



A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END TIMES

Week 16: What Happens When We Die?

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In previous lessons we have studied the Rapture, and our Rewards. In today's lesson we begin a discussion of another subject that fits into the general flow of study: "What happens when we die."

LET ME BEGIN BY SAYING - - - I have been the last person many people talked to before they died. They didn't plan it that way, nor did I.

It came with the territory.

- I was once an RN in a Coronary Critical Care Unit: lawyers, professors, doctors, business people, artists, TV personalities, and politicians were my patients.
- So were drug addicts, felons, homeless people, and sexual predators. I took care of all kinds of people from many walks of life.

Many physical conditions and diseases are outside of our control. Cardiac disease is one condition that can be very unpredictable.

- I once watched a very successful entrepreneur negotiate a business deal over the phone as we prepared him for emergency surgery.
- He died suddenly before he could give final approval to the terms. We could not resuscitate him.
- He was a Type A without a Plan B.

As a clinician I used to say, "Death is the great equalizer." No matter their background or their socio-economic status, every person is inclined to say predictable things when they face the end of life:

- "I wish I had spent more time with my kids."
- "I would've liked to have had kids."
- "I should've given more attention to my friends."
- "I should've been a better friend."
- "My accomplishments don't mean much to me now." and so on.
- I've heard lots of **similar** things from lots of **dissimilar** people.

When one faces their own mortality, they shed the act.

- There is nobody to impress anymore.
- There are no schedules to maintain,
- There are no causes to champion, no goals to pursue, and no promises to keep.
- They're worrying much more about their next heartbeat - their next breath. Will it come?

Death has confronted all of us. We've all lost best friends, family members, and those we have worked alongside. From a human perspective, many of these people have died at 'inconvenient times.' However, it was their "appointed time" (**Cf. Hebrews 9:27**).

As I consider the question, "What happens when we die?" I want to look at the examples of two people.

I want to talk about people that Jesus talked about, and wherever I need to discuss a specific situation and I am unable to talk about these two people, we will imagine somebody fictitious.

I. TWO PEOPLE REPRESENTING TWO DESTINATIONS:

- A. **One who dies IN THE FAITH** (Here, I'll use Lazarus from the parable of "the rich man and Lazarus" in **Luke 16:19-31** Many of you may be thinking of friends and family who have died in the faith).
- B. **One who dies WITHOUT Saving Faith** (Now we're talking about the "rich man" in **Luke 16:19-31**. Keep in mind, this person will be an example of anyone who has died without saving faith, from Old Testament times to present, and into the future.)

II. ONE WHO DIES IN THE FAITH:

NOTE: This is someone who dies having already believed "the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

A. I need to give some background here:

1. This is a phrase we toss around a lot in Christian circles, "the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." While it is embraced in our Gospel-centered churches today, I personally believe many people have little or no understanding of what it really means.
2. I personally feel there are times the phrase is too confining, it doesn't tell the full picture. Here's why:
3. Because "**one who dies in the faith**" is one who dies believing that Jesus Christ is who He said He was.
4. There are a few important things we need to capture with this concept:
 - a. Jesus said He was God Himself (**Cf. John 10:30** – "...I and the Father are one."). Jesus was not just a messenger from God, but He WAS God! He was one with God; He was equal to God.
 - b. It's through Jesus Christ alone that there is the forgiveness of sins (**Ephesians 1:7**) – "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace..."
 - c. (I could say more, but "lastly"): Jesus Christ alone is the way to eternal life. Here's the situation: Jesus and His disciples are having a discussion, and Thomas asks, "...how can we know the way?" (**John 14:6** – "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

B. What is essential for saving faith?

1. A couple weeks ago we mentioned the “good thief” who died beside Jesus Christ. Jesus promised him that he would be in paradise when he died.
 - a. But the Bible does not record the “good thief” praying a prescriptive prayer.
 - b. He doesn’t ask for forgiveness of sins, or for Jesus to come into his heart and save him.
 - c. And (GASP!) he is not baptized...(that’s a different matter altogether, but I don’t believe the Bible teaches that Baptism is necessary for salvation)
 - d. What the “good thief” **does do** is he asks for is a favor, and it’s in the nature of that favor that he expresses his full and complete faith (and here we go) - - that Jesus Christ was everything He said He was!
 - e. The “good thief” merely asked that Jesus Christ remember him when He came into His kingdom.
 - f. IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND: In other words, the “good thief” had faith that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, and therefore his only hope. The “good thief” demonstrated that faith even as Jesus was dying.
 - g. For that, the “good thief” received salvation. He believed IN Jesus Christ. He put his full faith in Jesus and he reserved no faith in anything or anybody else.
2. This is why when the jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered him in **Acts 16:31**, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.”*
 - a. The only thing the jailer had to DO was demonstrate proper and full faith in Jesus Christ. (The passage goes on to say that Paul and Silas explained the word of the Lord to him; I take that to mean they explained who Jesus Christ was and that He alone was the path to salvation).
 - b. Then the jailer and his household were baptized. This was NOT a requirement of salvation. We bring nothing to this supernatural transaction, however it was a DEMONSTRATION of their faith.
3. Simply said, the jailer and the “good thief,” and our Christian friends or family that have died, they all believed that Jesus Christ is who He said He was.
4. They all believed that in Jesus Christ alone is the forgiveness of sins and the way to eternal life. Therefore, they have escaped the wrath of God.
 - a. **Romans 5:6-11** explains that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ will not suffer God’s wrath for his sin, because the Son took God’s wrath upon Himself when He died in our place on the cross.
5. Some of you may be uncomfortable with the things I am saying. We’ve been raised in the church for so long that we feel we HAVE to ask Jesus to “come into our heart” in order to be saved.

- a. Believe me when I say that plenty of people who have used prescriptive words and phrases have done little more than try to pop a spiritual pill.
 - b. The things they say do not necessarily line up with the things they ultimately believe, or don't believe.
 - c. What I am telling you here gets to the center of the matter. **The Bible teaches our saving faith rests upon what we TRULY believe.**
- C. It's easy to talk about faith in reference to Jesus Christ and that He is everything He said He was, but what about the Old Testament folks? What about the ancients that lived thousands of years before the redemptive work on the cross. THEY HAD TO LOOK AHEAD!
1. **Hebrews Ch. 11** is the great FAITH chapter of the Bible, and it is chock-full of Old Testament examples of people who had true saving faith before the cross!
 - a. And **vs. 1** summarizes **their** demonstration of faith as *"...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*
 - b. Their lives are outlined in detail in this chapter.
 - We see how they each demonstrated myriad ways a genuine faith.
 - These individuals placed their faith in God, in His works, in His word, in His promises, in His commands, in His abilities, in His provisions, and so on.
 - In all respects before the cross, they also placed their full faith in God alone and no one else.
- D. Consider what **Hebrews 11:3** says regarding faith and the greatness of God; *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."*
1. In other words, God is responsible for all of Creation.
 2. Not only is He responsible for it, but He made it out of nothing ("ex nihilo"). In one moment it was not there, and in the next moment it was. **How? Why?** He is God!
 3. **Psalm 19:1** states: *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork."*
 4. Creation, and nature itself, shows us God and His greatness.
 5. These principles are in the present tense. That is, the heavens "declare," and the sky "proclaims" the work of God. It's a continual testimony!
 6. What we see in nature is meant to constantly show us that: (a.) God exists and (b.) how amazing and great He truly is.
 7. That's why **Romans 1:19-20** drives home the point that people can begin the journey of a saving faith by first properly acknowledging the evidence of God, by glorifying Him as a result, and by giving Him thanks.

8. God gives sufficient evidence of Himself in Creation for mankind to get on the right path. He can sovereignly meet them as He chooses to from that point. That is why they are “without excuse.”

- I grew up on the mission field and I’ve heard plenty of gravely and crusty old saints (though well-intentioned) claim God cannot reach anyone with a saving faith without the verbal testimony and witness of another.
- They quote **Romans 10:13-14** to support their case: *for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then can they call on the One in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?...*
- I certainly believe we have been called, and we have an obligation to share the “good news.” We also have a key role to play now as we always have and will continue to have, **however....**
- ...we cannot let our personal views override the truth of Scripture. God called Abraham sovereignly and without a witness. This is the doctrine of sovereign election.
- ...and God continues to bring people to salvation in places like Iran, India, and other parts of the world where the Gospel has not been preached.

Hebrews Ch. 11 (again - - this is STILL the great ‘faith chapter’ content) concludes in **vs. 39** by saying, “*These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.*” They lived believing in what and who was to come, but none of them were able to look back on the cross and back on Jesus Christ as you and I are able to.

- E. So that brings me full circle, and back to our example of Lazarus in **Luke 16:19-31**. Who was he?
1. This is likely a real life situation that Jesus knew of, and perhaps those who were listening to him also knew of it as well.
 2. Most importantly – somewhere along the line in his life, the context of the story makes it clear Lazarus had placed a proper saving faith in God.
 3. We are not told when or how, but we know he had nothing on earth; all of his investments were in his eternal life.

QUESTION: Where did Lazarus go when he died? **ANSWER:** He went to Abraham’s side. (paradise, or heaven).

4. The angels carried him there (**vs. 22**), which is likely what happened to anyone who dies **IN THE FAITH**.

5. In other words, when true Christians die, the angels escort us into the presence of God Himself.
 6. This is a fact that is consistent with other Scripture: Paul said of death for the true believer, that it is to be:
 - a. *"...absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."* (He also indicated this should be our preference in **2 Corinthians 5:8**, *"...and willing rather"*)
 - b. I felt a pang of jealousy when my good friend Randy died. He had already gained the wonderful truth for himself, a truth that STILL lies before me.
 - c. He was in glory, but I'm still here with an aching back, fading eyes and the need to pay my bills, and face these difficult and uncertain times.
 7. Paul also states the converse principle two verses earlier in **vs. 6** where he clarifies, *"...we know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord."*
 - a. So if you are alive on earth, you cannot be in heaven. And vice versa.
- F. What happened to Lazarus' body when he died? (getting back to **Luke 16**). What happens to true believers when they die?
1. The answer is their soul goes instantaneously into the presence of God. Paul already told us that. **But what is our soul?**
 2. The short answer is you are different than a prairie dog; you have a soul.
 - a. "It's the real you!"
 - b. It's your consciousness, your awareness, your eternal substance, your true "state of being."
 - c. It's your emotional and mental center, the seat of your expressions, and it's the part of you that placed your faith in Jesus Christ. "It's the real and eternal part of you!"
 - d. One abstract way of looking at this: It'd be YOU even if you had a different body.
 3. The Bible teaches our soul is interactive and able to communicate with others, experience emotion, and it has form and structure (**Cf. Revelation 6:9-11**). Here the souls of believers are able to:
 - a. Communicate audibly with God and with each other.
 - b. Make requests. Be intentional.
 - c. Feel emotion. Be logical. Seek justice.
 - d. Engage in worship ("holy and true")

- e. Exercise patience.
 - f. Wear a white robe (so there is form of a sort)
 - g. I believe all these attributes of our soul are what other believers like Lazarus, and others who have died IN the faith, are presently experiencing right now in the presence of God.
4. But at the resurrection (this is at the Rapture), something happens to our souls. They are reunited with our bodies. But it's not the same body we have now.
- a. It's a "glorified one." (We talked about this a few lessons ago).
 - b. We remember, it is a far more upgraded / advanced version of the one you have right now.
 - c. Paul calls it an "imperishable" one in **1 Corinthians 15:52**
"...in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."
 - d. Right now, the body we have is a perishable one. It doesn't last. From the time we are born, we start the process of dying. For some of us it takes longer than for others.
 - e. But the inevitable, the inescapable truth is: we will DIE! This body is a temporary house for our soul, the real US!
 - f. Some people spend a lot of money trying to upgrade this temporary house. They tummy tuck, and they face lift. They color their hair, botox their wrinkles, and throw in an occasional new joint or two.
 - g. But none of that sidesteps the fact we are going to die in this body. It is little more than a house for our soul however our bodies are not who we really ARE.
 - h. At the Rapture, the Bible says true believers will get a new body, we will be CHANGED!
 - i. We will inherit the fuller definition of the Biblical promise of 'eternal life'

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (John 3:36).