

Death and Resurrection #2

Eccl. 7:1-4 – “A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one’s birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. “

Last week we looked at the inevitability of death, the fact that there will be a judgment after death, the immortality of the soul (i.e., that death does not end your conscious existence), the fear of death, and how the death of a believer is completely different than that of the unbeliever.

How Does God See Death?

God alone determines the time and manner of death. It is very hard for us to understand why some people who are “relatively” innocent are allowed to suffer such painful and gruesome deaths, while others who seem to be more deserving, pass away with no apparent pain or difficulty. We do not and cannot fully know the answers to such questions, but must simply rest in the wisdom, goodness, justice, and sovereignty of God, and not presume to judge him for the ways in which he takes people out of this world. One respected Jewish author today believes it is normal and acceptable to be angry with God; that it is possible to serve and obey God, but rather difficult to love him, because of the injustice in the world. Many people indeed are angry with God, but if a Christian says they are angry and cannot forgive God, I just shake my head, thinking “You need your priorities straightened.” He is the potter; you are the clay.

It would appear that God determines “Your time is up. You have had your opportunity in life, and now you are marked for the harvest.” In several places of the Bible it clearly calls for harvests of the earth, both of the righteous and the unrighteous. This will especially be true at the time of the end (Rev. 14:14-20), but it is also an apt metaphor for the deaths that occur right now.

Isa. 40:6-8 – “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” (quoted in 1 P. 1:24-25)

James uses a similar analogy to show that the rich should show humility, in 1:9-11 – “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”

Consider also the parable of the fishnet, and the parable of the tares and wheat.

So how does God see the death of one of his own?

Ps. 116:15 – “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” Death may be traumatic for families here on earth, but God sees death as “precious”; a wonderful moment when he releases his own from the travails of life, into his glorious light and liberty, and reward.

Jesus makes it clear that he leaves us here in this world for a time, but is happily awaiting the time when we can be with him where he is, and see his glory.

Jn. 14:2-3 – “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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

There is a reward to the righteous. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). We have lived our lives by faith, not actually seeing God, but believing anyway, and so when we die we will actually see Christ.

What Follows Death?

Perhaps the clearest idea we can get from the Bible is in Lk. 16:19-31, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

- 22 - When the beggar died, he was carried by angels into “Abraham’s bosom”.
- 22 - When the rich man died, “he was buried”.
- 23 – The rich man was in hell (the word is “Hades” in Greek). What was this like?
 - “He lift up his eyes ... and seeth Abraham ... and Lazarus in his bosom” (he could see)

- He was “in torments”. i.e., not “soul sleep”, but conscious pain. It even says he is tormented “in flame”.
- Abraham was “afar off”.
- 24 – He cried to Abraham for mercy, by sending Lazarus with water, because he was “tormented in this flame”.
- 25 – Abraham said that the rich man had his comforts in life, while Lazarus had suffered, and now it is reversed.
 - Lazarus is “comforted”.
 - The rich man is “tormented”.
- 26 – There is a great gulf fixed between Hades and “Abraham’s Bosom”, and no one can pass from one side to the other.
- 27-31 – The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to the world to warn his brothers, so they do not also end up in Hades. This is refused, saying that the word of Moses and the prophets is sufficient warning.

So what can we learn about the state of souls after death?

1. They have conscious existence – they can see, speak, and experience suffering and regret, or comfort.
2. That the circumstances and social positions of this life are no indication of the real condition of the soul.
3. That there is a distinction between the destinations of righteous and unrighteous, Hades for the wicked, and “Abraham’s Bosom” for the righteous. (“Abraham’s Bosom” is called “Paradise” elsewhere.)
4. Once there, there is no possibility of change, and no possibility of return.
5. At death, believers have the pleasure of being escorted by angels.
6. Hades is a place of extreme pain and torment.
7. Paradise is a place of comfort, blessing, and rest; the opposite of Hades.
8. Souls are recognizable – the rich man knew who Abraham was, and somehow recognized Lazarus, and Abraham knew not only the rich man, but the circumstances of their lives here on earth.
9. God considers our having the scriptures as sufficient basis on which to condemn the lost. They cannot plead ignorance. He will just say “You had the truth available if you had cared to read it.”
10. Part of the suffering of the lost is to be able to see the righteous enjoying the comforts of Paradise, while knowing that they could have been there, but will never have the slightest hope of relief.
11. The lost will not deny their fitness for Hades, or question God’s justice in condemning them. No matter how they denied hell on earth, they will be forced to accept its reality and justice. (Unlike prisoners on earth, who continually cry “Get me out of here, I don’t deserve this.”)

Given all this, it is logical to ask, is this what we mean by Heaven and Hell? The answer is no. It is often referred to as the “intermediate state” (what lies between this life and “the eternal state”).

What is the Difference Between Paradise/Hades, and Heaven/Hell?

1. Paradise/Hades are where people go now, at death. They are temporary, not eternal. “Heaven” and Hell (aka the Lake of Fire, or Gehenna) are the ultimate and everlasting destinations of all men.
2. Satan and demonic spirits will eventually be cast into the Lake of Fire, but now they are mostly free, though still under God’s authority and control.
3. There has not yet been a resurrection, so Paradise is a place suitable for our existence with God while we await the resurrection of our bodies. Hades on the contrary is a place suitable for the punishment of the wicked, even before their resurrection and final judgment.
4. At the return of Christ and the beginning of the Millennium, the beast (Antichrist) and false prophet will be cast into a “lake of fire burning with brimstone”, and Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. Rev. 19:20 – 20:3
5. There will be a “first resurrection” of the saints at the beginning of the Millennium. Rev. 20:4-6
6. At the end of the age (after the Millennium), Satan will be released and there will be a final rebellion which will be put down, and he is cast into the lake of fire. Then there is a second resurrection and the Great White Throne Judgment, after which death and Hades, and “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”. This is what we mean by the lost being condemned to an eternal “Hell”.
7. Then comes the “new heaven and new earth”, and the holy city, New Jerusalem. This is what we mean by having an eternal home “in heaven”.