

Note:

- Italics used for notes to the speaker
- Regular text for specific discussion points to be brought up in the session
- The option to ask students questions may not be available in larger settings, please feel free to adapt the talk as necessary, while retaining key points
- Keep 1 Peter 3:15 ever in our hearts as we share our hope in Christ – “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**”
- The accompanying powerpoint presentation has certain places where the text comes up only with a click. Please do take a look at it so you can appropriately coordinate it with your talk.

Goal of the talk:

- I. Students would consider the question of life after death
- II. Students would recognize the problem of sin and its consequences for the afterlife
- III. Students would be released from fear about the afterlife and find the answer to the issue of sin in Jesus

Our Final Exam – Talk-Sheet

Key Points: God is not only the beginning, but also our end; Jesus gives us a sure hope of eternally being with God

We began this series of the story of scripture beginning with God who is before all creation and through whom all creation came into existence. We also end with God who is our final destination.

Connecting Point:

Exams are a common practice around the world. We may not like them, but they are necessary to determine our readiness to step into the next phase of life – whether that means we are stepping into the next grade or class, or we are graduating from a program of study. Our excellence in these exams helps us enter into whatever we hope to do after. The exams act only as a key to the door of what’s next.

As we talk about exams, I want you to consider this with me - What if life is one big learning experience that ends in a final exam? That means, everything that happens in our lifetime is preparation for the exam. How many of us would pass and graduate?

To know if we would pass and graduate, we would first need to answer some other really important questions like – What are the questions we will be asked in this exam? What is the minimum score required to pass? How can we prepare now so we can do more than just pass the exam, and instead excel?

From experience, we know that the amount of effort we put into preparing for an exam directly correlates to what those marks will determine. If its just a small internal mid-semester test, we may not give it as much importance as a final exam. What about the more important exams we take - like our 10th, 12th, or our final degree exams? If we give these exams so much importance, how much more should we focus on our life's final exam?

Let's look at a passage in the last book of the Bible that talks about the future –

Rev. 21:3b-6 (NLT)

“Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.”

Rev. 22:3a, 5a (NLT)

No longer will there be a curse upon anything.

And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them.

These passages describe what heaven will be like. Imagine a place with no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain, no darkness and every curse removed. Isn't it what we all dream of? This is something that is promised to “those who are victorious” i.e. those who pass the exam.

But it depends on what you believe about our lives on earth. If we were to take an Instagram Poll asking, “Is there life after death?” we would find people who either believe -

I No, there is no life after death. Death is the end - we live and die, and the story is over.

If that's the case, there is no exam needed. The question we must ask then is - If we have nothing to move on to, then what really is the point of life? If we are here only for a few years and all of us have the same end no matter how we lived, life has no meaning or purpose, there is no good or bad, better or worse, there is nothing to work toward. We just exist and wait till our end comes. Do you believe this is true?

II Yes, there is life after death. There is more to life than our present physical existence.

In that case, we have to ask the question - if death is not the end, then what happens after? People have come up with many answers to the question about what happens after we die, that is - where will we graduate to? Even though there are different answers about what happens, there is a common consensus that if there is more to come, there will be a final exam, and that final exam will determine our status after we die.

Let's go back to what we brought up at the beginning of the talk - How many of us would pass and graduate this final exam? In order to answer that question, we said we would need to answer some other important questions, like – What are the questions we will be asked in this exam? What is the minimum score required to pass? And how can we prepare now so we can not merely pass, but ace our exam?

Let's answer each of these questions in turn.

1. What are the questions we will be asked in this exam?

Most, if not all people who believe there is a final exam, will agree that we will all be asked a question about the good and bad deeds we have done during our life on earth.

I'm sure we can all agree that not one of us can claim that we have never done anything bad, so we will all reach the end of our lives taking both our good and bad deeds to this exam. But what if the bad deeds we have done have already been taken off the record?

As we discussed in the last session, Jesus took upon himself the punishment for our sin. If we receive Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for us, we do not have to bear that punishment ourselves. In essence, He wipes away the bad deeds from our lives, as if they were never there, so that we can go to the final exam only with our good deeds and we are guaranteed a pass mark and entrance into heaven.

Isaiah 44:22 (NLT)

I have swept away your sins like a cloud. I have scattered your offenses like the morning mist. Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free.

If we decide that we do not want to receive what Jesus did for us, then we have to take our bad deeds to that final exam. We then have to ask the second question,

2. What is the minimum score required to pass?

We heard the description of heaven in the Bible. There is no wickedness, no impurity, no evil, no suffering. It is a place of complete goodness. Who can enter into such a place, except someone who is also completely good?

Would you describe yourself as completely and fully good through and through? If you have done even one wrong deed, isn't that evidence that there is some trace of evil within? In fact, Jesus equates even having wrong motives in your heart to having committed a sin.

Matthew 5:21-22a, 27-28 (NIV)

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If this is the standard of goodness God expects, how can any trace of evil enter into His presence? Based on our understanding of God’s goodness and the purity required to enter His presence, we can conclude that the required pass mark for our final exam is complete purity. If we cannot meet that standard, we cannot graduate into the next phase which is the presence of God. Our failure in the exam will then result in being permanently and eternally separated from God, His goodness and His love.

This is why Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." **John 14:6 (NIV)**. No one else in history claims that they can make us completely pure and able to enter God’s presence.

Now to answer question 3 –

3. How can we prepare now so we can aim for more than merely passing, and instead work toward acing our exam?

Since we know that we need to consider our good and bad works at the end of our lives, and we know that none of us is completely good, we can choose if we want to take that exam carrying our bad works or whether we want to go in with a clean record.

Jesus’ sacrifice for our sake guarantees us an entry into God’s presence. Of course that doesn’t mean that because we believe in and receive Jesus’ sacrifice, we can continue to do as much wrong as we want and expect that He will forgive us. No, Jesus not only forgives us, but also changes our heart and gives us His Spirit so that our very desire to do evil slowly starts to fade and we begin to desire to walk in God’s ways.

So how do we prepare for the final exam? We can choose to receive the gift of forgiveness Jesus offers us and begin a new life walking with God. What is stopping you from doing all that it takes to be with God? Don’t let temporary things distract you from what is eternal. Go after the gift of knowing God and you will find in Him everything you need and desire in this life and for eternity.

Revelation 21:6-7 (NLT)

And *God, the one sitting on the throne* also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are **thirsty** I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are **victorious** will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.