

What About Life After Death (and the life after life after death)? -- Part 1



(1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) There are few things as universally hoped for as life after death. No matter how some people try to say “This life is all there is,” the hope of life after death cannot be dismissed or contained. It leaks out everywhere and finds its way culturally into most every media there is. Why? Because God has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Still, people in general and Christians in particular

seem to be confused about what Christians experience upon death and confused about the nature of “heaven”.

Some “after-this-life” beliefs:

Annihilation – No future life. You just cease to be. Body becomes dust. Period. (G Gordon Liddy on Letterman)

Reincarnation – At death one is absorbed into a wider world, wind, trees nature. (Pocahontus, the Lion King, Princess Di, cf Wright pp 10-11)

“Popular culture” afterlife – Ghosts (Whisperer), Zombies, reanimation, even Twilight Zone Lazarus...

If given a multiple-choice test, Christians would answer: D. None of the above. We believe what the Bible says about HEAVEN! But what DOES the Bible say about heaven? Did you know the Bible speaks of 4 heavens?!?

[Most of you are probably familiar w/the song “Imagine” by John Lennon – a song in which he wedded together a wonderful melody w/atheistic & Marxist lyrics. Remember the opening line? “Imagine there’s no heaven . . . “] Please allow me to suggest a new line: “Imagine there’s 4 heavens.” IF read the Bible, no imagination is necessary b/c the Bible speaks of not just 1, 2, or 3, but 4 DISTINCT PLACES that in the Bible go by the name “heaven.”

The 1st HEAVEN is the SKY (Psalm 147:8). It’s the AIR. It’s the ATMOSPHERE we breathe here on this earth. It’s where the wind blows, where clouds gather, & the place from which birds take target practice on your just-washed

car window. ^{ESV} **Psalm 147:8** He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills.

The 2nd HEAVEN is OUTER SPACE (Psalm 8:3), the home of the moon, the planets, and the stars. It's the place we send rocket ships, space shuttles, satellites, & *Star Trek*. ^{ESV} **Psalm 8:3** When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place . . . “

The 3rd HEAVEN . . . is PARADISE/HEAVEN (2 Corinthians 12:2-5; Luke 23:43). is where TRUE BELIEVERS go. In this **Vs**, whatever else you can say about PARADISE, we can say for sure that it's a place where Jesus is. We know for sure that WHEN a believer dies, he/she enters into the conscious presence of Jesus. Look @ **Vs 46** . . . Now, IF Jesus when He breathed His last breath was embraced in God's hands, and IF believers are with Jesus, we can begin to piece together a partial picture of PARADISE: Paradise is a GLORIOUS place where the souls of believers are held securely w/in the conscious perfect love of God & in the personal presence of Christ.

2 Cor. 12, PARADISE is actually called the “3rd Heaven . . . “ **Vv 2-5** . . . What we know for sure here is that what this man experienced so greatly exceeded anything he had ever experienced that he COULD NOT put his experience of heaven into words! Now, you could drain the dictionary dry and still not come up w/the words to even begin to describe the after death destination of every believer in Christ!

The 4th HEAVEN is the NEW HEAVENS & the NEW EARTH (Revelation 21:1-7). That's the final state / condition of all who are “in Christ”.

The MAIN IDEA of this lesson and the next: **The HOPE Christians have is BOTH in LIFE after DEATH AND in the life AFTER life after death!**

The question for this 1st of 2 lessons is: What happens to a Believer (one whose trust is in Christ alone, someone who is “in Christ”) when he/she dies? We answer the question with 4 affirmations of hope.

1. He/She Is ENDOWED with MORAL PERFECTION.

“Goodness” and where we go when we die . . . Often times, we make goodness a CONDITION of heaven rather than a RESULT of something else. NOBODY is perfect. If we were, we would NOT have needed Christ. As Christians, we KNOW our NEED, & We come to Christ w/the empty hands of FAITH & received the GIFT of JUSTIFICATION. Christians are DECLARED RIGHTEOUS on the basis of the LIFE & DEATH of Jesus.

Now, according to the clear teaching of *Hebrews 12:23*, ALL believers dying in the Lord 1 day come into the company of “. . . *the SPIRITS of JUST MEN made PERFECT . . .*” What does that mean? When a Xn his/her last breath, a CONCENTRATION of God’s sanctifying grace & power COMPLETES the work of conforming EVERY BELIEVER’S SOUL to the MORAL LIKENESS of Christ!

Christians who die are now SINLESS souls who no longer battles every w/sin OR w/the EFFECTS of sin.

Beloved, WE need to REMIND ourselves again & again that when a Xn dies, he/she GAINS that which is the BURNING DESIRE every True Believer. We cannot IMAGINE being completely, finally released from ALL sin, but EVERY XN in this room LONGS for that day when we no longer struggle @ ALL w/sin! That day arrives when we breathe our last. That is our CONFIDENT HOPE!

2. He/she Is IMMEDIATELY ushered into the PRESENCE of CHRIST.

“. . . gone where?” [I remember watching an episode of a Television show many years ago where a Mother w/two daughters passed away. When the Mother died, the older sister turned to the younger and said, “Well, Dawn, Mom’s GONE.” “Gone WHERE?” & then the episode ended.] Friends, that’s a GREAT QUESTION to consider when a loved one dies. Praise God, Q: “Gone WHERE?” is a question the BIBLE answers w/crystal clear clarity. In *2nd Corinthians 5:6-8*; the testimony of the Apostle PAUL was this: The MOMENT our SOULS leave our bodies @ death, we are INSTANTLY in the PRESENCE of the LORD.

In **Philippians 1:21-23**, Paul testifies that as good as this life may be, the DESIRE of his heart is to depart & to be w/Christ, for THAT is FAR BETTER than ANY-THING on this earth! You see, our TRUE home is not in Decatur GA, or Dallas, TX, or Crystal Springs, MS, or Waynesboro, MS, or HATTIESBURG, MS, or Gadsden, AL, or Jackson, MS, or Brandon, MS.

My TRUE HOME is in the immediate, never-to-be-suspended, actual presence of CHRIST. At death, we go to our TRUE HOME. ["Our God our Help in Ages Past"] On this earth, EVEN when surrounded by our loving families, WE are HOMESICK. But one day we will be at HOME w/the Lord.

3. He/She ENTERS the company of the SAINTS.

Individuality in birth and death . . . and community. Each of us ENTERS this world as an INDIVIDUAL. And when we DIE, we DIE as an individual. After birth, we become part of a COMMUNITY. So it should be no surprise that IMMEDIATELY after a Xn leaves this earth as an individual, IF you die as a believer, you become a member of a forever COMMUNITY of people in a state FOREVER TOGETHERNESS, **1 Thess. 4:16-17 . . .**

[Interaction with the LORD, 1st, and with others is part of what the afterlife is like for Christians. Imagine sitting down w/Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob & Moses & David & Peter & Paul & John & INTERACT w/them & thank them from the bottom of his heart for their writings & perhaps to ask a question or two, like, "Now Paul, just what DID you MEAN when you wrote this or that Vs?"]

The ULTIMATE FELLOWSHIP! You know, 1 of the many WONDERFUL things about WHERE believers go would HAVE to be the indescribable PRIVILEGE & HONOR of living FOREVER in the midst of a GLORIOUS ASSEMBLY of SAINTS ~ glorified BELIEVERS ~ who are CAPTIVATED & RAVISHED by the sight JESUS! In THAT assembly, we can HONESTLY say w/o hesitation, "Folks, it just doesn't get ANY better than THIS!"

4. He/she Enters the PROMISED REST.

Rev 14:13 . . . People are designed to be WORKERS, both now and in the "life after life after death". We work HARD. We strive to be DEDICATED to our FAMILY, JOB, CHURCH. We want to SERVE God / others.

But as the years roll by, as ALWAYS happens this side of eternity, life takes its toll on our body, & we STRUGGLE. [Good news / bad news about our cells . . . WALL cells in the human body are replaced over a period of roughly seven years, the body is constantly replacing cells, but each replacement is trading DOWN!] . Sooner or later, physically, we ALL struggle, some more than others.

WHY do we struggle? The Reason is, in this world in which we live is a FALLEN world. [As Puritan Thomas Watson once observed, “As Xns, even though we wear the YOKE of CHRIST, we still plow a CURSED field.”] Life IS difficult. We all know loved ones whose last days were DIFFICULT days. Beloved, when we live in a *broken* body in a *broken* world. And as we grow older, physically, one of the hardest parts of life is the very LIVING of it!

But for now, for believers who die in the Lord, there’s REST. [As the hymn writer Samuel Stennet wrote, “No chilling winds nor poisonous breath Can reach that healthful shore; Sickness, sorrow, pain and death, Are felt and feared no more. “For all the Saints, who from their Labors REST]

It’s hard to imagine. No pain. No physical limitations. No infections. No sickness. No struggle. Just PEACE. & REST. The Christian life is NOT a playground, it’s a battleground. Life is a STRUGGLE and a BATTLE. But at death, the Christian receives an HONORABLE DISCHARGE from the Battles of life, & right now, believers are ENJOYING the PROMISED REST of Heaven, which is an “active rest”!

How many have “FACEBOOK”? On **Facebook**, there’s something called “relationship status”. Today, you need to be sure your “relationship status” reads: “In a SAVING relationship ... w/CHRIST”. If THAT’S your PRESENT status, then your FUTURE status will be: **ENDOWED W/moral perfection, in the presence of CHRIST (which is the very deepest desire of our hearts fulfilled), fellowshipping w/the company of the SAINTS, & ENJOYING the PROMISED REST!** Wow? Can it get any better than this?

But there’s more... [. . .] But what comes next? For a Christian, there’s “A life AFTER life after death.” What is that all about? We’ll see next week.