AFTERLIFE
Christian hope in the face of death

The Lord will give life to those who die. The dead will also rise. All who are shown mercy from God will inherit the new heavens and the new earth.

John 1:9

LOGOS 2011

LOGOS
The true light that gives light to every person has come into the world.
AFTERLIFE: Christian hope in the face of death

[OPENING DRAMA: "The Afterlife: Level by Level"
downlight on Chris Chapman centre stage, all else black]

$ = Recently deceased, played by Chris Chapman

VO = Voice Over, Sue Chapman or recording

2 = Angel, guide to heaven, played by Sue Chapman

(Stage is set with a “bedding heap” stage right. $ enters and climbs into bed, pulls sheet over and goes to sleep – lights dim.)

$ enters and lies down and then in my sleep my heart ceased {$ sits slowly up} and my soul departed this life peacefully and when I woke up I was in heaven.

{$ stands up and freezes – a few seconds of nothing then re-animates!}

VO Level 2 afterlife.

$ What happened to level 1.

VO You had it. It was the materialist’s heaven.

$ I don’t remember anything.

VO That’s because there’s nothing there. Materialists believe there’s no life after death—you just cease to exist.

$ Oh. Well what’s level 2 afterlife then?

START TRACK 1.nirvana (Japanese Flute Music) … *skip to TRACT2 where indicated*

VO Level 2 Buddhist Nirvana– you merge with the great nothingness and escape suffering, desires and even your own identity. Begin to merge now.

$ But wait– do I stay me. Will I be able to see and hear and do stuff?

VO Those are marks of the individual identity which is one of the bonds that tie you to the world of suffering. You and everyone else must lose them all. Merge now with the shining sea of which you are a drop.

$ But I don’t want to be just another drip. I want to do things and know things...

*End JAPANESE FLUTE MUSIC / START TRACK 2.valhalla (Wagner’s ‘Flight of the Valkyries’) now*

n.b. This track starts with 32 sec. of silence, so it should SOUND by "LEVEL 4 AFTERLIFE: VALHALLA”

VO Then you may like to try level 3 afterlife, reincarnation. You return to the world in a form dictated by positive karmic energy.

$ ‘Begins to shrink! Hey what’s going on. I’m shrinking.
VO Unfortunately your karmic account was somewhat small and you have returned as a cockroach.

$ I'm hungry. Anyone got any manure?

{Person Enters! – Errrr a cockroach. {Splat}

VO And it's back to the afterlife.

$ You mean that was it?

VO Unfortunately you were a slow cockroach with limited scuttling skills.

$ Isn't there any other option?

{track 2 music, 0.32secs, should start}

VO Level 4 afterlife, Valhalla. An eternity of boozing, wenching, fighting. Which do you want for the first 1000 years, booze wench or fight.

$ Can I try wench?

{Huge wench marches on singing and backhands him to the ground, looks disgustedly at him and marches off! –

Wench Get me back to 800AD. These 21st century men are all wimps.

$ {Climbing up} Another one perhaps?

*End WAGNER MUSIC*

VO Level 5 Christian heaven.

{2 enters, dressed angelically. $ stands up and wafts over to them. Lights come up!

2 Welcome pilgrim, thou hast arrived at the pearly gates in the realm of everlasting joy

$ Enthusiastically! Oh yes.

2 Thou canst not wear those threads for they are verily a bit on the earthly side. Here takest thee thou these heavenly threads. {Holds out white robe or sheet!

$ You're speaking in that old fashioned way like in the King James version.

2 Yea pilgrim for verily the KJ version soundeth the most Christian but, {speaks normally! oh well I suppose well drop it for a bit till you get used to things but there'll be heavenly English lessons later. Now, oh yes clothes, here ye are. {Correcting self} I mean here you are.

$ Istruggles into robe! It's a bit um...

2 The first 1000 years are the worst. Now you'll need a musical instrument.

$ Cool on earth I used to play...
You get a harp.

You're trying to be well-mannered! Cool. Hopefully. Are there any...

No it's a total harp scene man; do you want lead acoustic or bass?

Um, I thought...

Then we'll organise wings, halo and song sheets in the next room. Now the lyrics that you sing forever are. Listen now... Kum by yah my lord, kum by yah. {etc.}

You mean I sing that forever?

Shhhh - not finished yet. Oh lord Kum by Yah oh lord kum by yah. {smile}

It sounds like an eternal church service. Look don't want to sound ungrateful but... robe, church service, harp forever... it's a bit claustrophobic. I mean I've always been a busy active sort of person. I mean, I was really good at carpentry. {Desperately} Is there something can build or fix. I need some out and about.

{Enthusiastically forging on} And guess what. We have the best preaching team here and the sermons are about to start. And for first 10,000 years it's... _______.

{Pastor ______ enters, dressed in a white robe with a halo from back corner of stage}

In total panic- NO NO PLEASE. {Panic thrashes about and walks backwards towards the original bed while 2 and ______ fade off stage and lights dim. When they are offstage lights come up and $ wakes up thrashing with sheets, gasping and panting.} A nightmare. Just a nightmare. It can't be. Heaven can't be like that. {Leaps up and rummages round and finds a bible turns pages over.} Bible... er um... Revelation chapter 22 it says there's a river... oh thank you, outdoor things. The tree of life- trees oh hallelujah- a new heaven and a new earth... oh good... maybe there'll be things to make and fix and I can help with the timber bits. {Exits reading}
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. And yes, according to the Bible, there is a river ... and a tree of life like way back in the Garden of Eden. There will be no more pain, or suffering; tears are wiped away, and God’s love lights up the garden-city brighter than Sydney Harbour on New Years. 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.

So, “What do you think happens when you die?”

“That’s a strange question!” your average uni student might reply. “When you die, you die. The plug’s pulled out, and the lights go out, that’s it: the eternal void. If there was something more, we would have discovered it by now. There would be proof, right?”

Discussion over. And with that he or she heads back to party.

But of course! For 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? The future looks fuzzy at best—extinction, reincarnation, Valhalla, harp concerts in the sky ... who knows? But in a world where death is more certain than taxes, do we have the courage to face up to ‘strange questions’ that define human life?

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?

1 Dialogue adapted from Clint Eastwood’s movie, “Hereafter” (2010).
Maybe you *ignore* the afterlife. Your theme song is "Forever young". Like Edward from the Twilight saga, you're blessed with immortality. Or is it 'amortality'? As sociologist Catherine Mayer dubs them, 'Amortals' "seek to arrive at the best time of their lives, and then linger there indefinitely, with the help of vitamins, Botox, plastic surgery, gym workouts, and of course Viagra. *(Think Shane Warne)*" He's tight like a tiger, but the clock is ticking.

Death is hard to ignore. Every second roughly two people around the world die—that's 150,000 per day, 55 million per year. And contrary to popular opinion, they don't disappear, pass away, fall asleep, or retire. They die. It's not someone else's problem, I will die. You will die. We could party hard and desperately grasp onto what life is left, but our last words may be tragic like whiskey merchant Jack Daniels. As he died from a blood infection, all he could say was "One last drink, please."

So much for *ignore*.

Well, maybe you *deplore* the afterlife. Who knows what lies beyond? Heaven is a distraction, so make the most of now. Death is as natural as birth, so just accept it. Like *Steve Jobs*, co-founder of Apple. Jobs battled with cancer even back at his Stanford University Commencement address of 2005. He said, "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life." Almost everything just falls away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. When he died this October at the age of 56, everyone spoke of his success and legacy. His accomplishments were admirable.

*But let's be realistic, here.* Apple will continue on with or without his vision. Jobs won't be there to appreciate it, and within a couple of generations his name will be a footnote in a design textbook. I have to agree with Woody Allen, who remarked, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve immortality through not dying. I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen. I would rather live on in my apartment." When death knocks on our door, all our 'immortality projects' are meaningless. As the writer of Ecclesiastes said, "All our strivings under the sun are but chasing the wind—utter vanity."

Okay, I recognize this is depressing. My apologies! But it's a virtue to number our days aright—to face life as it really is.
So you can ignore the afterlife, or deplore the afterlife. But today I want to challenge you to a third option.

Will you explore the afterlife?

What if? What if there is an afterlife? It falls short of mathematical proof, but there are rumours of transcendence that have defined entire cultures across history, from the ancient Egyptians embalming the dead to African Americans singing gospel tunes around an open casket. They could be right or wrong, but the question of the afterlife is anything but irrelevant.

Philosophers and luminaries across history have spoken about hope in the face of death. But only one pointed to themself as the source of this hope. Jesus of Nazareth said

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die.”

Jesus (John 11:25)

“It is finished.”

His last words came with confidence from a crucifix: “It is finished.”

What is finished? Apparently death as we know it. This wasn’t resigned acceptance.

Well, do we believe this? Should we believe this?

That’s what this Logos message is about: the afterlife. Is there reason for hope in the face of death? It’s humanity’s biggest question, and it’s relevant to every one of us here.

Thankfully it’s not a question I need to explore alone. So let’s welcome up our panel.
Q1. MATERIALISM: Bruce Blackshaw responds …

‘Bruce, you’re a hard-edged mathematics and IT kind of guy, having lectured at public universities on both topics. To enlightened atheists, all this talk of existence after death is nonsense. Famous scientist 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?’

Well Dave, this is a popular view nowadays – it’s called materialism. It doesn’t mean being obsessed with owning too much stuff. It’s a philosophy that says matter is all that there is. Life is no more than a product of natural causes.

In the words of Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA’s double helix, “You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”

So if you’re a materialist, you don’t believe in God or the afterlife. It’s all about the scientific evidence. Any hope or purpose you have as a materialist is simply what you make up for yourself.

Obviously Christians aren’t materialists, so what problems are there with this view?.

Let’s firstly look at scientific evidence. People will claim that there is no life after death because science can’t show it. And it certainly can’t. But hang on, science assumes only natural causes. That’s how it operates. So if the afterlife isn’t made of matter – if it is spiritual or immaterial – we can’t expect science to apply. It’s like losing your car keys at night, but only looking for them under the street light.

So using science is using the wrong tool if the afterlife can’t be reduced to the movement of atoms.

But there’s another problem for materialism – our minds. How can matter produce consciousness? Minds are not material things. They have subjective experiences of things such as pain, taste and beauty – and even fully understanding the biology of the brain can’t tell us what it is like to experience these things.

Some people try to explain the mind in terms of a complex computer. But we still have the same problem – how does consciousness arise from a computer program? Anyone who has programmed computers knows they can’t think – ultimately they just follow a series of simple instructions. Their creator is the one doing the thinking!

As David J. Chalmers, a leading philosopher of the mind, says, “Consciousness poses the most baffling problems in the science of the mind. There is nothing that we know more intimately than conscious experience, but there is nothing that is harder to explain. … The emergence of experience goes beyond what can be derived from physical theory.”
So the problem of consciousness is a significant problem for materialists, and if Chalmers is to be believed, always will be. This, of course, leaves wide open the possibility that consciousness is something beyond the material — and this means that perhaps our consciousness can survive our death.

Philosophy also has something to say about the possibility of life after death. Immanuel Kant believed that humans live in two worlds — the world as it really is, and the world as it is experienced through our senses. Science can only investigate the world of our senses. The real world is not bound by material laws, and we can know nothing about it. Schopenhauer went on to claim the self is part of this real world, and so death liberates the self from its ties to the world experienced through our senses.

Ok, so science is the wrong tool to disprove the afterlife, the problem of consciousness means we might survive death, and philosophy supports this idea. Surely that should be enough to convince die-hard materialists that there might be an afterlife.

Well, there’s one more possibility — materialism itself might one day provide support for the idea of an afterlife.

In quantum theory, matter does not behave as we intuitively think it should. Light acts as a wave and a particle simultaneously. In quantum entanglement, when two particles are entangled, measurement of one immediately affects the other — no matter how distant. It’s very strange.

We’ve also discovered dark matter and dark energy — mysterious stuff that we can’t directly observe and that we know little about — except that it makes up 95% of the matter in the universe!

Given how little we understand about matter, it seems unscientific to claim it rules out an afterlife!
Q2. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES (NDEs): Chadi Youssef responds ...

That’s a big claim that life goes on beyond the grave. Sceptics would ask, ‘Where is the proof?’ So let’s turn to our next panellist.

Chadi, you’re half way through your PhD on the teaching of Philosophy in schools. As someone who loves to explore complicated issues, you’ve had an interest in this question for many years, researching so called ‘Near Death Experiences’ (NDEs). Is there any scientific support for life after death?

Well Dave, NDE’s can be traced all the way back to the writings of Plato, however, it was Professor Raymond Moody, a psychologist and medical doctor, who coined the term ‘NDE’ in the 1970s while documenting cases of people who were resuscitated after being pronounced ‘clinically dead’. This led to the formation of a highly regarded academic journal called the Journal of Near-Death Studies.

But what is death? Medicine puts forward three criteria: death is a process that begins when; 1) the heart stops beating; 2) the lungs stop working and; 3) the brain ceases functioning—this is known as a ‘cardiac arrest’, which is biologically the same as ‘clinical death’. In the case of NDE’s, ‘clinical death’ may last from a few seconds to an hour or more, until doctors are able to restart the heart and reverse the dying process.

The scientific study of what happens during this time reveals nine or so common characteristics. I want you to imagine that you are experiencing ‘clinical death’, say... after a horrible car accident. You begin to hear a strange buzzing sound before quickly finding yourself outside your lifeless body, watching on below, while frantic efforts are made to resuscitate you at the scene. And then it gets really weird. As the realization of death sets in, you are then magnetically drawn into darkness, at an extremely high speed, through, what appears to be a tunnel or vortex, until you reach a dimension of radiant golden-white light.

You are then approached by a powerful ‘being of light’ which some have identified as God, Jesus, or some religious figure. An intense feeling of love begins to encompass you. Then, like a flashback scene in a movie, this powerful ‘being of light’ presents to you, a panoramic review of everything you have ever done. That is, you relive every act that you have ever done to other people, not just from a first person perspective, but actually experiencing how they felt. You begin to quickly realize that ‘love’ is the most important thing in life! After the life review, imagine approaching a border or crossroad of some kind. The ‘being of light’ then gives you a choice of either crossing this border, or returning back to earth. The next thing you know is that you are waking up in the recovery ward. Wow! That’s some journey right?
Dave, these experiences are consistently reported in scientific studies on NDE’s, irrespective of the person’s cultural or religious affiliation. It is also interesting to note that NDE’s have been described by people as either being ‘hellish’ or ‘heavenly’ ones, and seem to directly correlate with the manner in which one’s life was lived.

Some claim NDE’s are purely material, and that the brain is ‘imagining’ these things as it shuts down. But hang on a moment, what do blind people experience? Stunningly, research by Professor of Psychology Kenneth Ring has shown that those born blind, and those who have acquired blindness from injury, report, verifiable and correct observations during their NDE’s.

There’s a case study of a 70–year old blind woman, who specified very accurately and clearly, what happened around her when she was resuscitated after a heart attack. The woman had been blind since she was 18 years old. She not only gave a precise account of the medical devices used, but also their color. Mind you, these medical devices had not been developed at the time when this woman lost her vision some fifty years ago. Among other details, she even knew that the physician was wearing a blue suit when he started her resuscitation.

Scientists such as Kenneth Ring suggest that this is undeniable evidence for the existence of a transcendental part of the human being. This transcendence seems to point to the existence of a Soul or Spirit. Dave, these findings are certainly exciting. NDE’s provide another good reason to believe that there is life after death—our physical bodies will die, but we, will exist beyond the grave.
Q3. WISH FULFILMENT: Rowan Chapman responds …

Thanks for your research Chadi. As you said, science can get near death but can’t assess what lies beyond death. Maybe the afterlife is just a projection? Rowan. You’re a professional actor— you have the talent to convince people by playing a role. Like Ricky Gervais in the movie, “The Invention of Lying.” His character lives in a world where no one can lie—except him. He re-invents history to get ahead at the publishing firm. But the story climaxes as he consoles his dying mother by the hospital bed. Let’s take a look.

VIDEO CLIP: “THE INVENTION OF LYING” (2 minutes 58 seconds)

It’s subtle, I know! The point: belief in an afterlife is nothing more than wish fulfilment, a projection. It’s an act we put on to deal with dying. Your take?

...Yes very subtle indeed. That scene there expands upon the criticisms of Freud and Marx, who have labelled Heaven as nothing more than wish fulfilment. But Freud and Marx are ardent atheists. They’ve already subscribed to hard-core materialism as the ultimate form of truth. Hence, they are just as susceptible to the ‘wish fulfilment’ argument as everyone else. I mean, if I had assumed the universe was all there is and ever will be, I would sure as heck be ‘wishing’ for nothingness after death. After all, it would be an rather inconvenient truth if there was. Also, the afterlife isn’t always a place where someone would ‘wish’ to go! In some South American tribes, the afterlife is only a hell. I sure as heck wouldn’t be ‘wishing’ to go there!

So wish-fulfilment is an invalid argument, but “Hey, say what you want. Heaven’s still just a crutch!” Fair enough. I don’t deny that a Heaven would be a crutch to a species whose inevitable and ultimate destination is death. But if you approached someone in a wheelchair and said ‘You’re just using that as a crutch; it can’t be real’ they’d rightly question your sanity. Yes, the wheelchair is a crutch. Nonetheless, it still exists ... and you’re a cripple. The real question here is whether or not you have a reason to believe the wheelchair exists. Christians believe in the existence of a heaven because we have sufficient reasons to arrive at that conclusion; not because we ‘need it to be there’. As C. S. Lewis once quipped:

"...If you think that my claim to have a large balance in my bank account is due purely to wishful thinking, it might be a good idea first to find out whether or not I actually have a bank account!"
And we must question why the ‘afterlife’ is such a common theme across history. The Ancient Egyptians dedicated an entire book to the subject. For Hindus, it’s Swarga Loka. For Polynesians or Meso-Americans, it’s a multi-layered paradise. For Viking’s, it’s a traditional long-hall packed with weapons, beer and food. And suddenly all the blokes are thinking hmmmm maybe I should start worshipping Odin. But historically speaking, the majority of human culture has believed in a Heaven. This in itself is not proof of a Heaven, but it makes me wonder why humans are so obsessed with the idea of ongoing life.

Now that’s a fair point: NDE’s aside, how on earth have humans come to believe that we may continue to live onwards at all ...somewhere...after we die? An afterlife isn’t exactly verifiable, since if you’re there, you can’t report back in. Consider the fact that all of our basic needs require some level of fulfilment. If you get hungry, you eat something. If you feel sleepy, you sleep. Likewise, humans love to ‘exist’ and desire the things and experiences that life gifted us. Because death separates us from these things, all humans (even the non-religious) share the mutual feeling that death is fundamentally wrong. Could this very feeling indicate that we aren’t intended for something which is the be all and end all of our existence? Christianity would say yes, we aren’t intended for death.

So in summary, **you must show that a man is wrong before your start explaining why he is wrong**. Funny as it sounds, the current trend is to assume without discussion that someone is wrong... and then distract them from that by explaining how they became so silly. That’s bad reasoning! If the Wish Fulfilment argument is indefensible, and crutches can exist in themselves, and death is at odds with the majority of humanity’s values...I would say that’s some good evidence for an afterlife. And since we have evidence, it’s nonsense to say: ‘Heaven doesn’t exist, because you wish it exists!’
Q4. RESURRECTION: Steve Baso responds …

Thanks Rowan. Let’s turn to Steve. Christianity is not about some generic hope in the afterlife. It’s built on the radical claim that an historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, died and rose again. Let’s get real—every dead person I’ve ever known stays dead. And I’m guessing the same goes for everyone here. How can anyone believe in resurrection in the 21st century? You’re a criminal prosecutor by profession … surely this requires extraordinary evidence.

Absolutely it does. And as a non-Christian, the resurrection was a huge stumbling block for me. But then I took the time to actually investigate it.

The resurrection then is more than just one of Christianity’s core claims. Our faith stands or falls on whether it happened. If Jesus supernaturally came back to life, it vindicates His claims to be God, and that His followers will also be resurrected one day and live on forever.

The resurrection isn’t a case of a NDE, like Chadi spoke about earlier, where someone who is medically dead gets resuscitated. The resurrection claim is that three days after He died, Jesus was returned to life by God and granted a whole new resurrection body that could exist forever, free from the effects of death.

There are four key historical facts that undergird the resurrection. These facts are accepted by the majority of critical New Testament scholars regardless of their background or beliefs… so that includes atheists, agnostics and other non-Christians.

Fact one: Dead Body. Jesus was crucified and was taken down from the cross, dead. The eyewitness accounts we have of Jesus’ crucifixion fit what we know about how crucifixions occurred. Things like the description of water and blood flowing out of Jesus’ side after a spear was thrust into it… that accords with modern medical knowledge. In addition, crucifixion was something reserved for traitors and common criminals. It was so embarrassing for the early church that their leader was crucified, that historians overwhelmingly accept it must have happened.

Fact two: Empty Tomb. The tomb Jesus was buried in was discovered empty. The Gospel of Mark records that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, buried Jesus in his own tomb. Most scholar’s date Mark’s gospel as being written within 30 years of Jesus death. This makes it one of the earliest sources about Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s simply too early to pass the burial tradition off as being a legend that developed over time.
Because the account is so early, when it was written people the involved were still alive. Imagine if someone claimed Campbell Newman was the Qld Premier during the floods in January… in 100 years someone might believe it, but could never convince someone who lived through it, because they know what happened. In the same way, Joseph of Arimathea must have been real, because if he wasn’t, everybody would have known. Since Joseph was real, the location of his tomb would have been known. So when the disciples proclaimed Jesus’ resurrection, the Jewish leaders could have killed the whole movement by opening the tomb and pointing to the body. But they couldn’t, because the body wasn’t there.

Fact three: Multiple Witnesses. In the days following Jesus’ death, large numbers of people claimed to have seen him alive … In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul recounts a creed he was taught which lists the people who saw Jesus alive after his death… and the list includes friends, sceptics and enemies alike.

1 Corinthians is estimated by most scholars to be written within about 25 years of Jesus’ death. The creed is one Paul himself received when in Jerusalem as a new Christian, within 3–5 years of Jesus death. So we have a second, very early account, being circulated at a time when people involved were still alive. Paul even writes that if anyone doesn’t believe him, they can go and ask one of the people who saw Jesus and ask them about it.

Fact four: Lives Transformed. Imagine this: you leave your job, follow someone for three years, then He’s arrested, unjustly tried and killed as a common criminal. You flee; you’re scattered, hiding. Then suddenly, you become bold, fearless. You take the message of your leader’s resurrection all over the world. You endure trials, torture. Many of you die for claiming this resurrection happened. Something happened to bring about this change. What was it? The disciples’ answer – the resurrection.

Dave, you asked about extraordinary evidence… we’ve got a dead body, an empty tomb, multiple witnesses and transformed lives. Any explanation has got to account for each of these pieces of evidence. How do you explain this?

Some sceptics argue anyone who claimed to see Jesus alive was hallucinating. That doesn’t explain the empty tomb. Other claim the disciples stole the body and lied about the resurrection. That doesn’t explain their transformed lives.

From my own study, I came to the realisation that the best explanation for these facts is that God raised Jesus from the dead. It explains all of the evidence. And that was a key moment for me; it led me to faith. But what’s your explanation? Take the time to what I did; research the resurrection, consider the evidence and decide for yourselves.
Thanks Steve. Let’s say I was prepared to grant that some guy 2000 years ago actually did defeat death—that there is an afterlife. So what? What does this have to do with how I live right now? Worse, isn’t heaven a distraction, a kind of opiate for the masses as Marx put it? Sue, you’ve had to face death head on. In your personal experience, how does Jesus’ resurrection give you hope, and make a difference to everyday life?

**AM Sue Chapman responds …**

On the first of September this year I was rehearsing about 200 kids for a concert when I got a call that Dad had collapsed. Finally, Chris rang and said they wouldn’t be going to hospital. Dad had been mowing the lawn when he had a massive heart attack, and just like that, my dad who was full of beans, dreams and opinions was gone - no warnings, no inklings just boom.

Dad had always said, “I know where I’m going” and the more I thought about it the more I thought how much that matters.

When you have to plan a funeral, this all comes out in the wash as you decide what you want said on this special occasion.

Dad never lived his life as if it was on hold waiting for the real event. For dad, life counted. It wasn’t like the Maccas wrapper that lasts a few seconds and gets thrown in the bin. Because he believed that our Christian hope isn’t just a matter of “pie in the sky when you die” he made choices on how he would live the life that was given to him. His own dad was an unemployed alcoholic, an example he never wanted to follow. He saw all the good in this life as being transformed in the life beyond death and didn’t want to waste it.

So what did those choices look like? I’d say there were four. Firstly, dad believed God had given him a body that would one day be transformed. After all Jesus had an amazing new body after His resurrection, so if it was good enough for Jesus it was good enough for dad. He chose to enjoy what it felt like to be a healthy male. He avoided addictions like smoking and drinking that killed his own father. Instead of a couch potato lifestyle he enjoyed ballroom dancing, made the firsts at school in rowing and played hockey for Australia.
Secondly, the promise in the bible of a new heaven and a new earth reminded him that the earth would not be scrapped as a bad idea. He chose to enjoy the outdoors, especially as a surveyor who had worked in rainforests for up to 9 months in a year. For dad, that meant getting out in the garden, going to the beach, enjoying a picnic and celebrating God’s creation – flowers, mountains, animals – he loved being around them. If this earth can look that good what must the new earth be like?

Thirdly, dad was comfortable accepting that there are mysteries in this world that will make sense in the next. He loved the challenge of using his intellect; he even studied for his PhD while he was working fulltime as Surveyor General. But he never saw his academic achievements as the reason his life mattered.

Fourthly, knowing that death was not the end, meant dad chose to make time for people. Things would pass away but people would not, so dad would talk to everyone. As a judge, he knew and talked to all the cleaners in the land court. He felt this earnest desire of Jesus that no soul be lost and would happily talk about his faith, even when it was to his colleagues in the court or the government who would shake their heads and say “yeah but Neil, how can you believe all that stuff?”.

I think in the end, memories and shared DNA are not enough. Dad’s choices live on through us and through our family – an ability to enjoy being human and to value the world, an acceptance of mystery and a willingness to cherish people and share our time with them.

For Dad, this life wasn’t an accident with no hope, it wasn’t a burden demanding we work our way to heaven, it was a gift from God: a world to look after and talents he was given to use. Dad saw himself as caught up in something bigger, the huge event of Jesus’ resurrection sealed the promise that death was not the end, and shouted the value of life. For Dad that pointed the way forward so that his life on this earth was the journey of a faithful servant knowing that that this life is a taste of the best which is yet to come.
Q5. RELEVANCE [PM SERVICE]

Thanks Steve. Let’s say I was prepared to grant that some guy 2000 years ago actually did defeat death—that there is an afterlife. So what? What does this have to do with how I live right now? Worse, isn’t heaven a distraction, a kind of opiate for the masses as Marx put it? Bec, you’ve had to face death head on. In your personal experience, how does Jesus’ resurrection give you hope, and make a difference to everyday life?

PM Bec Vallee responds …

Dave, I think what really matters is how the resurrection of Jesus actually changes our everyday decisions. Now this isn’t about lofty, motivational speaking. I would just like to share from my own story how this has really affected my life choices.

To frame where I was at a few year ago let me tell you a quick, rather humorous story. In 2006 I was in hospital having dialysis tubes put into my abdomen. For those who may not know dialysis is the mechanical filtering of your blood when your kidneys have called it a day. A nurse turned to my Mum and asked her if I had a nose job done. Of course I hadn’t and the nurse went on to say how I’ll be famous one day with a natural nose like that. Just to be clear, that was the first and last time I ever received such a compliment about my nose. But I later said to my Mum—It won’t be my nose I am famous for. It’s because I’ll be shot as a martyr. Not a comforting statement from a 16 year old I’m sure. None the less I had made up my mind that I wanted my faith in God to define my life.

By the time this story rolled around it had been five years since I was diagnosed with Chronic Kidney Disease, leading to the need for dialysis and later a kidney transplant. My sickness made me realise I wanted to impact people for eternity. I asked myself what is important to Jesus? This is how I try to make my choices. As I read the Bible I learnt that what I did today has an impact on eternity. In three years Jesus lived a life that practically demonstrated heaven on earth. He healed the sick and he helped the poor. We all have limited time on earth. When I knew that mine would be shorter again I didn’t want to climb Everest or be famous for my nose! I wanted to give it my best shot at putting God’s interests first: loving the poor; befriending those alone; and speaking boldly about the Gospel.

So it was I started trying to work towards these things. In 2005 I had roughly 12 months before I would need dialysis. Here my hope in God made a very practical difference because it gave me the desire to use those 12 months to demonstrate God’s love to others. So I chose to visit Africa. I did my best to raise funds for school supplies for the local areas over there, and had the privilege to fly them over. And it was my hope in God that made me want to do that. A few years later my decision to study nursing was also founded in my hope in God. I saw being a nurse as tool for me – a way I could care for people in their most vulnerable times. I wanted to work in a low socioeconomic area and eventually overseas on mission. After completing my course over a year ago I now work as a nurse in a struggling part of our community. Every day my job takes me to clean the wounds and talk with some of the dirtiest and alone people in our city. I have been on 3 or 4 overseas short term missions and am passionate about it. I hope to become more involved in helping communities around the world.
These are just a few examples of how I hope to leave God’s footprint where I go. Jesus’ life was resurrected and we have that same hope for earth and all that we see.

Over the last 12 months my body has been rejecting my kidney transplant. My health has again acted as a reminder that all I have is the moment I am living in. What I choose to do here and now practically, or not to do will be reflected in eternity. Our words and actions all act as a window that points towards our hope in God. Every decision I make is one where I have to take into consideration a shorter time frame to complete what I dream for. Most of you will know that a few months ago I married Ryan... Lucky guy! But seriously marrying Ryan was one of the best decisions of my life, but one still where we had to sit down and count the cost. My life will be unavoidably filled with serious health issues. Will this affect us having children? When should we do mission work? We’ve had to make some heavy and real decisions about what we need to prioritize given my health. And as we consider what we will do our hope in God informs us how to make these decisions as best as we can. It is this hope that inspires us to love each other and those around us, where ever that may be as practically as we can.

When we treat disease or address poverty, we are not oiling up the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff. Every practical decision you make now to honour God and do good has lasting effects. Our hope for heaven is a hope for redemption that starts now. In the effort to save my health death can be faced knowing my hope is that what I do in Christ in the present is not wasted.
CONCLUSION: Near Life Experience: Eternity Starting Now (Dave Benson)

Thanks Sue/Bec. And would you thank our panel.

Well, is death the end? What of the afterlife? Looking around at our culture, I wonder if psychologist Erich Fromm was right: “Man always dies before he is fully born.” Are we fully alive right now? It reminds me of a Michael Leunig cartoon, with a mopey looking guy reflecting on death.

He had heard of near-death experiences and their transforming power, but he had never had one.

It seemed to him that much of humanity was near death; the way people watched so much television! ‘The living dead’ he thought.

While out walking it occurred to him that modern existence itself might be a constant near-death experience.

A flower truck turned a corner and a load of daffodils spilled from the back and buried him.

He lay bewildered for a moment under the glowing yellow heap and then poked his head out into the sunshine.

He saw his reflection in a shop window. He smelled the daffodils.

“How lovely!” he thought. It was a near life experience and already a transformation was in progress.
It’s ironic, but 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.

As it says in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So God stepped in through Jesus and paid for the mess we’ve made. He 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 has promised to set this world right. One day Jesus will judge the living and the dead. (Near Death Experiences don’t always have a happy ending.) But for any one who will turn from their own ways to 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.

We’ll join Paul in His victory song:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)
Like Leunig’s character poking his head through darkness, then flowers, into brilliant light, God offers us a near life experience starting now.

In John 17:3, Jesus explains that “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

There’s no escapism in this. By defeating death, Jesus started a radical movement of people not afraid to love others, even if it takes them to the grave.

In the face of death, Christian hope remains. It animates all we do. Eternity starts now.

Are you living this life? Is this what you want?

At 7pm tonight we’ll have an open question time—ask anything, for the afterlife is worth exploring. And there’s a link in your note outline to a small group discussion guide with further resources to help your search.

But let me close with the last words from my Nanna before she was “promoted to glory” in 2009. She was an amazing woman who embodied this resurrection hope: her whole existence was a near life experience. She poetically whispered,

“The sun is golden today; the first tips of pink and green are on the crab apple tree!! The promise of spring is here and soon the barren tree will be transformed into a mountain of blossoms. Wonderful!!”

Jesus said, “I AM the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. ... Do you believe this?” (John 11:25).

Let’s pray.

---

2 From Nell Hodgson’s poetic reflections on grief, Rainbows in the Tears, compiled upon her request before she died.
Questions for Discussion


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?
To my Darlings, My Family

Much as I love you, I will let you grieve, I will let you weep and feel the burden of your loss, as you my family, share my last farewell, and grieve and weep together. You weep and grieve; yet amidst the sorrow there is joy. Joy, as you share together the memories of years gone by. Joy as you feel again, see again, think again, of precious moments shared. So many treasures I have stored within my heart.

Oh that I could wrap them with rainbow hues, and give them to you in a golden box of promises. Promises I have proved and long for you to know.

Words stamped with God’s faithfulness.

Promises of His love and care.

The promise of His presence with you every passing day.

His grace, strength and courage to guide you on life’s way.

You have God’s word, seek them out for yourselves; teach them to your children, guard the heritage of faith and prayer that is yours.

The world is full of distractions, society around is full of false values, do not be fooled!

Raise your sights! Dare to dream! To plan! To work! And to trust!

Trust in the Lord! (Proverbs 3:5-20 has some great ideas!)

Keep your heart, your mind open to a sense of wonder, so many beautiful simple blessings of every day to see and give thanks for. Life is one great adventure and there will be times when you think it’s too tough or a raw deal. Remember, make prayer your first reaction not your last recourse, more forward with courage and remember, “The Lord your God is with you everywhere you go.”

God bless you each one, my dear ones, thank you for your love.

Mother Nell

The sun is golden today; the first tips of pink and green are on the crab apple tree!!!! The promise of spring is here and soon the barren tree will be transformed into a mountain of blossoms. Wonderful!!!

Mum Nell