

SERIES: Life After Death Wk. 2

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*"Now, there was a rich man and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes being in torment and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue for I am in agony in this flame. But Abraham said, child, remember that during your life, you received your good things and likewise Lazarus, bad things. But now he is being comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you, there is a great chasm fixed so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able and that none may cross over from there to us. And he said, then I beg you father, that you send him to my father's house for I have five brothers in order that he may warn them so that they will not come to this place of torment. But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them. But he said, no father Abraham. But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. But he said to him, if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." (*NASB, Luke 16:19-31)*

Now there are several things that we can learn about life after death from this passage. First of all, we need to identify that this is referring to this intermediate state. There's no question that what happens here is immediate. This is not a reference to the future Resurrection. This is a reference to what happens immediately and there's clearly a sense of urgency and awareness of that.

The next thing we notice is the fact that there is a chasm and the chasm is fixed. You have people on one side which is referred to as *Abraham's bosom*, which is Paradise. It's Heaven, it's whatever you'd like to call it, and the other side is a place of torment, and it's very clear that you're on one side or the other, - and you can't go back and forth. There's no middle ground. Perhaps you've seen on some sort of a television show or a movie, some sort of a scene where when you die, on the other side, you end up in this long line - kind of looks like immigration at the airport - and way up ahead of you there's a desk and there's someone at the desk and they're checking off, do you go to the right or do you go to the left? You have to know that is totally fictitious. There will never be a scene like that. At the moment of death your eternal destination is finalized and you immediately are either into the place of Paradise or you are immediately into

a place of torment. There is no line and there is no judgment where it'll go either way. There is a judgment for believers for one thing and there is a judgment for unbelievers for something else. They're two totally separate judgments.

What the text says though is there are two sides and those sides are fixed. That would certainly address a doctrine put forth by some called purgatory. It's helpful to know that there is no place in the Bible that even remotely comes close to affirming the doctrine of purgatory.

I believe the moment I die, I will stand in the presence of Jesus in Heaven, not based on my own righteousness, but based on the righteousness of Jesus. And because Jesus is fully righteous in the presence of God I stand in His righteousness. Therefore, I don't need this middle staging place to accomplish anything more. I'm fully 100% righteous because of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The text clearly indicates that you're in one place or the other and there is no middle ground.

The other thing that's interesting to notice from the text, is one of the questions that often comes up is, will we have a body in this intermediate stage? Well it seems fairly obvious from this text that the answer is yes, there will be some sort of an intermediate body before the Resurrection. You have a case where they recognize one another. You have a finger, you have thirst, you have a tongue, you have all the attributes of a body, and it's reasonable to expect that that is the case. It's important too to remember that the reason Jesus told this story, describing what happens immediately after you die, was not so that you could go home and at lunch today say, now wasn't that interesting? It is in order that it would radically change the way you live tomorrow. There is a heavenly value system and there is an earthly value system, and many people will live out an earthly value system, but the eternal price tag of that will be beyond description. 60 seconds after they die, they will know they have made a tremendous mistake. If the value system that will endure forever is the heavenly value system, then that's the value system we should be living out today.

Now it's important to realize what Jesus was saying is not that the rich man was where he was because he was rich or that the poor man was where he was because he was poor. The extreme is simply saying you take the greatest extreme of one who had everything in this life and one who had nothing in life, the fact is there is another value system at play; and the bottom line is those who have trusted Jesus as Savior, experience Paradise, those have rejected Jesus as Savior, end up in a place of torment. And understanding the reality of that should motivate us in how we live our lives.

Revelation Six affirms a few things we've already talked about and introduces just a couple of new things. This time period spoken of in Chapter six, precedes the New Heaven and the New Earth, is describing this intermediate period before the *resurrection of the dead* and before the New Heaven and New Earth, which is Revelation 20 and 21. So we can agree together that what's described here is describing what happens immediately after you die. It's this intermediate stage.

Verse Nine:

"When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."
(Rev. 6: 9-11)

One of the things we notice is in Verse nine he says, *I saw*, there's clearly language in this text that would indicate, again, there seems to be recognition. There seems to be a body. He says, *I saw*, a little bit later on he *cried out*, which would talk about a voice, a little bit later on he talks about them being *given a white robe*. You really don't put a robe on a spirit and *they rest*, I mean all of those would seem to indicate consistent with Luke 16 there is some sort of an intermediate body that seems to be, I would say, fairly clear.

These souls, as they're called, are the martyrs on Earth and he'll talk more about them in Chapter seven, but the reason he calls them souls is I think just identifying that they are people who have died, but very much alive in the presence of Jesus. The term soul does not imply that there's no body. We often get ourselves confused when we think soul means it's just something immaterial kind of floating around the universe. Genesis two says, when God took the material and combined it with the immaterial, that man became a living soul. It's simply a reference to a person. So, this could very easily be a reference to people that have died are in the presence of Jesus, and certainly does not mean that there is no body.

It's interesting to notice a couple of other things. For example, when the martyrs in essence are interceding and praying to God, they're talking about what's going on, on Earth. They clearly have an awareness of what's currently happening on Earth and they're actually interceding on behalf of the people that are still engaged in the warfare on Earth.

This idea that after we die, we become a disembodied spirit and we kind of float in the universe completely disconnected with what's happening on the Earth, completely disconnected with what's on the heart of God, is a ridiculous notion. It just is not a Biblical concept at all. The fact of the matter is there will be prayers in this intermediate heaven. They will be those believers who have died and are now in the presence of Jesus, just like these believers here who are interceding to God on behalf of those who are still engaged in the battle on Earth. We often talk about there will be no tears in Heaven, but if you look at that text, it's referring to the New Heaven and the New Earth. What it actually says is He will wipe away all of our tears, which seems to imply that there are still some tears in this intermediate stage. I think believers who die are still every bit as much engaged in the battle as they were before. Now in the presence of Jesus, they are very aware of what's happening on Earth. They are interceding for you. They are cheerleading you and they are very aware of what's happening.

There's this wonderful passage in Hebrews chapter 11 where it talks about these great men and women who are heroes of faith, who ran their leg of a relay race so well, and then the imagery is they pass the baton onto us as the next generation. And then Hebrews 12 says that when we run our leg of the race, we do so under this cloud of witnesses. It's an arena metaphor that in essence says they climb into the bleachers of Heaven and they watch, and they cheer as you run your leg of the race. And now having seen the reality of the other side, I would suggest to you they're more engaged, they're more focused, they're wanting even more for you to run your leg of the race, in such a way that that we will win the race. It's a wonderful imagery that suggests the fact that rather than when people die, they're just kind of disconnected on a cloud somewhere, but they're every bit as much engaged as they were, and they crawl into the bleachers of Heaven. We know the angels do that. And I think we have strong evidence that the believers do that. And they know and they intercede for you and they cheerlead for you and they want nothing more than for you to run your leg of the race well. Now I don't know about you, but I find that highly, highly motivating.

Can you imagine the day when you die? And immediately you're in the presence of the Apostle Paul and you give him a big high five and you say, I want you to know when I read your story and when I read how passionate you were for the Gospel, and when I read about how much you were willing to sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel, I want you to know that changed me. I want you to know that motivated me, that made me want to run my leg of the race with everything I have, in order that I may run well. And for the Apostle Paul to say, you know, I know that, and I've been watching you, and I've been interceding for you, and I've been cheerleading you, and I'm glad you're home. You say, well, that's just some sort of a fantasy. No, it's not. The fantasy is this disembodied spirit floating on a cloud somewhere. I would say what I just described to you is a very Biblical theology. Can you imagine Moses and Abraham and Elijah and Peter and John and Paul sitting in the bleachers of Heaven, and they're interceding for you and they're cheerleading you and they want you to run your leg of the race as well as they did. That is a staggering thought.

This is what I would suggest to you to make this very practical. Imagine someone in your life who has been a spiritual mentor, might be a parent, could be a spouse, could be even a child, could be someone significant in your life, that has now died and is in the presence of Jesus. And imagine that person every day is watching and is interceding for you. That is cheerleading you and wants nothing more than for you to run your leg of the race well. What I'd suggest you do is write on a piece of paper, that name, put it on your mirror, put it on your desk, put it somewhere where you'll see it every day, this week. And every day be aware of the fact that there is this cloud of witnesses and they're for you. And they're cheerleaders and they're interceding for you and they want nothing more than to see you run your leg of the race well. I tell you when you get that, it is life changing.

I try to imagine my Dad. I try to imagine my grandparents. I try to imagine my pastoral mentor, Kurt Laymen in Heaven and they are cheerleading and they are interceding and they are rooting and they want nothing more than for me to run my leg of the race well, and they're looking forward to the day when I'm finally home.

Cara: This is a really encouraging message, Bryan. It sounds as though all of Heaven is very focused on us. Is that true?

Bryan: Yeah, I think so. Us as the Church, the Bride of Christ, that's where the battle is. That's where the action is. And I think that's where the focus of attention is right now.

Arnie: So Bryan, we have the great reunion to look forward to and I get that. But the sad truth is there is another side to this and that is some people will experience Hell.

Bryan: Yeah. So the series we're doing is really life after death for the believer, but there's another side to it and that is for those who reject God's offer of Salvation, there is the reality of judgment. So I thought maybe it'd be helpful to go through some commonly asked questions. Like the first one is how can a loving God be a God of Wrath?

Arnie: That's a great one.

Bryan: And I think people have this confusion that those two don't go together. But I would say it's precisely because God is a God of Love, that God has wrath. To have evil in the world and God be indifferent toward it isn't love. That would be, you know, indifference flows out of hate. So, if you break into my house and you attack my family, it's because I love them that you're going to get my anger, you're going to get my wrath. And so it is with God.

Bryan: I think the other part of it is love to be legitimate, has a choice. And so, love can't be forced or compelled. People have a legitimate option to reject Christ or to receive Christ. And Hell is the reminder that that option is legit and there are people that will choose to reject His Salvation.

Bryan: I think another question is, does the Bible teach an eternal place of punishment? And I think it certainly does. You can demonstrate this in a number of passages, but Jesus talks like for example, in Matthew 25, we call it the mirror technique. So, He talks about eternal life contrasts with eternal punishment. So, if we're sure one is eternal, eternal life, then that requires the other to be eternal as well - that's the mirror technique - so it's eternal punishment. People ask, is it a literal lake of fire? I think a lot of Christians have a theology of Hell that's maybe more like Dante's Inferno than it is maybe a good Biblical theology. The images of darkness and fire are common in both the Old and New Testament. Darkness has to do with separation from God. Fire has to do with judgment. They're almost always figurative. It's very rare that they're literal. So, in this case, fire and darkness would be competing images because fire has light. So, it makes it even more obvious that those are meant to be metaphors or images. So, there's separation from God. There's judgment. Paul writes in Second Thessalonians One that it's the eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord. And I think that's what it is.

Bryan: Another question that comes up, will God punish someone forever, for what people call a temporal sin? Kind of like people are in jail and at some point, they should serve their time and basically be released, but that isn't what Hell is at all. I think the best way to think of Hell is Romans One *into eternity*. So, people worship the creature rather than the Creator. The result of that is then they have all these behaviors that reflect their desire to be their own god and three times in Romans one, Paul says, God turned them over to their desires. He let them have their

way. So essentially, Hell is that trajectory on into eternity. So, they're rebelling forever, so then they are judged forever.

Bryan: Tim Keller says, Hell is the trajectory of a soul living a self-absorbed, self-centered life going on forever. They're also separated forever because they rebelled forever. People are not in Hell begging for forgiveness, asking for a second chance, pleading with God. It's just the opposite. They're all the more determined to rebel, to have their own way. You know, CS Lewis said, the doors of Hell are locked from the inside, and that's what he meant. People are rebelling forever, and will be judged forever.

Bryan: The last one is, can someone be saved after death? I would say Biblically, there's certainly no evidence to suggest there's any hope for Salvation after death to those who reject Christ. So I'd take it a little bit farther, for a preacher, someone like me, to actually imply that there is a second chance for Salvation after death, with no Biblical support for that, just seems unbelievably reckless, and actually about the most unloving thing I could do for people that need to be encouraged, that today is the day of Salvation.

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