

Funeral sermon for Pastor Duerr
“**Departing to be with Christ**”

Introduction:

Quite often we will hear words at an occasion such as this, “Well, he is now in a better place.” And certainly we would concur with that pronouncement, that is, as it applies to those who truly know and live with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. But I suspect that if most of those who voice that statement were queried as to the nature of that “better place”, they would be hard-pressed to say what it is like, at least as it is set forth in the Holy Scriptures. I thought that it might be helpful for us to consider what the Word of God reveals about the afterlife of those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us first consider what occurs with...

I. The believer upon his death

The Word of God teaches us that God made us in His image, in order that we may be like Him in order that we might show forth in some finite ways what He is like who made us. But He also made us in His image so that we might know Him personally and intimately. Every human being is the image of God, and is to be regarded and treated with dignity and honor because God made him or her, and because every person is capable of reflecting in a measure what God is like.

God made every person comprised of two major components. God gave to man a *physical body* and an *immaterial soul* or personal “self” that animates or enlivens that body. The soul, which is also referred to as one’s spirit, is the real self. It is through one’s soul that we think, feel, and relate to others. It is through our physical bodies that our souls interact with the world about us through our five physical senses. We truly “live” as our souls through our bodies interact with the physical world and with other human beings. But a body without the soul is dead (Cf. James 2:26).

What happened when Ken Duerr passed this last Saturday? His soul separated from his physical body resulting in his body dying. But the Bible refers to the bodies of believers in their graves as “sleeping”, because of the certainty of God’s promise of the future resurrection of the body from the dead.” One day the Lord Jesus will awaken the bodies from their prolonged slumber, enabling them to rise and live before Him. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples regarding Lazarus, who had died and was buried for 4 days, who Jesus was about to raise from the dead, He said, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” (John 11:11). And so, when Christians die, their bodies become inanimate; they cease to live, but it is as though they were asleep; they will rise again.

But what of the soul or spirit of the Christian who dies? Word of God declares that upon death the soul is brought immediately into the presence of the Lord. The Old Testament book of **Ecclesiastes 12:7** speaks of this separation:

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

The Apostle Paul wrote of his preference to depart this world of pain and suffering even though he knew that a prolonged life here on earth would bring benefit to others. He wrote, “I am hard pressed between the two (that is, living or dying). My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23). And in another place he made it clearer. He wrote,

⁶So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:6ff)

But what is *the state of the soul* of the Christian after death, upon separating from the physical body and becoming present with the Lord? A word from our church's own statement of faith declares the biblical teaching clearly. By the way, this statement speaks of the destiny of both Christians and all others:

The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. *The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies;* and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none. (*The Baptist Confession of 1689*, Art. 31, par. 1)

That last statement, by the way, which reads, "besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none", is a repudiation of the doctrine of purgatory, which is nowhere taught in the Holy Bible. But the point being made regarding the Christian is that upon the death of his body, his soul immediately returns to God, who had given him his soul.

Several truths are made in this statement about the post-death existence of the Christian.

(1) The soul of the Christian is made perfect in holiness...

In order to dwell with God in eternity, we need to be holy as God is holy. This means that we need to be pure of sin, for sin cannot dwell in God's holy presence. Now we cannot be infinitely holy as God is infinitely holy, but through the salvation that God gives us freely in Jesus Christ we can become holy in a finite way as God is holy in an infinite manner. But this cannot and will not take place until our regenerate souls leave these fallen bodies, in which sin is manifest in us.

Paul expressed his longing, as every true Christian desires, to be holy before the Lord, that is, to be able to live without dealing with sinful temptation, committing sinful acts, being delivered from all sinful thoughts. But in this life this was not possible for Paul, or for you or me, for that matter. Paul expressed his lament, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And then he confidently affirmed, "I thank God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:23f). And when the soul of the Christian is separated from his body in death, he steps over that threshold into a place of a whole new realm of existence. No longer is he plagued with a guilty conscience, nor does he feel the sting of separation of his soul from God. He is then holy, as God is holy, even perfect in holiness. That is one of the wonders of his present existence that Ken Duerr is now enjoying.

But a second truth is made in this statement of faith that reflects the teaching of the Holy Bible. It declares that...

(2) The soul of the Christian is received into paradise.

Again, it reads, "The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are *received into paradise...*" The Lord Jesus gave a glorious promise to the dying thief hanging on the cross next to Him, after the thief had repented of his sins and believed on Jesus as his Lord. Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). To what was the Lord referring? What is paradise? Our Lord was speaking of a restoration of His people to Paradise, which mankind had lost in the beginning with the first entrance of sin. Paradise is a reference to a beautiful

and expansive garden, a restored Garden of Eden, greatly enhanced and expanded, I would think, which is filled with everything pleasant and beautiful. Our Lord Jesus in another place declared to a local church,

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

We have not the time to read of this paradise as recorded in the last two chapters of the Bible, but we know that it is an amazing, wondrous place, filled with beauty that will astonish the eye and delight the soul. Our brother Ken Duerr is presently, as we speak, in Paradise, land of beauty and wonder.

But what is the greatest delight of this place? The third truth is stated

(3) The soul of the Christian is with Christ.

Again, the confession rightly states, “The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where *they are with Christ...*” Adam and Eve had enjoyed great pleasures in that original garden paradise long ago--the beauty of the place, the blessed communion that they enjoyed with one another, for there was at first no sin to trouble them. But the greatest joy of the place was after a day’s labor, in the cool of the day, when they would hear the sound of the Lord God walking in the Garden, coming to them. They would commune with God, which we understand to have been a manifestation of the preincarnate Son of God. They enjoyed blessed fellowship with their God.

Jesus had told the believing dying thief, “Verily, Verily, I say to you, today you will be *with Me* in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Ken Duerr is now with Jesus Christ, perhaps walking with Him in a beautiful serene garden paradise. Ken is communing with his Savior, whom he proclaimed faithfully throughout his life.

What else may we say about the state of the Christian upon death?

(4) The soul of the Christian sees God.

Again, the statement we read earlier records accurately this truth: “The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, *and behold the face of God in light and glory...*” Now it is true that now through faith and then in sight we will see God in the face of Jesus Christ (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), but then we will also see, I believe, in some way, even though a limited way, the presence of God the Father. Perhaps it will be as John saw in Revelation 4 when he was caught up to the throne room of heaven:

²Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

³And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. (Rev. 4:2f)

Or perhaps it is as Isaiah saw the Lord when God called him to be a prophet,

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. ² Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!”

⁴And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isa. 6:2-4)

I do not know what or how it will be, but I know that it will be. Our Lord told His disciples, “Blessed are the pure in heart; they shall see God.”

But the statement we have read conveys a 5th experience of the Christian who has died and has gone to be with the Lord.

(5) The soul of the Christian is desiring and waiting for the future resurrection of his body.

Here is the full statement once again: “The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, *waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.*”

Many Christians tend to think that when we leave this world and go be with Christ that then we will have it all. Our salvation will then be complete. This is not so. Although that post dead existence is a blessed and glorious existence, there is something not yet realized. The full salvation that Jesus Christ has secured for us who believe on Him will not yet have been experienced by us. There is even among those whose souls are now with Christ a desire, perhaps even longing, for the day when true, full, life may be experienced and enjoyed, for apart from the physical body that is not possible. A human being is a material body with an immaterial soul. That immaterial soul is in need of a body to fully interact and experience the world about him and to enjoy the fulness of relationship with others. The future physical resurrection of the body from the grave and its reuniting with the soul, is a vital Christian doctrine.

Paul himself, when he wrote of the blessing of departing to be with Christ, declared that he did not want to exist apart from the body. He wrote:

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this we groan, *earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*, ³if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. ⁴For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, *not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life*. ⁵Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Cor. 5:1-5)

Paul did not desire to exist apart from a body, but he desired a glorified body, one that God has prepared for His people that will enable them to dwell with Him and one another for eternity.

The Holy Scriptures speak not only of the salvation of our souls, but also the redemption of our bodies. But that will not take place until the Last Day. Paul wrote of the Christian’s longing for this event:

“...but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, *the redemption of our body.*” (Rom. 8:23)

And Paul wrote in some detail of this end time event. He wrote,

⁵⁰Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴So 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 Cor. 15:50-55)

The Lord Jesus declared that He would raise up His people on "the last day." He said,

This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up *at the last day*.⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up *at the last day*." (John 6:39f)

God has appointed a Day, the Last Day, when He will raise the dead. But what will then happens upon this great event? And so, let us consider...

II. The believer upon his resurrection

Now in contradiction to a great deal of claims of many sincere Christians who teach about the end times, The Bible presents a future scenario quite different than they espouse. Frankly, there is a great deal of error and ignorance about biblical prophecy. It is commonly claimed that the resurrection from the dead of all who are saved is a separate and distant event from that time when God will raise all the condemned to face their judgment. Some say there are over 1,000 years separating the resurrection of the Christian and the bringing forth of the damned to their final judgment. But the Word of God teaches quite clearly that there will be one final day, one last day, when there will take place a general resurrection of all the dead of all humanity through all history. The Lord will cause all human beings who have ever lived to come forth from their graves. They will all be brought before His judgment throne, and He will judge everyone according to the works done in this life. The result of that judgement will be a great separation between those who are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and all others who will be damned in their sins. The Lord Jesus will separate His people, true believers, from all others. He will pronounce either the blessed entrance of His people into His eternal kingdom, or He will consign the damned to their eternal destiny. Our Lord spoke of this general resurrection in John 5:22-26:

²⁸"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹and come forth-- those who have done good (that is, as He has defined "good"), to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil (that is, as He has defined "evil"), to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:28f)

On that Day of Judgment He will judge all mankind according to what they have done in this life. We read our Lord's words in **Matthew 16:27**, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." And in Matthew 12:36 we read, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment." Those who are *without* Jesus Christ as Savior will be judged and condemned by their sins. Those who *know* Jesus Christ will be proved to be true Christians by their works. The works will not condemn them, but rather, because they were produced by God's grace in their lives, their works will prove the genuineness of their true faith in Jesus Christ. And it is only they, who will stand exonerated from all condemnation in His judgment, because of their faith alone in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior. But their works will give the evidence for the Lord's pronouncement of their vindication as His people on that great day.

The Lord Jesus spoke of this final judgment in many places and in many ways. On one occasion He said,

²⁴...“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ²⁸He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ ²⁹But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’””

A little later He explained those parable to His disciples:

³⁶Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”

³⁷He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴²and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matt. 13:36-43)

On that same occasion He said,

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:47-50)

And much later, as recorded in Matthew 25, He said to these words,

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

⁴¹“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I

was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴“Then they also will answer Him, 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?’ ⁴⁵Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matt. 25:31-46)

This Day of Judgment will be a day of incredible horror for all those who lived in disregard and defiance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Scriptures describe their prospect as “a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27).

But it will not be so for the Christian. We read in the Scriptures, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb. 9:27). The Christian will not only come into the judgment without fear, but he will welcome the occasion. The souls of the righteous in heaven are looking for and longing for that day to arrive. He is not fearful of the prospect of judgment, for he knows that He is not coming to God’s judgment in his own righteousness, but because the blood of his Savior, when He died upon His cross, fully paid for his sins, and that he will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ clothed in the righteousness of Christ, he is unafraid. God had freely given to him the gift of righteousness through faith in His Son. And fully clothed in that righteousness He will come before the Lord unashamed, and even with confidence. He is coming before King Jesus the Judge, but He is also coming before His Savior. And so, we read of the true believer in Jesus Christ, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

But there will be another outcome of that judgment of the believer than just pardon, exoneration from sin. The result of the Lord judging His people will be the glorification of His people. One aspect of that final judgment of our works, and I speaking here of Christians, is that the Lord will reward the faithful stewardship of His people according to the way they had conducted themselves in this life. King Jesus will confer honor, dignity, and authority to His people. Depending on our faithfulness to use the gifts that He has given us, the opportunities that He has afforded us, the degree of difficulty for having lived faithfully for Him, He will reward His servants. This reward will include the entrusting of various degrees of authority and responsibility in His everlasting kingdom. And somehow, and in some way, those whom the Lord Jesus glorifies in this judgment will take his place along with the Lord Jesus assisting Him in judging the world, and even angels (Cf. 1 Cor. 6:3). We do not have the time, but we might cite one verse that intimates of this. Jesus told His disciples:

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:11f)

III. The eternal state of the true believer

What then occurs in the experience of the glorified child of God? Having received a share in all things that Jesus Christ secured for His people, the eternal state is brought into existence. This old world, even this old creation, has been adversely affected by sin. Man’s fall into sin was all pervasive. The Holy Scriptures declare that the Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth, in which His eternal Kingdom will be manifest. The Apostle Peter wrote of this:

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people

ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening 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! ¹³But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. (2 Pet. 3:10-14)

The Lord will one day declare to His people, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

Now we have set forth today only what the Bible teaches, and only what Pastor Duerr has taught 100 times over his many years of ministry. He is now enjoying the fruit of that life of faith and faithful service. But there is yet more coming. May that day come soon, when The Lord Jesus returns and that great Day unfold before us. May the lord be merciful and gracious to every one of us that we are ready and that we will welcome Him joyfully at His Coming.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
Who comforts us in all our affliction, (2 Cor. 1:3f)
