

A Christian Perspective on Death & Dying

Part 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations

The Rev. Eric Zolner - July 9, 2023

Alternate understandings of death

Annihilation

- Materialism
 - The physical universe is all that exists
- When people die, they cease to exist



Reincarnation

- Roots in Hinduism but also present in many new age philosophies
- Often an element of progression to an enlightened state
- Karma



Paganism/Nature Religions

- At death one is absorbed into the wider world
- Individual still “exists” as part of the “universe”
- The “circle of life”
- Scattering ashes



Spiritualism/Gnosticism

- Spirits exist on a separate plane of existence but can at times “cross over”
- Dualism: The spiritual is the “true self” and the physical is corrupt
- The goal is to cast off the physical for the spiritual



The History of Death in Scripture

Death is not part of God's intention for Creation



- Genesis 2:9
 - “The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Death enters the world through disobedience and sin



- The one rule - Genesis 2:15-17
 - “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Death enters the world through disobedience and sin



- The Temptation - Genesis 3:4-6
 - “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Death enters the world through disobedience and sin



- The Consequence of disobedience - Genesis 3:19
- “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Death enters the world through disobedience and sin



- The Provision - Genesis 3:21
 - “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

Death becomes part of the world



- Genesis 4:8
 - “Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.”

Death becomes part of the world



- Genesis 4:23
 - “Lamech said to his wives: ‘Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.’”

Death was not the intention for creation

- It is the enemy of God's overall plan for creation
- Part of the goal, or "telos" of God's rescue plan for creation is to defeat death once for all
- We get a foretaste of this plan with Jesus' resurrection
- 1 Corinthians 15:26
 - "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Christian cosmology, anthropology, and teleology

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED
THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.

- GENESIS 1:1 -



Body & Soul

- Our bodies are more than just “vessels” for our souls
- What we do to our body effects our soul and vice versa
- Our truest self is found in the union of our physical and spiritual being



Body & Soul

- Jesus not only takes on flesh in the incarnation
- In the ascension, he takes that flesh, that physical body, into heaven



Telos

- What is the ultimate end for the world?
- It is not destruction of the physical in favor of the spiritual
 - This is Greek gnosticism



Telos

- Instead, it is the redemption of the physical world
- It is the joining together of heaven and earth into a new kingdom
- This kingdom is both physical and spiritual



Telos

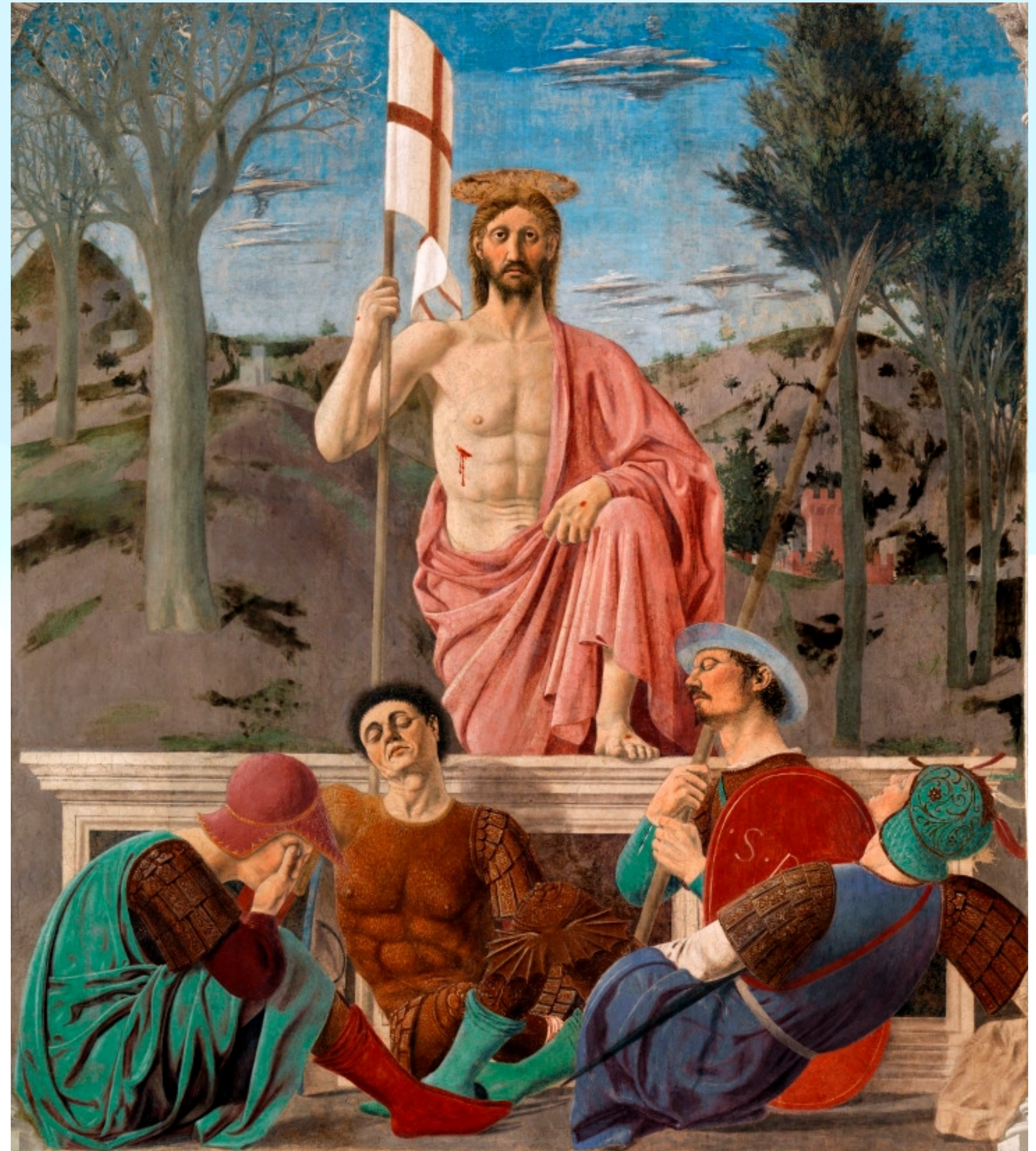
- Revelation 21:1-4
 - “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

Telos

- The death and resurrection of Jesus opens up the possibility of this new physical and spiritual reality for us
 - When Jesus ascends into heaven, he brings the physical into the spiritual
 - When the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost, he brings the spiritual to the physical
 - The two are now united, and at the end of time will be fully brought back together

Victory over death

- Death is still a reality for us, but it does not have the final word
- We will all one day be raised to new life, just as Jesus was raised
- In the consummated kingdom, death will be no more, just as it was intended in creation



What happens when we die?

Part 1: Heaven



- Upon death, our souls immediately enter into God's presence in heaven
 - No purgatory
 - This is a spiritual existence

Part 1: Heaven



- The Bible actually doesn't say much about going to heaven
- Luke 23:43
- “And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’”

Part 1: Heaven



- The Bible actually doesn't say much about going to heaven
 - Philippians 1:23-24
 - “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

Part 2: Resurrection



- When Jesus returns our bodies will be raised and we will once again have a physical and spiritual existence
- The Bible has quite a bit to say about this life after life after death!

Part 2: Resurrection

- 1 Corinthians 15:51-55
 - “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”

Part 2: Resurrection

- 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17
 - “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Part 2: Resurrection

- John 5:28-29
 - “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”