

The Afterlife: Ignore, Deplore, or Explore

Welcome to KBC. Over the last couple of months we've been exploring the afterlife—a final vision of what *will be* when God sets the world right. There will be no more pain, or suffering; tears are wiped away, and God's love lights up the garden-city. We wake to new life. This is the New Creation. And *this* is the Christian hope in the face of death.

But to more than a few people, hopes of heaven sound like wishful thinking. The afterlife itself is the dream. Right here, right now—this is the only reality.

Q. "What do you think happens when you die?"

A. "When you die, you die. The plug's pulled, the lights go out: the eternal void."

If death really is the end, then as the apostle Paul said, "Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"

Well, what of the afterlife? Do we have the courage to face up to 'strange questions'?

As I see it, most people respond in one of three ways to the afterlife: we *ignore* it, we *deplore* it, or we *explore* it. Which are you?

Ignore

Famous Last Words: "One last drink, please" (whiskey merchant Jack Daniels)

We may seek to be 'amortals', but the clock is ticking and death *will* come.



Deplore

Famous Last Words: "Almost everything just falls away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important" (Apple entrepreneur, Steve Jobs).

Yet, ~~facing death, our immortality projects are meaningless: chasing the wind.~~

"I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen. I would rather live on in my apartment" (Woody Allen).



Explore

Famous Last Words: "It is finished" (Jesus of Nazareth).

What if there *is* an afterlife? Follow the rumours of transcendence; it's not irrelevant.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25). ... Well, *do* we believe this? *Should* we believe this?

¹ For full notes, fact sheets, and a small group discussion guide, visit logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/afterlife/

Q1. MATERIALISM: Brace Blackshaw responds ...

Carl Sagan said 'The Cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.' Science has proven that there's no soul, no afterlife. When you die, that's it. What's your take?'

- ✚ Materialism = matter is all there is. We are reduced to molecules in motion.
- ✚ Scientism *assumes* (not *proves*) that natural causes explain everything—which in itself is a non-scientific belief. If the afterlife is non-material, science is inept.
- ✚ Minds: consciousness is not reducible to matter, whether biology or physical theory. So, perhaps our consciousness can survive our physical death.
- ✚ Philosophically, the 'real world' lies beyond our sense-perception
- ✚ Quantum theory (e.g. entanglement) reveals even matter is mysterious at the atomic level. Thus, it seems unscientific to *a priori* rule out an afterlife

Q2. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES (NDEs): Chadi Youssef responds ...

Sceptics would ask, 'Where is the proof?' Concerning the field of Near Death Experiences (NDE's), is there any scientific support for life after death?'

- ✚ Prof. Raymond Moody (psychologist and doctor) documented cases of the 'clinically dead' in the 1970s. Since then, the highly regarded academic and peer reviewed *Journal of Near-Death Studies* has carried on the scientific search.
- ✚ 9 or so common characteristics: *ineffability; outside our space-time; out of body experience; perceiving communication after death; awareness of being dead; the tunnel; the light and judgment; meeting friends and family; ageless*
- ✚ NDE's include 'Hellish' experiences corresponding to how you lived
- ✚ Prof. Kenneth Ring has extensively documented NDE's by blind people reporting verifiable and correct observations around their body during death
- ✚ This transcendence seems to point to the existence of a Soul or Spirit, and is consistent with some form of afterlife beyond the grave.

Q3. WISH FULFILMENT: Rowan Chapman responds ...

Like Ricky Gervais in the movie, "The Invention of Lying," perhaps the afterlife is merely projection. It's wish fulfilment—an act we put on to deal with dying.

- ✚ Gervais popularises Freud and Marx. But as materialists, all *presuppose* matter is all there is, thus they *assume* any belief in an afterlife must be wish fulfilment
- ✚ It may be wish fulfilment for materialists desiring *nothingness* after death. And many beliefs—e.g. hell—are hardly something for which you would wish
- ✚ Heaven is a crutch, but facing death we're all cripples. So, is the crutch *real*?
- ✚ Some form of 'afterlife' is believed across all of history and every culture
- ✚ Physical thirst points to water. Spiritual thirst points to some real existence beyond the grave that quenches our desire for justice, beauty and love
- ✚ Thus, it's *reasonable* to believe there *may* be an afterlife; and it's *nonsense* to say "Heaven doesn't exist, because you *wish* it exists"

Q4. RESURRECTION: Steve Baso responds ...

Christianity is built on the radical claim that an historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, died and rose again. Surely this requires extraordinary evidence.

- ✚ Absolutely! So we must take time to actually investigate—not dismiss—it
- ✚ As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15, *if false*, then we are to be pitied. But, *if true*, then the resurrection vindicates Jesus' claim to be God, and our future hope
- ✚ Unlike NDE/resuscitation, resurrection is passing *through* and *defeating* death
- ✚ FACT ONE: Dead Body. (Consistent with current medical knowledge)
- ✚ FACT TWO: Empty Tomb. (Corroborated by hostile witnesses)
- ✚ FACT THREE: Multiple Eyewitnesses. (Based on early historical accounts)
- ✚ FACT FOUR: Lives Transformed. (Fearless martyrs and a growing church)
- ✚ Hallucinations, stolen bodies, lying disciples, resuscitating messiahs:
no alternate explanation fits the facts

Q5. RELEVANCE: Sue Chapman and Bec Vallee respond ...

Even if some guy 2000 years ago actually did defeat death, *so what?* In your personal experience, how does Jesus' resurrection make a difference?

✚ Sue reflects on her father's death, and a life directed by what lies beyond

✚ Bec reflects on dynamic hope amidst her battle with chronic kidney disease



CONCLUSION: Near Life Experience: Eternity Starting Now

"Man always dies before he is fully born"—Erich Fromm. Are we fully alive right now?

How we view death determines how we live life, right now. Is death the end, an eternal void? If so, you can ignore it, or deplore it. But what if death *isn't* the end? What if it's less an extinction than a graduation?

Christian hope is not some fuzzy optimism about an afterlife. It's based in the real life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. We've each rejected the Creator who gave us life, and in so doing, we die (Romans 6:23). So God stepped in through Jesus and lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died, so that we could be born again, fully alive in Him. Through His death we live.

God will judge this world: not all NDE's have a happy ending. But for those who turn from rebellion and trust in God, we have an eternal hope that is real—a cosmic resurrection ending in a New Heaven and New Earth. Jesus' love makes this possible, and God will be "all in all." We'll join Paul in His victory song: "Where, O death, is your sting?"

Jesus offers us a *near life experience* starting now: eternal life is knowing Him (John 17:3).

Are you living this life? Is this what you want? Winter is here, but Spring *will* come.

Questions for Discussion

1. What impacted you most in this talk? Download the *manuscript and small group discussion guide* from <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/afterlife/> to jog your memory.
2. What do you believe happens when you die? How does it impact how you live?
3. In what ways have you ignored, deplored, or explored the afterlife? Where to now?
4. "Matter is all there is. Once you die, it's an eternal void—a blackout. Belief in any version of the afterlife is pure wish fulfilment." Discuss.
5. Why do, or don't, you believe Jesus rose from the dead? If true, what difference does this make for you personally, and the future of all things? (See Romans 8:18-39)
6. Share a "Near Life Experience" you've had, where you've tasted eternal life and realised there must be something more. What role has relationship with God played in this?