mine. There is no sweeter sound to me.

But, as God does, digging into this verse has led me to another discovery. Jesus is saying whoever gives a cup of water to one of His. How easy is it to give someone a cup of water. This small act is enough to warrant Jesus mentioning it, and I believe we can find truth in that fact.

Why would Jesus mention someone giving a cup of water to one of His as being worthy of reward? I believe He was trying to show us something. I believe He wanted us to know that NO kindness given to one of His would go unnoticed. No matter how small the act, when we are demonstrating LOVE, Jesus notices.

Are you living your life giving water to the thirsty? Or are you continuing to act in selfish, ungrateful ways? We know what living our lives for ourselves will give us...prison. Don’t waste your time stuck in the same rut that led you to prison. Do something different.

I challenge you to reach out to God. I challenge you to ask Him to reveal Himself to you. And one thing I can tell you, from experience, is even behind the fences you will feel peace. The important things in your life will begin to change. You will focus on rebuilding the relationships you’ve destroyed. TODAY you can BELONG to Christ. I can think of no place I’d rather be.