

"What Happens at Death"

Since no one lives forever on this earth, what will happen to us when we die? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. This is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." Stay with us and we'll explore the Bible for what happens when we die.

Hello, we're here to search God's Word for the Lord's Way. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 29:29 that, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." God doesn't answer every question that we can ask, but God does give us everything that we need to know, everything that pertains to life and godliness. And if you wish to live with God eternally, the most important thing you can do is to study God's Word. We're always delighted when you spend this time with us. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

Now no one likes to talk about death or even think about it, and yet death is a topic we can't avoid. Heb. 9:27 says that, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." From our earliest days, we have heard about judgment, heaven and hell. And we know something exists beyond this life, but we don't always know everything we want to know. Movies and television stimulate our imagination, but they only provide somebody's guess about what lies beyond. We want to know what God says will happen when we die. And that's why we go to God's inspired Word for answers.

And today we're talking about a sensitive subject, so I want to speak to you personally. And I hope this time will be like two friends having a heart-to-heart conversation. Life is short, and death is certain. And even if you're young and healthy, you can't escape reality. Your death will either open the door to the most wonderful experience you've ever enjoyed or the worst experience anyone could have. God wants to bless you, and the Bible gives us the information that we need to find that blessing.

Now, we're offering a free book. This little book called After Life. And if you want to study more about this topic, this booklet is free or a CD is free of our study. If you just mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. And that number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from James 4:13 to 17, and then we'll explore what happens to us when we die.

Our reading today comes from the letter of James chapter 4 verses 13 to 17.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

That's an important reading from the book of James. Let's pray. Father we're grateful for the love that You share with us and for the life that we have. Help us Father not to take our lives for granted. And help us to do Your will always. This is our pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

The word "death" occurs over 150 times in the Old Testament and 120 times in the New Testament. Now death signifies separation. Physical death separates the body from the spirit. Spiritual death separates people from God and His blessing. We grieve when we lose our loved ones, because

we know that we can't be with them ever again in this life. The good news is that while death is a separation, it's not the end of our existence.

When David and Bathsheba's first child died, David said in 2 Samuel 12 and verse 23, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." We all will one day die. And the angels will come for us, and they'll take our spirits to another place.

This Bible describes death in James 2 and verse 26 "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." Now notice that it says the body is dead, but we're more than a body. We're body and spirit. The body dies but the spirit still exists. Ecclesiastes 12 and verse 7 says that, "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." When we die, our spirits return to God who made us. God is the Father of spirits according to Hebrews 12 and verse 9. Now your spirit is not physical or material, and it's not subject to death.

On the cross, Jesus told the thief, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23 verse 43). Now the Lord clearly says that we'll survive and be conscious beyond this life. Now the Lord expected to see the thief in Paradise. Now there's an inner spirit that survives death and is conscious. Life here and now is not all there is.

Yes, it is appointed for us once to die, then comes judgment. And death holds mysteries for us, no doubt about it. That the unknown, especially judgment, that's frightening. And we worry whether our afterlife will be peaceful. You remember the Lord Jesus said Matthew 7:13 to 14, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Now whenever you read a passage like Matthew 7 it surprises many who think nearly everybody is going to be saved and only a few of the worst will be lost. But that's not what Jesus says.

We must consider the afterlife. How we live here, will determine where we will spend eternity. Well what are we saved by? Well we're saved by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. What are we saved from? Well we're saved from the penalty of sin. And Jesus warned us in Matthew 5:29 to 30 that, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

The Lord Jesus gives us a glimpse of what happens after death in Luke 16 verses 19 to 31. And so let's listen to Him. "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 (he) 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 also 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.'"

Many think that this story is a parable and for that reason shouldn't be taken seriously; but Jesus is never trivial. When Jesus uses a figure of speech like a parable, He does so to emphasize a point not to trivialize it.

However one takes this story, there are two very different destinies awaiting after death. One destiny is filled with comfort and the other with agony. Lazarus and the rich man both knew where they were. Both could have conversations and could reason. Both could remember the lives that they lived back on earth.

Sometimes the Bible speaks of death as "sleep." And this is likely because the body after death appears to be sleeping. But this, however, does not mean that our spirits are unconscious or in some stupor. You'll remember that Moses and Elijah, though they had been dead for many centuries, had a conversation with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as Matthew records it in chapter 17, verses 1 to 5. Now death happens to the body, but death does not make our spirits unconscious.

The lives that we live here, and whether we are right with the Lord, will determine our future destiny. Now this illustration story of Lazarus and the rich man it opens our eyes to what happens when our spirits leave this world. After we die, the angels will come for us and they'll take us to a place that God has assigned for us. Now this may be a place of comfort or it may be a place of torment.

Scripture uses the word "Hades" to describe that place where disembodied spirits of dead people go. Some scholars say that "Hades" means "unseen"; while others say it means "all-receiving." Well Hades, whether it's one or the other, shouldn't be confused with the idea of Hell. Now Hades is a temporary place, between the time we die and we'll reside, our spirits will reside there until the Judgment Day, it's temporary; but hell comes after comes after the Judgment and it's eternal. Now no one will enter heaven or hell until after the resurrection and after the Judgment. Hades is the place where our spirit, where the spirits of dead people reside. Now in the resurrection, those spirits will return to earth and be joined to new, imperishable bodies. Death is the separation of the body and spirit. Resurrection takes place when our spirits are reunited with a changed, imperishable body. I'll have more to say about this in a few weeks.

Now while Hades usually refers to that place of torment, the word can also be applied to refer to the entire realm, which has both a place of torment and a place of comfort. In Acts 2 and verse 27 the apostle Peter quotes David's prophecy in Psalm 16 and verse 10 about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And he noted that while Jesus' soul was not abandoned to Hades, that his flesh did not suffer decay. Well when Jesus died, his soul went to Paradise, according to His statement to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, He said "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Well the word Paradise is used three times in Scripture, and each time refers to the heavenly realm where the righteous go after death. 2 Corinthians 12 verses 2 to 4 talks about Paradise and how Paradise is equated to the third heaven, that is the place where God dwells. Well, Jesus went to that unseen place of righteous spirits and where God dwells. In Revelation 2 and verse 7, the Paradise of God is where the tree of life is. Well if Jesus' soul was not abandoned to Hades but He went to Paradise, then Hades must contain a place where righteous souls are comforted.

The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 6 to 9 also helps us to understand that we will have an existence in spirit form after we die and until the resurrection. He says the righteous will go to be with

the Lord Jesus. He said: "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight— we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." Now when the righteous die, they go to be with the Lord.

Again, Paul said in Philippians 1 verses 21 to 23, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, (and then he says) for that is very much better." Now Paul said he would go and be "with Christ" when he died and that would be very much better. Well this is the Christian hope that we have, to live with our Lord Jesus forever and ever.

Through the years whenever I've preached funerals, I've often cited Romans 14 verses 7 to 9. And the Bible says, "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." Now we may die physically, but not even death can separate us from the love of our Lord Jesus. When Christians die, they go to be with Him that very day. But when evil people die, the angels take them to a place of torment.

And this is why we must be prepared spiritually. No one else can do that for you. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." Now the saved person goes to judgment with the blood of Jesus and has his name recorded in the book of life. And he can face the afterlife with confidence that he has an eternal home with the Lord. The unbeliever and the impenitent person has no such hope. He must face God on his own.

God does not want any person to be lost, no not a single one—He wants everyone, everyone to be saved. And God would not have sent His son Jesus to die on a cross, if He were looking to condemn people. But God will not force people to do what is right or to repent.

Now God has prepared the way for your salvation in the gift of His beloved Son, Jesus. And by His grace you are saved. But grace as a gift must be received by faith and obedience. We don't earn our salvation, but God has determined that those who receive His gift are those who meet his conditions. Yes.

The Bible says in Heb. 5 verses 8 and 9, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." Now your gift of eternal life is ready for you if you believe, repent and are baptized. My friend have you prepared? Death is something that all of us will face one day, and it may come sooner than we think. And so I ask you are you prepared? Are you prepared? Let's pray together. Oh Father help us in every way to come to love You more and to have a deeper faith in Your son Jesus Christ. Help heavenly Father to all that we need to do to prepare to live with You forever and ever. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

I bought life insurance to protect my wife and to provide for my family after I'm gone. Many people buy a plot, choose the casket, and arrange the service long before the time. How foolish it is to be so well prepared for death here but fail to prepare myself spiritually for the hereafter. I don't want to be like the five foolish virgins, who failed to buy the oil needed for their lamps. You remember, they ran to the dealers to buy oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom came. And the door was shut, and

they were not allowed in (Matthew 25 and verses 1 to 14). I tell you they weren't prepared and we must prepare.

Now don't waste your opportunity in this life to get right with God; once life is over, there's no second chance. Why not start a new and different direction for your soul's sake? Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3 and verse 20).

I tell you, you can lose your car, your house, your health, or your life and still go to heaven; but if you lose your soul, you've lost everything. Make the most important commitment that you'll ever make, that of giving yourself to the Lord by obeying the gospel. Believe in the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Repent of every sin. Confess publicly the name of Jesus, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And when you're baptized, the Bible says in Acts 22:16 that your sins will be washed away. The Lord will add you to His church, and you'll be a son of God with eternal life.

Well we hope that today's study about death has caused you to think about your soul. We're offering this free book this month. And if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Just subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

We ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week. So keep searching God's Word and tell a friend about this program. And remember as always we want you to know God bless you, God be with you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.