

STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

February 2022 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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CONTACT DETAILS

Stornoway RPCS
 Bridge Community Centre
 Bayhead Embankment
 Stornoway, Isle of Lewis,
 Scotland, HS1 2EB

www.stornowayrpcs.org
info@stornowayrpcs.org
 Scottish Charity No: SC043043

NEWS & EVENTS

FEBRUARY COMMUNIONS

The Communion Services are due to take place in the congregation from 17th-21st February. The preachers will be Rev Donald Macdonald, Rev Stephen McCollum and Rev Jonathan Baxter (Stornoway APC).

The Lord's Day services will be held in the Bridge Centre. All other services will be held in the Gospel Hall, Bayhead. The service times are as follows:

Thursday 17th February 7.30pm—Rev Donald Macdonald

Friday 18th February 7.30pm—Rev Donald Macdonald

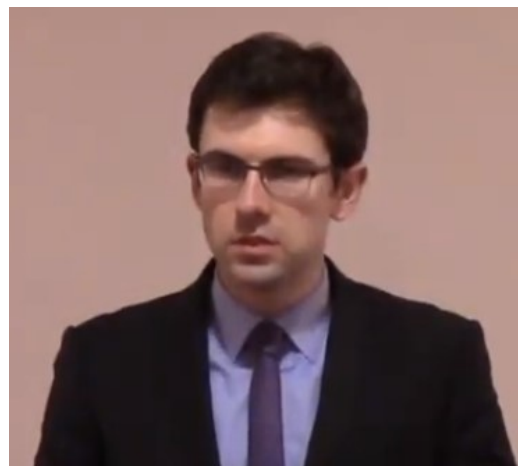
Saturday 19th February 11.00am—Rev Jonathan Baxter

Saturday 19th February 6.30pm—Prayer Meeting

Lord's Day 20th February 11.00am—Rev. Stephen McCollum

Lord's Day 20th February 6.30pm—Rev Stephen McCollum

Monday 21st February 7.30pm—Rev Stephen McCollum



*Rev Jonathan Baxter
(Stornoway APC)*



WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR SOUL WHEN YOU DIE?

We've all thought about it. What happens the moment we take our last breath, our heart stops beating, and our soul departs from our now dead body? Truth be told, most of us fear dying, even if we do not fear death. Dying is often a painful struggle. Dying often occurs in a sterile, clinical environment and is usually an ugly process. However, by trusting in the promise that death means entrance into eternal life in the presence of the Lord, as well as trusting in the power of Christ to raise the dead, Christians need not fear the outcome of death even if we experience trepidation regarding the process of dying.



Stories and legends about death and dying abound. This is the case, in part, because the Scriptures do not describe the process of

dying, although they do speak of several individuals who died but were raised back to life by Jesus. Lazarus comes to mind (John 11) among others (e.g., the widow of Nain's son in Luke 7:11–17). But we do not possess any first-hand account (including from Lazarus) of what these people experienced when they died. We can only but wonder what Lazarus was thinking when he died a second time, this time to enter eternal life. Now, we do know what our resurrection bodies will be like, since Paul gives us a remarkable description of the complete transformation that takes place when Christ returns and we are raised imperishable (1 Cor. 15:35–49). But there is not much biblical data on the intermediate state—that period of time when the souls of the believing dead await the resurrection of their bodies and the final and complete overturning of the curse (death).

It is also the case that the very nature of the question (What happens to our soul when we die?) lends itself to speculation. I recall my saintly grandmother (a pastor's daughter) recounting bedside vigils with dying church members. She described how before breathing their last, a dying person would often open their eyes, look heavenward, express some sort of joy and expectation, then surrender to the inevitable. She believed these saints were given a brief glimpse of what (or who) awaited them. That may be, but it is just as likely that the biochemical reactions within the brain to a body shutting down produces all kinds of sensory activity. Such accounts, however sincere, are anecdotal and provide no basis on which to build doctrine.

We've all heard stories about those who supposedly died and then returned from the afterlife. Such stories are fascinating, which explains the existence of the cottage industry of books written about near-death experiences that spin tales of the author's personal visit to heaven before returning to write a book about their experience. These books usually reveal encounters with the dearly departed, they often include descriptions of heaven (usually exaggerated earthly scenes), accounts of meeting Jesus, talking with God, and descriptions of heavenly things.

“We’ve all heard stories about those who supposedly died and then returned from the afterlife...”

But all of these likely spurious accounts conflict with what we know the Bible says about entrance into the presence of God. Isaiah 6:1–7 comes to mind. Isaiah is overcome by his unworthiness when given a vision of the Lord. The biblical accounts of encounters with God—such as Moses' glimpse of the Lord's glory (Ex. 33:18–23) or Jesus' appearance to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:37)—produce fear if not terror at being in the presence of the Holy God. The biblical accounts do not square with the casual, if not trivial nature of the “I saw heaven” or “I walked with Jesus” genre of literature. Since the Bible does not describe the process or the reflections of the dying, many have sought to fill in the gap with fabricated stories. Sadly, they've been very successful. Many people accept these legends as truth.

Thankfully, the Bible gives us two points of reference regarding the intermediate state that help prepare us for death. First, in several well-known passages, Paul specifically addresses the matter of what happens to believers between the time they die and when Christ returns. According to 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul teaches that at the moment of a believer's death, we immediately enter into the presence of the Lord. The Apostle writes, “We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Paul also spoke of how he desired “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23). When we die, we are immediately “with Christ” and enter into the presence of God. This is usually what we mean when we speak of “heaven.”

Second, the heavenly scene described by John in Revelation 4–6 gives us a glimpse of that previously unseen reality we will experience upon dying. We who have trusted in Christ alone will join the redeemed saints before the heavenly throne in the presence of God. We are conscious, aware of where we are, and joyfully praising God. To put it simply, this heavenly scene is the clearest image we have of what happens to our soul when we die. In these three chapters, John gives a glorious image of heaven, where God dwells among His people until the resurrection of our bodies at the end of the age. This is what heaven is—the redeemed dwelling in the presence of the Holy God, ascribing all praise and glory to our Creator and Redeemer.

While the scene is wonderful, and in many ways beyond our comprehension, it is worth noting that the saints in heaven are crying out, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10). Those already in God's presence before His throne—who have died before us and are now experiencing the intermediate state, the time between death and the Lord's return—long for that day when Jesus Christ returns to earth on the day of resurrection and judgment.

So, what happens to the souls of believers when we die? We immediately enter the glorious presence of the Lord, where we await the resurrection of our bodies at the end of the age.

Children's Corner



Dear Children

We are now into the second month of another year, 2022. A month doesn't take long in passing, at least it doesn't for me. Four weeks or thirty-one days probably feels very long to you but when you think of it time never stands still. It is always moving on. Look at the second hand on a clock and it goes on and on day and night. That is the way our life is. It passes so very quickly.

A few months ago I had a birthday and when two charming little girls asked me how old I was I began counting with them how many birthdays I had had. By the time I reached my age I felt really old and, no I didn't reach 100!! I then showed these little girls photos of me as a baby, as a schoolgirl, when I got married and when I retired. They didn't recognise me in the earlier photos but as I got older they began to see the resemblance. Why was that? Well, it is because our looks change as we get older. Our hair gets grey and our skin gets wrinkly. That is telling us that our bodies are beginning to die long before we actually die. That is true of everyone who is born into the world but the Bible tells us about one person who never changes. Who is that?

Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 8 reads: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever." He never changes. Why do our bodies change? It is because of sin. Once Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden by eating the forbidden fruit then their bodies began to die. In contrast to us Jesus was sinless. Yes, he grew from being a baby to being a young man but his body was not decaying and deteriorating like ours is.

Jesus is also the same as a person. He is God and He never changes. Question 4 in the Shorter Catechism tells us that "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." Isn't it wonderful to know that Jesus never changes as a person? We change from day to day. Sometimes we can be friendly and other times we might be moody. That is because of sin. Jesus, on the other hand, is always wise, powerful, holy, just, good and truthful.

What a good friend to have as you are journeying through this world! Other friends may forsake you through time and they may deceive you and not be faithful to you but Jesus will never forsake you, He will never deceive you, and He will always be faithful to His promises. Is He your friend? Jesus Himself said to His disciples in the Gospel of John chapter 15 and verse 14: "You are my friends if you do whatever I have commanded you." What does Jesus command us to do? Read what He says in the Gospel of Mark chapter 1 and verse 15: "Repent and believe the gospel." Is that difficult? Yes it is, because we are sinners. We need to ask Him to give us the ability to repent and believe. He says in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 7 and verse 7: "Ask and it will be given to you." That is a wonderful promise. You take Him at His word. Ask Him to help you to repent of your sins and to trust in Him for your salvation. That is my prayer for each one of you. I pray that as you go from month to month in 2022 you will have the best Friend of all as your friend.

God bless you all.

With my love

Granny M