

TO BE WITH CHRIST IS FAR BETTER

by Pastor Mike Taylor



1 “ If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1-4)

Have you ever been to a funeral of a loved one and felt so sad, almost to the point of total depression because of the cold, unnatural looking person who you loved lies in a perpetual state of unawareness?

Most people have, and I really don't like going to them, as I would rather remember them in life, than have that last image of them in their casket burned into my memory. But you can understand that many people believe that death is the end of our existence, that your loved one is completely gone and never coming back. The Godless world believes that death is the end of our thoughts, our memories and the end of our consciousness.

Think about your loved one for a moment that has passed on. When they were with you, they were warm, animated and engaged with life. Now they are cold and still and totally disconnected from this life. Have you ever reached out and maybe just touched their hand or finger, how it feels like a piece of a stick? All that you knew them to be if gone, and your loss and pain of the unbeliever is overwhelming. One, you have to face your own mortality, as that will be you in the future, should the Lord tarry longer than your date of death, which only He knows.

MAN IS DESTINED TO DIE

I read where man is the only creature that knows he is going to die. Even though everything on this planet at some point dies, man knows that it also includes him. So why do we fear it so much?

What you're looking at, in that casket, is the mortal remains full of embalming fluid to preserve the flesh till you get it in the ground. It knows nothing, feels nothing and the life force has left its shell. But what of the consciousness? What happens to it? Do you have a body, or is the body you? Is your body your possession, or as the song goes “is this all there is?”

Someone who is not a believer in Jesus Christ and has no relationship with God, called an Atheist would argue that the body and the consciousness are one and the same. When the body dies, so does the consciousness of the person. They reduce mankind to some kind of road-kill that was run over in the road and doesn't go to heaven. In this viewpoint, you ARE your body. There is no “ghost in the machine” ..no spirit, nothing that goes on and continues to live. Your brain produces your mind and your mind is what makes you think that you are YOU. An Atheist credits reason for reaching this “enlightened” perspective.

But to qualify as an atheist, that person must know EXACTLY what happens to the mind, their will and their emotions. And if they entertain the possibility that death is the great UNKNOWN, then they are not atheist, but now are agnostics...They just don't know for sure.

For the worldview that claims “reason” as its father, it's not very reasonable.

WHAT DID THE ANCIENTS BELIEVE ABOUT DEATH?

As early as Job's time, God had revealed the existence of the Redeemer Christ, and the PHYSICAL resurrection of the dead. Job not only expected to see Christ with his PHYSICAL eyes, but he expected his physical body to be changed.

25 “ For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:25-27)

The prophet Daniel also wrote of what we would be, those who have the Hope of the resurrection to a new life.

2 “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:2-3)

Job awaited the call of a Trumpet that would raise the departed souls from their sleep and raised in a new body. This change was believed a thousand years before it was generally known as the resurrection of the saints, some call the rapture.

12 “So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.

13 O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!

14 If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.

15 Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.

16 For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin?” (Job 14:12-16)

Our Lord Jesus expressed this same concept when He spoke in John:

28 “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice

29, and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28-29)

Many point to the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes where Solomon referred to the PHYSICAL body which is “asleep” and not the spirit. Solomon addressed the eventual end of both body AND spirit.

7 “ Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

But note what Paul the Apostle said concerning the body that dies. It is not the end of all consciousness. Yes, the body dies, but the consciousness lives on.

8 “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2nd Corinthians 5:8-10)

May we point to the parable that Jesus gave when He spoke of Lazarus and the rich man? Some say this is just an analogy, but did Jesus lie when He gave parables? No, He spoke them of truth, but many couldn't not hear them, or understand them, as it was not meant for them to understand. Because if they remained ignorant of the point, they would not be guilty of sin of unbelief.

19 “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

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

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And 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 thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” (Luke 16:19-31)

Jesus spoke truth and never lied when He spoke of such a case that makes the reader heart sick for one so unable to change his destiny. And maybe those who read that identify with that man. It brings a sense of dread to the unbeliever. If you or your loved ones were in such a condition, would you not pray for another chance as this rich man did in the story Jesus told? Jesus told us in plain truth what the person experiences upon physical death

Lazarus died physically, but the angels carried him into Abraham's bosom which is another word for Paradise. The rich man also died and was totally conscious of his fate while looking up from the flames of hell. Let us look at the facts I believe Jesus was relaying to His listening audience:

1. Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man were all there, and they were all conscious of their surroundings.
2. The rich man was conscious of his torment and was able to speak with Abraham and was aware of Lazarus whom he knew also. Abraham was also conscious of his surroundings as well and able to give reply to the rich man's questions.

Note that the rich man was in Hell, not in the Lake of Fire, which establishes the story playing out in real time at some point before the resurrection of Jesus. It was not a scene of the penalty imposed on those at the Great White Throne Judgment. The rich man had memories, not only of his life on earth, but the memories of his family as well.

The rich man cared for his family, his father and five brothers, so all of his earthly memories remained intact. And also his emotions which are entirely human.

His physical body was dead in the grave, or asleep as Solomon puts it, but his soul, what made him who he was, was very much alive in the sense of his consciousness and his mind.

So taking this parable and knowing it was an actual event Jesus was telling the people around Him, the question remains, what happens when we die? Answer: We are absent from the body, but there is no cessation of our consciousness until the resurrection of the dead. Our dead bodies will be changed and we will rejoin them and be united and stand before the God of the Universe and give an account of our lives..Some will receive rewards and eternal life at the 1st resurrection, and those raised in the 2nd Resurrection will be raised to judgment and condemnation.

The Apostle John wrote of this judgment of the unrighteous in Revelation:

5 “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:5-6)

Note that John speaks of those raised in the 1st Resurrection, but the rest lived not until the end of the 1000 years. He separates the two resurrections. Those who are raised before the Millennium with those Tribulation saints are of the 1st resurrection, beginning with Jesus, the first fruits of those born of the dead. And the second resurrection is not where anyone wants to be, as it will be condemnation, judgment and the penalty of separation from God for all eternity.

John addresses the PHYSICAL resurrection of the dead whose consciousness remain awake and very much alive in hell with the rich man until final judgment after the 2nd resurrection of the lost.

11 “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:11-15)

As to the 'dead in Christ' -- they are also conscious, but in Heaven in the presence of the Lord from the moment of physical death until the Rapture.

Furthering Job's theme of 'the change' Paul writes,

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". (1st Corinthians 15:51-52)

At the coming of Jesus for His church, some believer will not have experienced physical death. They will be instantly changed in to their incorruptible bodies, and those who have experience physical death will be raised prior to those found alive, and they will receive their resurrection bodies first. And then we will all be united in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

THE GREAT DEBATE, WHAT OF THE SPIRIT?

There is a great debate on what the spirit of those who have died experience when their spirit returns to the Lord. Does the Bible give us a description of what we will be? No, it does not...but I am of the mind, we are not some disembodied spirits floating on clouds playing harps, as the imagery fostered by a major world religion. The Bible doesn't come right and say what we will be between here and the coming of the Lord for those departed, but Paul makes this statement in his epistle

20 “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:” (Philippians 1:20-23)

Did you catch that? “I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” If Paul was desiring to be with Christ, is it in his grave, or his spirit with the glorified Savior whom he saw with his own eyes? The God who blinded him, and was taught by Him in the wilderness for three years prior to coming to see the other Apostles, and the man who was translated (raptured) into the third heaven and heard words that are not lawful for a man to hear? Paul knew our Savior almost as intimately as the other Apostles, but He knew Him as the glorified Savior in His power and glory. That is who Paul wanted to leave this life and join and he has been with Him, in whatever form of spiritual expression that God has deemed fit, for now over 2000 years.

So we await what is promised those who have died and those who are alive that are found in faith and belief in our Lord Jesus Christ

At the return of our Lord for His church, the Bible says that;

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise (physically incorruptible) first: Then we which are (physically) alive and remain (in our natural bodies) shall be caught up together with them (changed and incorruptible) in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1st Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Our loved ones who have gone home to the Lord are ALREADY in His Presence, enjoying Heaven and its unimaginable joy and riches in what form, we are not told. They are NOT moldering in the grave, unconsciously

awaiting the call of the Trumpet. They are alive and aware and eagerly anticipating the opportunity to meet with us in the air and embrace us once more.

LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION?

Where do you see yourself on this great debate. Are you the rich man waiting for his demise in an eternal hell? Or are you the beggar who is not rich, but rich in the power of the Holy Spirit? Do you see yourself in the arms of your Savior, or destined to be cast out? It is a question that everyone of us must make a decision over, and it is why everyone that has ever been born has to decide. “what will you do with the God/man, Jesus Christ? Will you accept His free offer of mercy and grace, or will you enjoy your sin and unrighteousness, being deceived but for a short while?

This world is coming to an end. Maybe quicker than you even imagine. But the bible says we all die. Are you ready to die?

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:.” (Hebrews 9:27)

In this life, you only get one chance to get it right. No second chances. No passing GO and collecting \$200...when you die, you have two places to end up...with Christ, or in hell...or the Lake of Fire. Don't wait, as we are not promised even tomorrow. Tonight might be the beckoning call of death that awaits us all. Look to Jesus, as He will save you only if you ask Him.

“For God so loved the Word, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him, might be saved”
(John 3:16-17)

Make that decision right now...Your eternal destiny depends on it.

This is Pastor Mike Taylor, praying for your salvation. If you need counseling, prayer, or just a listening ear, email me at realteam1999@sbcglobal.net, God bless you all,

TILL WE MEET AT JESUS FEET