

What Happens When I Die?

Hebrews 9:27

What happens when I die? Have you ever asked yourself that question? If you haven't, one day you will. Death is a reality. And, let's face it, it's a reality we don't like to think about. But the Bible is clear:

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment

And in our hearts we know this is true. But what happens AFTER we die? Job, the oldest book in the Bible asks the question like this:

Job 14:14 If a man dies, will he live again?

I think a lot of people ask Job's question. "If a man dies, will he live again?" So for the next few weeks we're going to take a side trip from our series in John and answer the question, "What happens when I die? Will I live again?" Is there more to this life than just this life?

When it comes to the topic of death, it's important we understand what God says about it in the Bible. If we ignore God's Word on the subject, death will always be a mystery, a great unknown that fills us with dread and fear.

But in the Bible, God has given us a lot of information about death, not only what happens when we die, but what happens after we die.

And it also gives us real life examples of people who died and what happened to them. So this morning let's look at the basic facts the Bible gives us about death.

Fact #1: When we die our spirit leaves our body. James 2:26 says:

James 2:26 ...the body without the spirit is dead...

When Jesus died, his spirit left his body. Do you remember the last words our Lord uttered before He died? As, He said:

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this, He breathed His last.

He dismissed life from His body and His spirit left His body.

You see, as humans we're made up of a body that contains a spirit. To be more precise, humans are actually spirits that are clothed in a body.

Even though we have physical features, the real me/you is the person INSIDE, right? The organs in our body do what they do, so that our spirit can express itself in the physical world – the world we see.

But it's our spirit that's alive and energizes our body. And when our spirit leaves, our body loses its source of life and is empty. Understand our life, our being, is in our spirit NOT in our body. That means that when we die, even though the organs in our body stop, LIFE doesn't stop. It continues.

Fact #2: We don't stop living when we die. Do you remember what Jesus said in John 8:51?

John 8:51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.

Remember the context of what He says here. "Keeping his word" means believing He's the Savior. And listen to what He says! Those who believe in Christ will never see death.

He DOESN'T mean we won't experience physical death. He means that the instant our eyes close in death is the same instant our eyes open in eternity. Isn't that awesome! For Christians it's a blink of the eye. It closes in this world and instantly opens in God's presence.

There's no such thing as purgatory, no intermediate state, no soul sleep. We continue to live, and as Christians we continue to live in God's presence. That's another fact Jesus' death teaches us is this.

Fact #3: Christians go directly to be with God when they die.

2 Corinthians 5:8 says:

2 Corinthians 5:8 ...to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Remember what Jesus told the believing thief on the cross next to Him?

Luke 23:43 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

So, when a person dies, their spirit leaves their body. They don't stop living. Christians go directly into the presence of God.

Fact #4: One day our body will be resurrected.

When Jesus died on the cross His spirit went into the presence of God in heaven. His body was embalmed and carried to a tomb. On the third day after His death, Jesus came back into that tomb to resurrect His body.

Remember, his grave clothes were left behind. Jesus rose bodily from the grave. And, Jesus' resurrected body was the same, but also different, than it was before He died. Let me explain.

After His resurrection, Jesus looked the same. He showed the disciples the nail scars in his hands and feet. And his body was solid, touchable. Remember He told Thomas to touch him to erase all doubt He was alive. He ate food. People recognized Him. So His new body was a lot like His old one.

But at the same time His new body was different. He could travel long distances in an instant. He could walk through walls. He no longer grew tired. And what's so great is that Jesus' resurrected body is a preview of what our bodies will be like when we rise from the dead at the second coming. Paul describes our new bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44:

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

By the way, later in his book, Job answered his own question. "If a man dies will he live again?" In Job 19:25-27 he said:

Job 19:25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;

26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,

27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

So Job believed in the resurrection. He knew that he'd rise from the dead and be with God. Another fact Jesus' death and resurrection teach us is that:

Fact #5: Christians will spend eternity in a special place called heaven.

John 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

The place Jesus prepared for us is heaven. And Jesus says we will be there with Him.

Well, so far we've looked at what happens when Christians die. What does the Bible say about those who don't trust in Christ for forgiveness? Well, some facts are similar.

For example, when non-Christians die their spirit also separates from their body. Their life will also continue; their spirits are also eternal. But the Bible warns that people who haven't believed in Christ won't spend eternity in heaven. Revelation 20:15 says:

Revelation 20:15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

That is a sad, serious reality. Hell is nothing to laugh about, nothing to joke about it.

What will it be like for those who don't believe in Christ? Well, again the Bible tells us. In fact, Jesus gives us a firsthand account, the testimony of someone who's there right now. In Luke 16 Jesus tells a story. It's not a parable. Jesus never used names in parable.

It's a real life story, the deaths of a poor beggar named Lazarus and a rich man. Lazarus went to heaven but the rich man went to hell. And the way Jesus tells it indicates that He knew these men. So He wasn't making up the story just to make a point. It really happened. Listen to what Jesus says:

Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 Then he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.

27 Then he said, I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have

five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.

29 Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

31 But he said to him, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.

The rich man's experience tells us a lot about what hell is like. Did you notice as we read?

First of all, when he closed his eyes here and opened them there, he was alone. All alone. Can you imagine the shock? The fear? The horror of being all alone in hell.

On the other hand, when Lazarus closed his eyes here and opened them there, he was surrounded by God's angels who welcomed him and escorted him into God's presence.

The rich man was all alone and he knew where he was and why he was there. He was able to think, to remember, to communicate. He was in horrible physical pain, desperate for water. He was continually being burned by an unbelievably hot fire. He could see into heaven and he also knew the truth about life and death.

He knew there was a way to stay out of hell but not a way to get out of hell. He couldn't leave. It was a place so awful that this selfish man actually thought of others for once. He wanted to warn his family about it.

But he learned that people choose heaven or hell by faith in God's Word and no other way. And God's Word says that Jesus is the only way to heaven. He alone paid the price for our sins. That's why we must trust Him – in THIS life.

It's interesting that Jesus had more to say about hell than He did about heaven. He doesn't want anyone to go there. But that's not HIS choice; it's ours.

The Bible describes hell as everything that heaven isn't. It's a place of constant torment, a place of pain and fear, a place of horrible loneliness. And the worse thing about hell is that it is a place without God's loving presence. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says:

2 Thessalonians 1:9 these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

In Matthew 8:12 Jesus describes hell as a "place of outer darkness and of weeping and torment." Several years ago I watched a documentary about firefighters on TV. They had heat-proof cameras attached to their helmets, so as they entered burning building, you could see what they saw.

And they explained a fact that gave great insight into the lake of fire. In the middle of fire, there's no oxygen, because the fire is consuming all of it. And the absence of oxygen creates darkness. The firefighters can't see anything. That's why they have to take lights with them.

Jesus said that the lake of fire is a place of darkness, a fire that produces intense, burning heat and consumes all light. That's a terrible image to see in our mind. But even more terrible for those who will experience it for eternity.

The fact is, when they die, those who believe in Christ will open their eyes in heaven. But those who don't will pass all alone into a dark, burning, painful, place where God is not. And they will be there forever.

We don't have a choice after we leave this life. When we close our eyes in death, our choices end. Where

we open them depends on the choice we made in this life.

Reject Jesus, refuse to believe in Jesus and you make your choice. When you die, you will open your eyes and be all alone in hell.

Believe what the Bible says. That Jesus is God's Savior. God Himself, who came to earth and voluntarily went to the cross. As He hung there He gathered the sin of the world into His body and suffered holy judgment for all of it. He took your place and mine and paid for our sins – ALL of them.

Now He offers eternal life in heaven if you will only believe. Make the choice to believe that what He did on the cross He did for you and accept Him as your Savior. And when you die, you will open your eyes in the presence of God who loves you and be with Him forever in heaven.

As God speaks to your heart right now and shows you the choice you need to make, please make it. Heaven or hell will be decided by it.

Let's pray. Pray for ourselves. Pray for the people we love to make the right decision.