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We Believe God Reigns

Unlike any other time in history, we live in a culture where youth is valued, and old age is not valued

Where we all want to come off younger than we are. Where we celebrate medical advancements that might keep us alive longer.

But one thing that our culture shares with any other time in history? Fear of death

What happens when you die?

Naturalists believe nothing happens

Universalists believe everybody goes to some sort of heaven

Catholics believe you go to Purgatory, to pay off any unforgiven sins

Reincarnationists believe you come back repeatedly, until you've paid off your karmic debt. (Problem is, you sin faster than you can pay it off)

What do we believe?

We are each made up of body and soul

Death is not natural, but an enemy, a consequence of sin

When we die, our body goes to the grave, and our soul goes to an afterlife to face judgment

Hebrews 9:27 *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*

One day there will be a physical resurrection, where everyone (past/present/future) will rise to eternal life with God, or eternal condemnation apart from God in hell

Daniel 12:2 *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*

Matthew 25:46 *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*

Revelation 20:15 *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*

We Christians believe that our eternal status depends on our relationship with Jesus
John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

Notice that "believe" and "obey" are treated as the same thing

Immediately upon death, the believer's soul goes to heaven to be with Jesus

2 Corinthians 5:1-11 *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened - not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.*

So what does dying have to do with the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is the result of God's mission to save, to rescue and renew His sin-stained creation. It's about Jesus our King establishing His reign and rule over all creation, defeating sin and death, and being worshipped as Lord.

The twin sins of idolatry and injustice will be replaced with the twin virtues of loving God and loving others

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Meaning: The Kingdom is at hand, because Jesus is on hand. He's arrived!

We are not naïve, like the kingdom is fully here

We are not hopeless, as if the kingdom has not already begun

The Kingdom is both a journey and a destination

(What we call the "already and not yet")

We Christians are not observers, but participants, each living out our calling to make the still invisible Kingdom visible to each other, and to others

Why would a living God send anyone to hell? He doesn't. They send themselves

C.S. Lewis said it like this: "Either people will say to God, "Thy will be done"; or God will say to people, "Thy will be done."

Do unborn babies, and babies/young children who die young go to hell?

Genesis 18:25 *Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of the all the earth do what is just?*

Hell is for people who resist and reject who Jesus is and what Jesus has done
They don't want to be with Jesus now, and they don't want to be with Him in eternity

Matthew 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

The Kingdom is reserved for those who repent of their sin. More so, it is for those who have rejected their former ways and their former devotion to other kingdoms, and seek citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven.

This is a question of new priorities, forsaking all other lesser priorities

Matthew 13:44 *the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

This also a question of citizenship - that is evidenced as image-bearers of our God, producing fruit of the gospel

Matthew 21:43 *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.*

So what does the Kingdom of God have to do with dying?

Matthew 25:34 *Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

What's going on right now in the meantime?

John 14:2-3 *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would not have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

And while we each continue on in this present body, what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 is our temporary "tent," what should we be occupying ourselves with?

Mark 1:3 *Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

So let's put dying and the Kingdom of God together

2 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 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. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.*

This is triumphant language, dominant kingdom language.

Where our destination after death is so much better than anything we have going on right now, even our earthly life.

As Christ-followers, we have nothing to fear. Because we are the most hopeful of people. We are citizens of the Kingdom, in life and in death, because ours is really eternal kingdom life in the presence of our King.

We Believe God Reigns!