FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of Last Things

He Who Was, and Who Is, and Who Is to Come

UNIT 2: INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY — DEATH AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Lessons 4–6: What Happens When We Die?

Lesson 5

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Between Death and Resurrection — Where Are the Dead Now?

The Conscious, Blessed, and Incomplete Condition of the Redeemed Between Death and Resurrection

"The dead in Christ are not absent — they are more present to Him than we are. They are simply present to us no longer."

Key Texts: 2 Corinthians 5:1–8; Philippians 1:21–23; Luke 16:19–31; 23:43; Revelation 6:9–11; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 8:23

> *"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*
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> **Titus 2:13, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Lesson 4 established the biblical doctrine of physical death: its origin in the fall of Adam, its nature as the separation of soul and body, its triadic structure (physical, spiritual, and eternal), its defeat in the resurrection of Christ, and its coming abolition at the return of the Lord. This lesson takes up the question that Lesson 4 necessarily leaves open: what happens in the interval between a person's physical death and the resurrection of the body at the return of Christ? That interval, potentially extending from the moment of death until the final day, is what the church has called the intermediate state: the condition of the human person between death and resurrection. It is one of the most pastorally immediate questions in all of eschatology, because it is the question everyone asks when someone they love dies.

The question presses with particular urgency in the pew. Is my mother, who died in faith three years ago, conscious? Does she know where she is? Is she at rest, or in some condition of waiting that approaches suffering? Can she see us? Does she know what is happening on earth? Is she praying for us? These are not idle philosophical speculations; they are the questions of bereaved, grieving, hope-hungry people who need to know that the God of the gospel has not abandoned the one they buried. And the answer the New Testament gives to these questions is one of the most pastorally rich and theologically precise bodies of teaching in the entire canon.

This lesson examines the intermediate state under seven headings: the definition and scope of the intermediate state; the positive biblical testimony to the believer's conscious, blessed presence with Christ in the intermediate state (2 Corinthians 5, Philippians 1, Luke 23:43, Revelation 6:9–11); the state of the unbeliever in the intermediate state (Luke 16:19–31); the refutation of three major errors regarding the intermediate state (soul sleep, purgatory, and second-chance theology); the incompleteness of the intermediate state and its orientation toward the resurrection; the relationship between the intermediate state and the biblical language of "sleep"; and the pastoral comfort the doctrine provides for the grieving. The governing theological conviction throughout is this: the dead in Christ are not lost, not absent, not unconscious, and not in limbo. They are with Christ. And that, as Paul insists with a stacked superlative, is very much better.

A word about the limits of our knowledge is necessary from the outset. Scripture gives us real and sufficient information about the intermediate state, but it does not give us a comprehensive account of every dimension of that condition. We know what we need to know: that the believer is with Christ, that the unbeliever is in conscious suffering, that no transition between states is available after death, and that the intermediate state is not the final state but an anticipation of the resurrection. Beyond these affirmations, we must resist the temptation to speculate beyond what has been written (1 Corinthians 4:6). The doctrine of the intermediate state is one that calls for theological precision where Scripture speaks and theological silence where it does not. Both are acts of faithfulness to the Word of God.

I. DEFINING THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

The Period Between Death and Resurrection

A. What the Intermediate State Is

The intermediate state is the condition of the human person from the moment of physical death until the general resurrection of the dead at the return of Jesus Christ. It is "intermediate" in the sense of being a transitional stage between the present earthly life and the final eschatological state that will follow the resurrection, the judgment, and the inauguration of the new creation. It is not the final state, not the eternal state, not the consummation of God's redemptive purposes, but it is a real, present, and conscious condition in which the souls of the dead exist while awaiting the resurrection that will reunite them with their glorified bodies.

The intermediate state is a necessary feature of biblical eschatology precisely because the New Testament's eschatological framework includes both an individual dimension (what happens to the person at death) and a cosmic dimension (what happens to all things at the return of Christ), and these two dimensions are not simultaneous. Individual deaths occur throughout the inter-advent period; the general resurrection will occur at the parousia. Between the death of any given individual and the parousia, there is an interval, potentially a very long interval, during which that individual exists in some condition. The doctrine of the intermediate state describes that condition.

It is crucial to note what the intermediate state is not. It is not the final state of the redeemed, the eternal, embodied, glorified existence in the new creation that follows the resurrection. It is not annihilation, the temporary or permanent cessation of conscious existence. It is not purgatory, a condition of post-mortem purification through suffering. It is not soul sleep, an unconscious, inert waiting period in which the soul has no experience of time or condition. And it is not a second chance for those who died without faith, the appointment of death is followed immediately by judgment, not by a further opportunity for repentance. Each of these errors will be examined and refuted in the course of this lesson. For now, it is sufficient to note that what the intermediate state is, positively, is the condition of conscious, personal existence, blessed for the believer, suffering for the unbeliever, in which the soul of the deceased person awaits the resurrection body and the consummation of all things.

B. The Anthropological Foundation of the Intermediate State

The intermediate state is possible only on the basis of a biblical anthropology that affirms the real distinction between the soul and the body and the capacity of the soul to exist, at least for a season, apart from the body. This is not a Platonic dualism that regards the body as a prison from which the soul longs to escape, the biblical view of the human person is thoroughly integrative, regarding body and soul as together constituting the whole person that God created in His image. But it is a recognition that the soul and the body, while normally and properly united, are not identical, and that the soul can subsist in a state of separation from the body without being annihilated.

The Old Testament's language of Sheol, the realm of the dead, the place of the departed, already implies this distinction. When the Old Testament speaks of the dead "going down to Sheol," it is not speaking of the dissolution of personal existence but of the gathering of the person (understood primarily in terms of the soul or shade, the

rephaim of Sheol) into a realm distinct from the land of the living. The condition of the Old Testament departed in Sheol is variously described, as shadowy, as a place of waiting, as a realm below, but it is not described as nonexistence. The dead continue to be persons, even in Sheol, even if their condition there is not one of full eschatological blessedness.

The New Testament's teaching on the intermediate state is far more specific and far more positively defined than the Old Testament's language of Sheol, for the simple reason that the New Testament stands on the far side of the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is not only the guarantee of the believer's future resurrection; it is the basis on which the intermediate state of the believer is transformed from the shadowy Sheol of the Old Testament into the luminous, conscious, Christocentric presence that Paul describes in Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8. The old covenant dead looked forward in hope toward a redemption they did not yet possess; the new covenant dead depart into the immediate presence of the Redeemer who has accomplished that redemption fully. This is the eschatological transformation of the intermediate state that Christ's resurrection makes possible.

II. THE BELIEVER'S INTERMEDIATE STATE

Conscious, Blessed, and in the Presence of Christ

A. 2 Corinthians 5 and Philippians 1, The Pauline Testimony

The two primary Pauline texts for the intermediate state of the believer have already been examined in the context of Lesson 4's discussion of death's transformation for the believer, but they deserve more focused attention here as testimony to the specific character of the intermediate condition. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul states the believer's preference with unambiguous directness: "we prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." The word "absent" (ekdemeo) means to be away from one's home country, to be living abroad. Paul uses it of the condition of being in the present body, life in the mortal flesh is a kind of residence abroad, and its antonym ("at home with the Lord", endemeo) of the condition of being in Christ's presence after death. To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord: personal, conscious, relational presence with Jesus Christ.

The word "presence" deserves particular emphasis. Paul does not say that the soul enters an impersonal spiritual realm, or that it is absorbed into the divine being, or that it loses its individual identity in some mystical union. He says it is "with the Lord", in the company of a Person, in the relational presence of the One who loved the believer and gave Himself for them. This is personal immortality, the continuation of the individual, conscious, self-aware person in a relationship with Christ that is more immediate and more unmediated than anything available in the present life. The veil of mortality, the distortions of sin, the limitations of the present body's access to spiritual reality, all of these are removed in the intermediate state, leaving the believer in a condition of direct, unobstructed, joyful presence with Christ.

Philippians 1:23 adds the superlative of comparison: "I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." The Greek construction (pollo mallon kreitton) piles up intensifiers to express an excess of excellence that ordinary language strains to capture. Being with Christ in the intermediate state is not merely better than continued earthly life, it is far, far better. Whatever experiences, joys,

and blessings the present life offers, the immediate presence of Christ in the intermediate state exceeds them by a margin that Paul reaches for the highest language he can find to express. And yet, as we will see in Section VI, this "very much better" is still not the best, the resurrection and the new creation will surpass even the intermediate state's blessedness, because they will add the glory of the resurrection body to the joy of Christ's immediate presence.

B. *Luke 23:43 and Revelation 6:9–11, Additional Witnesses*

The promise Jesus makes to the dying thief on the cross is among the most consoling statements in all of Scripture: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The word "today" is crucial. Jesus does not say "at the resurrection" or "at the end of the age" or even "soon", He says "today." On the very day of the thief's death, before his body had been removed from the cross, he would be with Jesus in Paradise. There is no interval of unconsciousness, no waiting period in an undifferentiated realm, no gradual awakening into a new condition. Death, for the repentant thief, is the immediate passage into the personal company of the Lord he had confessed moments before.

The word "Paradise" (paradeisos) in Luke 23:43 is drawn from the Persian word for a walled garden or park, adopted into the Greek Old Testament as a description of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8–3:24 LXX) and used in Jewish apocalyptic literature as a term for the blessed realm of the righteous dead. Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians 12:4 of the third heaven into which he was caught up in his visionary experience. Revelation 2:7 promises the one who overcomes that they will eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God. The trajectory of the term in the New Testament consistently points toward the presence of God and Christ as the defining reality of the blessed intermediate state, a return, in some sense, to the garden intimacy with God that was lost at the fall, now experienced in the company of the Last Adam who has undone the damage the first Adam inflicted.

Revelation 6:9–11 provides a window into the intermediate state of the martyred saints that is at once specific and profoundly moving: "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also." Three features of this vision are particularly significant for the doctrine of the intermediate state: the martyred souls are conscious (they cry out), they are articulate (they address God in the language of lament and petition), and they are aware of their condition (they know they have been killed, they know the judgment has not yet come, and they are waiting for a completion that has not yet arrived). They are not asleep, not absent, not unconscious, they are intensely present, actively engaged with the living God, and longing for the consummation that the resurrection will bring.

III. THE UNBELIEVER'S INTERMEDIATE STATE

Conscious Suffering and the Absence of Remedy

A. *Luke 16:19–31, The Rich Man and Lazarus*

The most extended and specific biblical description of the intermediate state of the unbeliever is Jesus' parable, or perhaps more precisely, his illustrative narrative, of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31. The narrative describes two men who die: Lazarus the poor man, who is "carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom," and the rich man, who is buried and, in Hades, is "in torment." The rich man, lifting his eyes, sees Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom, and cries out to Abraham to send Lazarus to cool his tongue with water, "for I am in agony in this flame." Abraham replies that a great chasm has been fixed between the two conditions, such that no one can cross from either side to the other.

The exegetical status of this narrative has been debated, whether it is a parable (in which case the details of the narrative may not be pressed for precise doctrinal information) or a historical account, but several features of the text compel us to draw at least the following doctrinal conclusions. First, there is conscious existence after death for both the righteous and the unrighteous. Lazarus is consciously blessed; the rich man is consciously tormented. Second, the condition of the unrighteous in the intermediate state involves suffering, not merely the neutral absence of blessing, but active, conscious torment. Third, the two conditions are separated by a fixed and uncrossable chasm, there is no movement from one side to the other after death, no remediation of the unbeliever's condition through any post-mortem process. Fourth, the rich man retains full personal identity and memory, he recognizes Abraham, he remembers his brothers, he is concerned for their fate, and he interacts with Abraham through coherent, articulate speech. He is not dissolved or diminished; he is fully himself, in a condition of irremediable suffering.

The particular location of the rich man in "Hades" and of Lazarus in "Abraham's bosom" reflects the Jewish eschatological geography of the period, in which Sheol / Hades was understood to contain both the righteous and the unrighteous in distinct conditions and regions. The New Testament's eschatological development will eventually distinguish between the intermediate state and the final state more sharply, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15) is the final destination of the unrighteous, distinct from the intermediate Hades in which they currently await judgment. But the fundamental structure of conscious, differentiated, post-mortem existence in which the righteous are blessed and the unrighteous are suffering is clearly established in this text and is consistent with the broader New Testament eschatological witness. The point that must be stressed for the purposes of this lesson is the finality and the irreversibility: after death, the conditions are set. There is no crossing the chasm. There is no second chance.

B. *The Significance of Hebrews 9:27 for the Intermediate State*

The most concise and structurally decisive verse for the doctrine of the intermediate state is Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." The Greek word translated "appointed" (apokeitai) means to be stored up, set aside, or reserved for a future occasion, it carries the sense of an irreversible divine ordering. Death is not a random event that happens to overtake the unsuspecting; it is a divine appointment, sovereignly set and certainly kept. And the structure of the verse, death once, then judgment, is the biblical structure within which the doctrine of the intermediate state must be understood.

The phrase "die once" rules out reincarnation: there is one death, one life, one set of choices, one opportunity to respond to the gospel. The phrase "after this comes judgment" rules out the possibility of post-mortem repentance, second-chance theology, or any other framework that inserts a further opportunity for spiritual decision between death and judgment. The structure is sequential and final: life, then death, then judgment. The intermediate state is the condition in which the soul awaits the judgment that Hebrews 9:27 announces as the

inevitable next appointment after death. For the believer, that appointment has already been resolved in Christ's substitutionary death and is therefore the occasion not of dread but of final and public vindication. For the unbeliever, it is the appointment that their entire earthly life has been refusing to take seriously, and from which there is no longer any escape.

The pastoral urgency of this verse for the ministry of the gospel cannot be overstated. If the structure of Hebrews 9:27 is true, and the entire weight of biblical teaching confirms that it is, then the window of grace is open now, in the present life, and it closes at death. The person who hears the gospel today and defers their response until tomorrow has done something more dangerous than they know, because tomorrow is not guaranteed. And the person who dies without faith in Christ enters an intermediate state from which no movement toward faith is possible, and from which the final judgment will not deliver but condemn. The doctrine of the intermediate state is not merely a curiosity for the theologically interested; it is one of the most powerful motivations for evangelistic urgency that the entire eschatological witness of Scripture provides.

IV. REFUTING THREE ERRORS ABOUT THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Soul Sleep, Purgatory, and Second-Chance Theology

A. Against Soul Sleep (Psychopannychia)

The doctrine of soul sleep, called psychopannychia from the Greek psyche (soul) and pannychios (all night), holds that at death, the soul enters an unconscious, inert state of dreamless sleep in which it has no experience of time, condition, or personal existence, until it is awakened at the resurrection. The position has been held at various points in the history of the church and continues to be advocated within some Anabaptist, Seventh-day Adventist, and other Protestant traditions. It appeals to the biblical language of "sleep" as a metaphor for death (a point to be addressed in Section VI) and argues that the biblical emphasis on the resurrection as the moment of the believer's eschatological blessedness implies an intermediate condition of inactivity.

The soul sleep position is refuted, decisively and on multiple fronts, by the very texts that the previous sections have examined. If the souls of the martyred saints in Revelation 6:9–11 are crying out, praying, and receiving divine communication, they are not unconscious. If the rich man in Luke 16 is in torment, recognizing Abraham, interceding for his brothers, and engaging in coherent dialogue, he is not unconscious. If Paul's desire to "depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23) is "very much better" than continued earthly life, the intermediate state must involve a quality of experience that an unconscious, inert condition could not provide. And if Jesus promises the dying thief that "today you shall be with Me in Paradise," the thief must be consciously present with Christ in Paradise today, not in an unconscious sleep that has no experience of the passing of time.

John Calvin's early treatise Psychopannychia (written in 1534, published in 1542) remains one of the most thoroughgoing refutations of soul sleep in the history of Protestant theology. Calvin's central argument is that soul sleep confuses the condition of the body (which is dead and in a state of rest awaiting resurrection) with the condition of the soul (which is alive and conscious in the presence of God). The biblical metaphor of "sleep" for death, Calvin argues, is applied to the body and to the appearance of the dead, the closed eyes, the repose, the apparent cessation of activity, not to the actual condition of the soul. The soul that God breathed into Adam at

creation (Genesis 2:7) is not an entity that ceases to exist or to function when the body it animated returns to the dust. It is the immortal, personal principle of the human being, which subsists in the presence of its Creator even when separated from the body it will one day inhabit again in glory.

B. *Against Purgatory*

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory holds that believers who die in a state of grace but with unresolved venial sins, or with a remaining temporal debt for mortal sins already forgiven, must undergo a process of purification through suffering after death before they are fit to enter the full beatific vision of heaven. The duration and intensity of purgatorial suffering is understood to be proportional to the degree of purification required, and can be reduced through the prayers, indulgences, and masses offered on behalf of the deceased by the living church. The doctrine has no patristic consensus before Origen and Augustine (the latter in a very qualified form), received its most systematic development in the medieval period, and was formally defined at the Councils of Florence (1439) and Trent (1547) in response to the Protestant Reformation's rejection of it.

The Protestant rejection of purgatory is grounded on several exegetical and theological pillars, each of which reflects the soteriology established in this series' Reformed confessional framework. First, the believer is fully and finally justified by grace through faith in Christ alone at the moment of justification, not through a progressive process of post-mortem purification. There is no remaining debt of temporal punishment that the believer must discharge, the blood of Christ has fully satisfied the righteous requirement of the law (Romans 3:24–26; 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Second, the believer who dies in Christ departs immediately into the presence of Christ, not into a condition of purgatorial suffering: "to be absent from the body" is "to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), without any intermediate purgatorial stage. Third, the fixed chasm of Luke 16:26 and the appointment structure of Hebrews 9:27 both preclude any post-mortem process of moral improvement or qualification for the divine presence.

Fourth, and theologically most fundamentally, purgatory represents a misunderstanding of the sufficiency and finality of Christ's atoning work. The Roman Catholic doctrine implies that Christ's death, while meriting the forgiveness of sin's eternal guilt, leaves a remaining temporal debt that the believer must personally discharge either in this life or in purgatory. The Protestant insistence is that the cross is fully sufficient: it bears not only the eternal but also the temporal consequences of sin; it satisfies not only the guilt of sin but also its entire penal demand. "It is finished" (John 19:30) is not a partial declaration; it is a complete and final one. The believer who dies in Christ dies in the confidence that the full debt has been paid, the full penalty absorbed, and the full righteousness of Christ credited to their account. There is nothing left to purge, because there is nothing left to pay.

C. *Against Second-Chance Theology*

Second-chance theology, the view that those who die without faith in Christ are granted a further opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel in the intermediate state or at the final judgment, takes several forms in contemporary theological discussion. It appears in the annihilationist's hope that the unevangelized will be given a posthumous opportunity for faith, in the universalist's confidence that all will ultimately be reconciled to God, in Clark Pinnock's postmortem evangelism proposal, and in various forms of Christian inclusivism that hold that explicit faith in the gospel is not necessary for salvation. Each of these positions, whatever its internal diversity,

rests on the assumption that the structure of Hebrews 9:27, death, then judgment, either does not apply universally or does not have the finality the text appears to claim.

The biblical response to second-chance theology is the same response that refutes purgatory on the structural point: the appointment structure of Hebrews 9:27 is categorical and universal. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment", the text does not say "some men" or "men who have heard the gospel." It says "men", the full category of humanity. Death is followed by judgment, not by a further opportunity for repentance and faith. The fixed chasm of Luke 16:26 is explicitly designed to prevent any crossing from the condition of the unrighteous dead to the condition of the righteous dead. And the entire logic of the New Testament's evangelistic urgency, "How will they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14), presupposes that the window of hearing and responding to the gospel is the present life, and that it closes at death.

The pastoral and missiological stakes of this refutation are enormous. If second-chance theology is true, then the urgency of the missionary enterprise is significantly diminished, the unevangelized can always be reached after death. If second-chance theology is false, and it is, then every human being who dies without faith in Christ dies without hope, and the responsibility of the church to take the gospel to every person in every nation before they die is not a counselled priority but a binding eschatological mandate. The Great Commission is not an invitation to optional engagement; it is the most urgent assignment that the last-days community of Christ's disciples has ever received, and the doctrine of the intermediate state's finality is one of the most powerful motivations for taking it with the seriousness it deserves.

V. THE SLEEP METAPHOR AND ITS PROPER INTERPRETATION

What the Bible Means When It Says the Dead Are Asleep

A. The Biblical Language of Sleep for Death

The New Testament uses the metaphor of sleep for death with surprising frequency. Jesus says of Lazarus, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep" (John 11:11). Paul speaks of "those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15). Stephen, at his stoning, "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). The repeated use of this language has led some interpreters to conclude that it describes the actual condition of the soul after death, unconscious, inert, dreamless, hence the doctrine of soul sleep. But this reading misconstrues both the literary function of the metaphor and the specific referent to which it is applied.

The sleep metaphor for death is not a theological description of the soul's condition in the intermediate state; it is a description of the body's appearance and the social experience of bereavement. A dead person looks like someone sleeping, the closed eyes, the stillness, the repose of the body. The bereaved community experiences the departure of the person as analogous to falling asleep: the person is present but not available, alive in some sense but inaccessible to those who remain. And for the Christian community in particular, the metaphor of sleep carries the additional connotation of the expectation of waking, the sleep of death is not permanent because the resurrection morning is coming. It is the metaphor of a temporary rest before an awakening, not a description of the soul's actual conscious state during that rest.

This distinction, between the metaphor applied to the body and the actual condition of the soul, is confirmed by the specific contexts in which the sleep language appears. In John 11, Jesus explicitly corrects the disciples' misunderstanding: when they say "If he has fallen asleep, he will recover," Jesus says plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (vv. 12–14). The sleep metaphor is immediately set alongside the literal reality of death, demonstrating that Jesus' use of the metaphor is not a claim about Lazarus's soul's condition but a deliberately chosen figure of speech that anticipates the awakening (resurrection) he is about to perform. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Paul uses the sleep language precisely in order to offer comfort, and the comfort he offers is not that the dead are peacefully unconscious but that they will be raised and reunited with their living loved ones at the return of Christ. The sleep is not the comfort; the resurrection is the comfort. The sleep language simply frames the present condition of the dead as temporary and oriented toward a waking that is certain.

B. *The Biblical Groaning and the Incompleteness of the Intermediate State*

A final dimension of the intermediate state that deserves careful attention is its essential incompleteness. Paul's language in Romans 8:23 is instructive: "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." The groaning is from within the present embodied life, Paul is describing the experience of living believers who long for the redemption of the body. But the souls of the dead, even those who are with Christ in the blessed intermediate state, share in some sense the eschatological incompleteness that Paul describes. They are with Christ, which is very much better. But they are not yet in the resurrection body. They are not yet in the new creation. They are not yet experiencing the fullness of the redemption that Christ has purchased for them.

Revelation 6:9–11 makes this incompleteness explicit: the souls under the altar are crying out, "How long, O Lord?" They are blessed, they have been given white robes, they are in the presence of God, they are at rest. But they are waiting. They are waiting for the full number of the martyrs to be complete. They are waiting for the judgment that will vindicate their deaths. They are waiting for the resurrection that will restore their bodies. The intermediate state, even in its blessed form, is a condition of eschatological anticipation, of longing for the consummation that has not yet come. The souls of the dead are not in the final state; they are in a real but provisional state, real enough to be characterized by consciousness and blessedness, provisional enough to be characterized by an unfulfilled longing for what only the resurrection and the new creation can provide.

This incompleteness is one of the most important reasons why the resurrection, and not merely the transition of the soul to the presence of Christ at death, must remain the central eschatological hope of the Christian faith. A gospel that promised only the soul's passage to a disembodied bliss at death would be insufficient; the full gospel promises the redemption of the body, the renewal of the creation, the full and final reunion of the human person as God created it, and the dwelling of the triune God with His redeemed humanity on a renewed earth. The intermediate state is precious, it is the presence of Christ, which is very much better. But it is not yet the marriage supper of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, the face-to-face beatific vision of the triune God. For that, we wait with all creation, groaning and longing, until He comes.

VI. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Our Relationship to the Dead in Christ

A. Hebrews 12:1 and the Cloud of Witnesses

One of the most evocative passages bearing upon the intermediate state in its relation to the living church is Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." The "cloud of witnesses" refers to the great assembly of faith-heroes catalogued in Hebrews 11, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and the unnamed multitudes who "by faith" endured suffering, rejection, and death in the confidence of promises they had not yet received. These are the dead in faith, and they surround the present-tense runner in the race.

The precise nature of the "surrounding" is a matter of careful exegetical nuance. The passage does not say that the cloud of witnesses is watching the present race in the sense of spectators in an arena, the Greek word (martȳs) means "witness" in the sense of one who testifies to something, not necessarily one who observes. The cloud of witnesses surrounds the present believer in the sense that their lives, their faith, and their testimony surround and encourage the one who is running: you are not alone in this race; a vast company of those who have run it before you and finished it well forms the backdrop against which your own running takes place. They do not spectate; they testify. And their testimony is the encouragement that the present generation needs to run with endurance.

Nevertheless, the passage does imply a real and meaningful connection between the church militant (the living believers still engaged in the race) and the church triumphant (the dead in Christ who have finished it). The saints who have gone before are not absent from the community of the redeemed in any ultimate sense; they are with Christ in the intermediate state, awaiting the resurrection that will reunite the whole community of the redeemed in the new creation. The communion of saints, properly understood, is not limited to the living. It encompasses the entire company of the redeemed, those who are still running, and those who have already arrived at the throne, white-robed and waiting. We are, together, one body, separated for a season by the event of death, but united in Christ, and destined to be reunited in the resurrection.

B. What We Should and Should Not Say About the Dead

The biblical doctrine of the intermediate state provides a clear and comforting account of where the dead in Christ are and what their condition is. It does not, however, provide the kind of detailed information about the inner experience, the specific knowledge, or the relational capacities of the dead in Christ that popular religion and grief culture frequently desire. We know that they are with Christ. We know that they are conscious and blessed. We know that they are not in suffering. We know that they are waiting for the resurrection. We do not know, from Scripture, whether they are aware of specific events on earth, whether they pray for us, whether they can see us, or whether they experience time in any way analogous to our experience of it.

This means that several claims frequently made about the dead in popular Christian culture go beyond what Scripture warrants. The claim that the dead are "looking down on us" and monitoring our daily lives is not

established from biblical testimony. The practice of praying to deceased saints, which the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions permit, has no warrant in the New Testament, which consistently directs prayer to the Father through the Son by the Spirit, and which warns against any attempt to communicate with or seek guidance from the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Isaiah 8:19). The claim that the dying receive communications from already-departed loved ones is not a category of biblical experience and should be evaluated with great care in pastoral contexts. The dead are with Christ, which is more than enough, and more wonderful than we can fully imagine. We do not need to supplement this with speculations that the biblical text does not support.

The positive pastoral word to those who mourn is equally clear and equally sufficient: your loved one who died in faith is with Christ. Not lost, not absent, not unconscious, not waiting in a condition of suffering or uncertainty. With Christ, in the most immediate and unmediated way available to a human soul in a condition of incomplete eschatological existence. And the One with whom they are is faithful, and loving, and has prepared a place for them (John 14:2–3), and will raise them on the last day (John 6:39–40). The separation of death is real, and grief is appropriate. But the separation is temporary, and the reunion is guaranteed. The same Lord who raised Lazarus is coming back to call every name out of every grave, and when He calls, the dead will hear His voice, and they will come forth (John 5:28–29). That is the pastoral anchor the intermediate state doctrine provides, and it is more than enough.

VII. THE PASTORAL COMFORT OF THE INTERMEDIATE STATE DOCTRINE

Grieving with Hope

A. What 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 Tells the Grieving

The most explicitly pastoral treatment of the intermediate state in the New Testament is Paul's extended address to the Thessalonian congregation in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. The situation is specific: some members of the congregation have died since Paul's founding visit, and their surviving loved ones are grieving, and, apparently, are uncertain about the eschatological status of those who have died. Have the dead missed the resurrection? Are they in a worse position than those who survive to the return of Christ? Paul's pastoral response is one of the most theologically dense and emotionally luminous passages in all his letters.

Paul begins with the pastoral diagnosis: "I do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope" (v. 13). The problem is not grief itself but grief without a specific kind of knowledge, the knowledge of the resurrection hope that recontextualizes what death means for those who are in Christ. The Thessalonians are grieving as though the dead had no future, no destiny, no reunion to look forward to; Paul writes to give them the eschatological orientation that transforms their grief without suppressing it. The instruction is not "do not grieve" but "do not grieve without hope", and the hope Paul is about to provide is the specifically eschatological hope of the resurrection and the return of Christ.

Verses 14–17 then unfold the eschatological logic that grounds the pastoral comfort: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the believer's resurrection: the same God who raised Jesus will raise those who are His at the return. And in the order of events Paul describes, the Lord descending, the shout, the trumpet, the dead in

Christ rising first, the living transformed and caught up together, the dead are not disadvantaged. They rise first. They have precedence. The dead in Christ are not behind the living believers; they are, if anything, ahead of them in the sequence of eschatological events. The grief of those who remain is genuine, but the reason for it is not that the dead have missed out. They have not. They are with Christ, and they will be the first to rise when He returns.

B. *The Doctrine of the Intermediate State as Pastoral Formation*

The doctrine of the intermediate state is not merely an answer to an intellectual question; it is a formative doctrine that shapes the entire posture of the community that believes it. The community that knows its dead are with Christ is a community that grieves differently, with the specific shape of grief that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4: genuine, deep, unashamed, but not without hope, not without trajectory, not without the expectation of reunion. That specific shape of grief is one of the most powerful testimonies the church can offer to a world that grieves without hope, a world that eulogizes the dead with desperate fictions (they live on in our memories, they are looking down from the stars) because it has no access to the resurrection hope that transforms grief into a longing that will be satisfied.

The community that knows its dead are with Christ is also a community that receives the dying differently. The deathbed of the Christian is not primarily an occasion of terminal tragedy, it is the threshold of departure into the immediate presence of Jesus Christ. The pastor who can stand at that threshold and say, with full theological and personal conviction, "You are about to be with Jesus. Today, you will be in Paradise with Him", that pastor is offering the most specific and the most sufficient pastoral word available at that moment. Not a platitude, not a therapeutic reassurance, not a human wish, but the precise, exegetically grounded promise of the living God, delivered to a person who is about to experience its fulfillment.

And the community that knows its dead are with Christ is a community that anticipates eternity differently. The resurrection hope is not merely the hope of a continued personal existence or a family reunion in the sky; it is the hope of the full and final consummation of everything that the intermediate state has only provisionally realized. The dead in Christ are blessed now, with Christ now, at rest now. But they are also waiting, and what they are waiting for is what we are waiting for: the return of the King, the resurrection of the dead, the new creation, the face-to-face beatific vision of the triune God, the marriage supper of the Lamb. The doctrine of the intermediate state, properly understood, does not diminish the resurrection hope; it intensifies it. It puts the present blessedness of the dead in its proper context as a foretaste of what is coming, and it gives the living church a vision of the completion that is still ahead, for the dead, for the living, and for the whole creation that groans and waits for the sons of God to be revealed.

> *"For I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better."*
>
> **Philippians 1:23, NASB 1995**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Intermediate State	The condition of the human soul from the moment of physical death until the general resurrection of the dead at the return of Christ. For the believer, the intermediate state is characterized by conscious, blessed, personal presence with Christ. For the unbeliever, it is characterized by conscious suffering and anticipation of final judgment. It is a real but incomplete and provisional condition, oriented toward the resurrection as its necessary completion.
Soul Sleep (Psychopannychia)	The erroneous doctrine that at death, the soul enters an unconscious, inert state of dreamless sleep until the resurrection, having no experience of time, condition, or personal existence in the interval. Refuted by the conscious activity of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9–11, the immediate presence of Christ promised in Philippians 1:23 and Luke 23:43, and the rich man's conscious suffering in Luke 16:19–31.
Purgatory	The Roman Catholic doctrine that believers who die in a state of grace but with unresolved venial sins or remaining temporal debt for sin must undergo purification through suffering after death before entering the full beatific vision of heaven. Rejected by the Protestant tradition on the grounds of the full sufficiency and finality of Christ's atoning work (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:1), the immediate blessedness of the departed believer (2 Corinthians 5:8), and the absence of any post-mortem remediation process in the biblical testimony.
Second-Chance Theology	The view that those who die without explicit faith in Christ are granted a further opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel in the intermediate state or at the final judgment. Rejected on the basis of Hebrews 9:27 ("it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment"), the fixed chasm of Luke 16:26, and the entire structure of the New Testament's evangelistic urgency, which presupposes the present life as the only window of grace.
Paradise	Greek paradeisos, from the Persian word for a walled garden or royal park. Used in the New Testament of the blessed realm of the righteous dead: Luke 23:43 ("today you shall be with Me in Paradise"), 2 Corinthians 12:4 (Paul's heavenly vision), and Revelation 2:7 (the promise of the tree of life in the Paradise of God). In the context of the intermediate state, Paradise refers to the blessed presence of Christ in which the dead in faith dwell while awaiting the resurrection.
Abraham's Bosom	A Jewish expression for the blessed condition of the righteous dead in the intermediate state, used in Luke 16:22–23. The image of reclining at Abraham's bosom reflects the banquet imagery of the Jewish eschatological hope: the righteous dead enjoy a place of honor and comfort at the patriarchal table while awaiting the eschatological consummation.
Hades	Greek term for the realm of the dead, corresponding roughly to the Hebrew Sheol. In the New Testament, Hades is the intermediate abode of the unrighteous dead, distinct from the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14) which is the final destination following the judgment. The rich man in Luke 16 is in Hades; death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire at the last judgment (Revelation 20:13–14).
Church Militant	The church of Christ as it exists on earth in the present age, the community of believers still engaged in the spiritual warfare and the race of faith, not yet arrived at the eschatological completion. Contrasted with the church triumphant (the dead in Christ in the intermediate state) and the church glorified (the fully resurrected and consummated community of the new creation).

Church Triumphant	The community of the dead in Christ who have finished the race and now dwell in the blessed intermediate state in the presence of Jesus Christ. Distinguished from the church militant (the living believers still running the race) and the church glorified (the resurrection community of the new creation). The term "triumphant" reflects the completion of the earthly struggle, not the full eschatological glory that awaits the resurrection.
Communion of Saints	The doctrine that all believers, living and dead, are united in one body in Jesus Christ, sharing in His life and in fellowship with one another across the barrier of death. The communion of saints is not dissolved by physical death; the dead in Christ remain members of the one body, separated for a season from the living but united with them in Christ and destined for reunion at the resurrection.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the dead in Christ are with Christ, consciously, personally, and blessedly, in the interval between their death and the resurrection. This is not wishful thinking or therapeutic comfort; it is the precise and consistent testimony of the New Testament. The believer who dies does not enter an unconscious sleep, does not go to purgatory, does not receive a further opportunity for faith, and is not absorbed into some impersonal spiritual realm. They are with Christ. And that specific, personal, relational presence is "very much better" than anything available in the present life, precisely because it is Christ who is better, and closer, and more fully known in that unmediated condition.

We must believe that the intermediate state, while genuinely blessed, is not the final state. The resurrection of the body is the necessary completion of what the intermediate state only partially realizes. The believer who is with Christ in the intermediate state is not yet in the resurrection body; they are not yet in the new creation; they are not yet experiencing the full eschatological blessedness that the resurrection morning will bring. This conviction protects against two errors: the error of treating the intermediate state as if it were the final destination (which can lead to a diminishment of the resurrection hope and a quasi-Platonic vision of salvation as the escape of the soul from the body), and the error of treating it as a condition that needs no description or discussion (which leaves the grieving without the biblical comfort the doctrine genuinely provides).

We must believe that the unrighteous dead are in conscious suffering in the intermediate state, awaiting the final judgment. This is not a doctrine to be proclaimed with satisfaction or handled carelessly. But it must be believed and taught, because it is what the New Testament teaches, and because its implications for evangelistic urgency are decisive. The person who dies without Christ does not enter a neutral waiting room; they enter a condition of conscious suffering from which no remedy is available. This conviction must fuel our prayers for the lost, our engagement in gospel proclamation, and our personal witness to those around us who have not yet responded to Christ.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

We should feel a deep and specific comfort when we think of those who have died in faith. The comfort is not the vague assurance that "they are in a better place", it is the specific, theologically grounded confidence that they are with Christ. With the Person who loved them and gave Himself for them. With the One who knows their name, who has wiped every tear from their eyes in a foretaste of what He will do fully at the resurrection (Revelation 7:17), who is preparing the place He promised for them (John 14:2–3). That specific comfort is what the doctrine of the intermediate state is designed to produce, and it is a comfort that goes deeper than any other source of consolation the world offers the grieving.

We should also feel an increasing readiness for the intermediate state as the prospect of our own death becomes more concrete. The person who has been formed by the doctrine of this lesson knows that death, for the believer, is the door to the immediate presence of Jesus Christ. That knowledge does not require the suppression of natural fear or the pretense of eagerness that is not genuine. But it does provide a framework within which the natural fear of death can be progressively overcome, not by denying the reality of death, not by avoiding the thought of

it, but by filling the imagination with the truth of what lies on the other side of it: Christ, Paradise, the white robe, the rest, the longing fulfilled.

We should desire, above all, to be found in Christ when death comes, to die as Paul describes dying, with the desire to depart and to be with Christ. That desire is not achieved in the final hours; it is cultivated across a lifetime of deepening faith, of loosening the grip on earthly things, of growing love for the Person who is waiting on the other side of the door. Let the doctrine of the intermediate state be the fuel for that cultivation, a vision of what awaits the one who dies in Christ that makes the prospect of death not simply endurable but, in the deepest sense, anticipated.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 in its entirety this week, paying attention to the specific comfort Paul addresses to the specific grief of the Thessalonians. Identify the three-part structure of his pastoral response: (1) the diagnosis of their grief (v. 13), (2) the theological grounding of the hope (vv. 14–17), and (3) the practical instruction for communal comfort (v. 18). How does Paul's model of pastoral grief ministry apply to the specific grief situations you are currently aware of in your congregation or circle of relationships?
- Read Luke 16:19–31 carefully and identify every feature of the intermediate state that the narrative establishes: conscious existence, personal identity, differentiated conditions, the fixed chasm, the awareness of earthly life. Reflect on the urgency that this passage lends to the ministry of the gospel. Is there someone in your life who needs to hear the gospel before their appointment with death arrives? Let this passage motivate you to specific action this week.
- Reflect honestly on your own expectations of the intermediate state before reading this lesson. Were you operating with any assumptions that this lesson has corrected, soul sleep, purgatory, a vague "heaven," communication with the dead, or something else? Write a brief account of the correction this lesson has made to your prior understanding, and identify the biblical text that is most decisive for you in making that correction.
- Write a brief letter to a person you know who is currently grieving the loss of a believing loved one. Not a theological essay, a pastoral letter. Use the specific language of Scripture: they are with Christ; they are in Paradise; they are very much better; they will rise first when He returns. Let the doctrine do pastoral work in a specific human life this week. Deliver the letter, or the conversation it prompts, before the next class session.
- Memorize Philippians 1:23 this week: "I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." Carry it as the primary pastoral word for the intermediate state. When you are with someone who is dying, or someone who is grieving, let this verse be the first that rises to mind and the first that you offer. Practice speaking it from memory until it is genuinely your own.

Key Texts: *2 Corinthians 5:1–8; Philippians 1:21–23; Luke 16:19–31; 23:43; Revelation 6:9–11; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 8:23*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- What did you believe about the intermediate state before this lesson? Where did those beliefs come from, from the Bible, from popular Christian culture, from family tradition, from movies or novels, or from some combination? Which of your prior beliefs has this lesson most significantly corrected or clarified?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–8 and Philippians 1:21–23 together. What specific words and phrases does Paul use to describe the believer's condition after death? What does the word "absent" (ekdemeo) imply about his understanding of the present life? What does "at home with the Lord" (endemeo) imply about the character of the intermediate state? What is the superlative Paul uses in Philippians 1:23 ("very much better"), and why does he use that level of emphasis?
- Read Luke 23:43. What is the significance of the word "today" in Jesus' promise to the dying thief? What does "Paradise" mean in its New Testament usage? What does this promise tell us about the timing of the believer's arrival in the blessed intermediate state, is there an interval, or is it immediate?
- Read Revelation 6:9–11. List every piece of information this passage gives us about the condition of the martyred souls in the intermediate state: their location, their activity, their awareness, their request, and the divine response. How does each of these features bear on the question of whether the intermediate state involves conscious experience?
- Read Luke 16:19–31. What are the features of the rich man's intermediate condition that the narrative establishes? What does the fixed chasm of verse 26 indicate about the possibility of post-mortem remediation? What is the rich man's concern for his brothers, and how does Abraham's response to that concern bear on the question of second-chance theology?
- Read Hebrews 9:27 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. What is the structural claim of Hebrews 9:27 about the sequence of death and judgment? How does 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 describe the condition of those who "have fallen asleep in Jesus" and their eschatological destiny? What specific pastoral problem is Paul addressing, and what specific pastoral solution does he provide?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson distinguishes between the intermediate state as "blessed but incomplete." What specifically makes the intermediate state incomplete, and why is this distinction important? How does it protect against a quasi-Platonic view of salvation as the soul's escape from the body?
- The lesson refutes soul sleep by arguing that the biblical "sleep" metaphor for death applies to the body's appearance and the community's experience of bereavement, not to the soul's actual condition. Do you find this argument convincing? What is the most important piece of evidence you would cite from the biblical text to support this interpretation?
- The lesson argues that purgatory is incompatible with the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone and the full sufficiency of Christ's atonement. Can you articulate in your own words why the doctrine of the atonement rules out purgatory? What specific biblical texts would you use to make that argument?
- The lesson warns against claiming more than Scripture warrants about the dead, specifically, against claiming that they are watching us, praying for us, or that we can communicate with them. Do you find this

pastoral counsel helpful, or does it seem unnecessarily restrictive? What would you say to a grieving person who finds comfort in the belief that their deceased loved one is "looking down on them"?

- How does the doctrine of the intermediate state relate to the doctrine of the communion of saints? In what sense are the living and the dead still united in one body in Christ? And in what sense does physical death genuinely separate them, making the reunion at the resurrection a real reunion rather than merely a continuation of an unbroken fellowship?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson describes the proper pastoral word to the dying as "You are about to be with Jesus. Today, you will be in Paradise with Him." Have you ever been present at a deathbed where those words needed to be spoken? How would you speak them, in what tone, with what specific biblical grounding, alongside what other pastoral presence? What would you say to a dying unbeliever?
- The doctrine of the intermediate state's finality, no crossing of the chasm after death, no second chance, is one of the most powerful motivations for evangelistic urgency in the entire eschatological witness. How is that urgency reflected in your current practice of personal witness and gospel proclamation? Is there a specific person in your life whose death without faith would be an irreversible tragedy, and what are you doing about that?
- The lesson argues that grief without the resurrection hope looks like the grief of those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), and that the doctrine of the intermediate state gives grief a specific and sufficient hope. How has the grief you have experienced over the death of a believing loved one been shaped by your eschatological convictions? Has this lesson provided any specific correction or deepening to the hope that frames your grief?
- As this unit moves to its third and final lesson (Lesson 6: The Present Heaven), what is the one question about the intermediate state that you are carrying forward, a question this lesson has raised but not fully resolved for you? Name it, and bring it to the next session.

Prayer Focus

Open this prayer time by reading John 11:25–26 aloud: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'" Pause on the question: do you believe this? Not as an abstract doctrinal proposition, but as the living reality that the doctrine of the intermediate state is built upon. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Him, even if they die, will live. The intermediate state is not the dark anteroom of non-existence; it is the presence of the One who is Himself the resurrection and the life. Pray that the congregation would believe this, not just intellectually, but with the confidence that transforms grief, shapes dying, and generates the specific eschatological hope that no other source can provide.

Pray by name for the bereaved in the congregation, those who have lost a spouse, a parent, a child, a dear friend within the past year or within recent memory. Pray specifically over the names you know, and ask God to let the truth of this lesson reach them in their specific grief: that the one they buried is with Christ, is conscious and blessed, is not lost or absent or asleep, and will be the first to rise when the Lord returns. Pray that the grief of those families would be shaped by this hope, that it would be real and unashamed, but also specific and trajectory-bearing, oriented toward the reunion that the resurrection promises.

Pray for those in the congregation who have never thought carefully about the intermediate state and who, as a result, have been comforting themselves or others with ideas the Bible does not support: that the dead are watching from above, that we can speak to them, that they are present in some ongoing way in our daily lives. Ask God to gently correct those beliefs through the teaching of His Word, and to replace them with something more beautiful and more sufficient: the truth that those who die in Christ are with Christ, in the presence of the One who is better than any continued earthly relationship, and that they will be with Him until the resurrection brings the reunion the whole body of Christ is waiting for.

Pray for the urgency of the gospel in the face of death's finality. Pray that the members of this congregation would feel in their bones the weight of what Hebrews 9:27 says: that every person they know who has not believed in Christ is moving toward a fixed appointment at which the chasm will be set and no crossing will be possible. Pray for specific people, family members, neighbors, coworkers, friends, who are living without faith in Christ. Ask God to use the members of this congregation as instruments of the gospel that alone can transform the intermediate state from the prospect of conscious suffering to the anticipation of Paradise with Christ.

Close by reading together 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." Let the congregation hear the imperative at the end: "comfort one another with these words." This is not optional; it is a command. The truth of the intermediate state and the resurrection hope is designed to be spoken, shared, and given as a gift to those who grieve. Let this congregation be the kind of community that does that, that speaks the resurrection hope into grief with specificity, with love, and with the confident authority of those who believe what they are saying.

> *"We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."*
>
> **2 Corinthians 5:8, NASB 1995**

Key Texts: *2 Corinthians 5:1–8; Philippians 1:21–23; Luke 16:19–31; 23:43; Revelation 6:9–11; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 8:23*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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