

INTRODUCTION

If you could push the fast-forward button on your life, and go to the point of your death, some of you would go a long way and others only a short distance. But imagine for a moment that you’ve just died. It might have been in an accident, heart attack or a lingering illness, but your heart has stopped beating, your blood pressure has dropped to zero and your lungs are no longer breathing; you are dead. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. What have you experienced? And what have you learned in the first 10 seconds after you die? Death is so mysterious. Unlike the Star Trek theme “Space, the final frontier,” Space is *not* the final frontier and neither is death, because there is something beyond death.

People claim to experience a lot of things at the point of death. In his book *Life After Life*, Dr. Raymond Moody interviews hundreds of people and summarizes the similarities in their near-death experiences. Most people report hearing the doctor pronounce them dead and report hearing an uncomfortable buzzing in their ears and then they see themselves literally floating about their bodies looking down, but they seem to be attached by some (as some have described) a cosmic umbilical cord. And then they find themselves being drawn down a dark tunnel toward that bright light everybody talks about. At some place in that light, they approach some kind of a barrier and are faced with either going forward or returning back to life. And of course, all of these people returned and tried to describe what they experienced.

Is that what you’re going to experience in the first 10 seconds after you die? I seriously doubt it. Because I don’t believe those people died. Remember, our definition of death is the point at which physical resuscitation is *no longer possible*. The Bible makes it clear in Hebrews 9:27 that no person is going to die twice. “It is appointed unto man once to die and after that judgment.” I believe these people experienced the foyer of death. It’s the approach to death, but they don’t pass over that final barrier, which is death itself. Once you step over that barrier, that’s where the road forks. And there are two and only two destinies for people after they die. I don’t think you have to reach some after-death experience to find out what it’s going to be like, because we have the words of Jesus Christ, who did in fact literally die, and came back from the dead, and as he says he has the keys of death and hell.

What did Jesus have to say about when a person dies? It is simply described in Luke 16:19. I do not believe it is a parable, because Jesus names one of the characters and nowhere in a fictitious parable does he name a character. I believe this is a literal event that took place.

Luke 16:19-31. “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this,

between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ”He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

I. THE AWFUL DESTINY OF THE LOST

Jesus says at the point of death there are only two destinies. First is the awful destiny of the lost. This is a bottom line kind of message. Some of you want me to get to the point and here it is: There is a heaven and there is a hell. God loves you and Jesus died for you so you wouldn’t go to hell but you can instead go to heaven. The truth is, some people reject God’s love and end up in hell, just like this rich man. We learn a lot about hell. In fact, Jesus gives us more details about hell in this story than he does about heaven.

1. Torment

Number one. We learn hell is a place of torment. Three times Jesus said there is fire there. The rich man says, “I am in agony.” Hell is such a terrible place that if you could ever understand the tragedy and the agony of hell, you would never ever again tell anybody to go to hell. You would never wish that upon anyone. We’ve all heard the expression “hell on earth.” As bad as it may seem to get in this life, in terms of physical pain, relational problems, emotional strain, there is not an experience on this earth that comes close to the agony and torment of hell.

In 1990, when I was a pastor in Birmingham, I took a week’s vacation to marshal at the PGA tournament at Shoal Creek in Birmingham. On Saturday, Fred Couples was in second place. He drove his ball to the right at the hole I was marshaling. It went out of bounds and into water. I signaled from the fairway that it was out of bounds, but apparently they didn’t pay any attention so Fred Couples comes walking down the fairway to me. No one was around, because all the spectators were on the other side of the fairway; his caddie was in the middle of the fairway checking his yardage. Fred said, “Where’s my ball?” I pointed to the out of bounds creek and said, “There is your ball Mr. Couples.” He looked at me eyeball to eyeball and the only thing Fred Couples has ever said to David Dykes was, “Well why don’t you just go to hell!” He also dropped a few more adjectives than I care to mention. I was absolutely shocked and at a loss for words for a few moments. I didn’t say anything, but about three or four seconds later I said, “I’m sorry Mr. Couples, that’s one place I can never, ever go, because Jesus Christ is in my life.” And he shook his head, walked back to re-tee the ball.

If you remember anything about that tournament, he fell from the leader board like a rock. Why would anybody walk up to somebody and to wish them to go to hell? It happens all the time. Those people don’t understand hell is a place of torment that is to be avoided at all costs.

2. Awareness

Number two. It is a place of awareness. Some people think there is no sensitivity or feeling. They believe in annihilation—you just die and that’s the end. No. Jesus said this man woke up in hell and could see heaven. I think what makes hell more agonizing beyond the fire is the fact that Jesus said people in hell are aware of people in heaven—they can see in heaven and they can speak. If a husband who is not a Christian is married to a woman who is a Christian and his children are Christians, when he dies he’ll be able to see them in heaven—you talk about agony and torment—forget the fire! That’s the awareness of hell.

3. Memory

Number three. Hell is a place of memory. To me the scariest words in this dialogue between Abraham and the rich man are found in verse 25 when Abraham says, “Son, remember, remember...” I believe if a person dies and go to hell, they will remember every gospel sermon they ever heard they will remember every gospel tract given to them and every time they were channel surfing and came across Billy Graham and heard him preaching about Jesus. They’ll remember Luis Palau coming to East Texas. They’ll remember every opportunity they had to be saved. Hell is a place of memory.

4. Regret

Number four. Hell is a place of regret. The rich man didn’t enjoy being there. “I’m in torment!” Some people honestly think they’re going to party and have a good time in hell. I’ve literally heard people say they’re going to go to hell and have one big beer party for a long time with their friends. Nobody in hell *wants* to be there.

I love to read Mark Twain but he was really off base when he made this absurd statement: I’ll choose heaven for its climate and hell for its company. Mark Twain was greatly deceived about that because no one in hell wants to be there. The rich man said, “Father Abraham take care of me; I’m hurting. send Lazarus to dip his finger in the water and touched my tongue.” Abraham said, “Sorry nobody can cross the gulf.” You know what became a rich man’s concern? He had five brothers still alive. “Send Lazarus to preach to them and tell them to repent.” He knew what it took to be saved. “I want my brothers to repent.” If we could send a television crew to hell to interview the people there, the one thing they would hear over and over again would be “warn my loved ones! Warn my friends! Do not come to this place of torment.” I believe there is probably a greater evangelistic fervor in hell than there are in most Baptist churches. The number one concern of people in hell is “Don’t let anybody else come to this place!” It is a place of regret.

Some of you are probably wondering how a loving God could send people to hell. Most people don’t even believe in hell. According to the Gallup polls, 68% of Americans believe there is a heaven—almost 7 out of 10 people. But only 43% believe there is a hell. People deny the fact there is a hell. And if there is a hell, why would God send people there? According to Matthew 25:41, hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. It was never created for human eternal habitation. The truth of the matter is, some people are going to end up there forever—the rich man did. According to what Jesus said in Matthew 7, more people are heading toward the road to

destruction than they are to heaven. God doesn't want anyone to go to hell. “God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

I used to think it was easy to go to hell. In fact, in college I used to hand out tracts that were thought were cute. On the outside it said “How to go to hell.” On the inside there were no words—it was blank by design. Meaning, if you want to go to hell you do nothing. It's easy to go to hell, just never repent of your sins. I've since changed my mind. I don't think it's easy to go to hell, especially in Tyler, Texas or in East Texas, because God has given you so many warnings and ways for you to be saved. Imagine someone is driving down the interstate and they see a flashing sign that says: Danger! Bridge out: 1 mile. Detour ahead. Half a mile later it says: Danger! Bridge out: 1/2 mile. Detour ahead... Danger! Bridge out: 1500 feet. Merge left. There are flashing signs and cones and barriers across the bridge being repaired. What if someone is driving and hit the accelerator and drives right through the barriers and into the gully? Would anyone say, “How can our highway department be so cruel to send somebody to their death?” Of course you wouldn't say that. God has put up so many warnings for every one of you about hell. One of the warnings is this message today. If you're not a Christian, this is a warning to you: There is a heaven there is a hell to be avoided and you're going to have to crash through God's love and prayers of other people and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to go to hell—but there is a place called hell—the awful destiny of the lost. The good news about what Jesus said is for believers, there is good news.

II. THE AWESOME DEATH BENEFITS OF A BELIEVER

Number two. The awesome death benefits of a believer. And I use that word intentionally, because those in the insurance business talk about death benefits. For Christians, the death benefits are indeed extremely positive.

1. Find yourself in Paradise

Number one. If you're a believer, 10 seconds after you die you will find yourself in Paradise. That's the word Jesus used when he was speaking to the thief on the cross. He said, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” The word *paradise* is not translated from the Greek language; it is transliterated, which means in Greek is the word *paradeisos*, meaning “perfection” or “a perfect garden.” The word has the connotations of greenery and beauty. Heaven is a place we would call paradise because it is absolutely beautiful—and it is a literal place. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you.” Just as hell is a literal place, heaven is a literal place. It's going to be beautiful.

Revelation talks about the streets of gold and the gates of pearl. None of that language I believe comes close to the beauty of what we are going to see in heaven. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

An avid golfer died, and after he met Jesus, he asked an angel, “Are there any golf courses up here?” The angel said, “You ought to see them!” The next day the angel took the golfer to the most beautiful golf course imaginable. Compared to this heavenly golf course, Augusta National looked like a pig pen. He had perfect clubs; he always shot under par; the fairways were

immaculate; the greens were perfect. It was absolutely beautiful. When the golfer saw it, he fell and began to weep. The angel said, “I thought you’d be happy; why are you crying?” The golfer looked up between his tears and said, “If it wouldn’t have been for that low-fat, high fiber diet, I would have been here 10 years earlier!”

Heaven is a wonderful place but you don’t need to go there before God’s timing. But 10 seconds after you die, according to the Bible, the angels will have escorted you to the presence of Jesus in Paradise. The Bible says the rich man was buried but it doesn’t say Lazarus was buried. They probably threw his body on a garbage heap as was the custom for beggars back then. But that was only his body—his soul and his spirit were already in God’s presence.

2. Be furnished with a new body

Number two. You will be furnished with a new body. That’s good news for any of you who have ever been in pain or feel like you are fighting a losing battle against your body. This body gets old, it wears out and no matter how you stretch it, tuck it, lift it and exercise it—it’s going to wear out; it’s going to hurt; it’s going to pass away. This body is literally going to die. It is finite, temporary. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:1: “Now we know that if the earthly tent [our bodies] that we live in is destroyed, we have a building [a body] from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” Most of us will actually have three bodies.

a. Earthly body

Number one is our earthly body. It gets sick. It gets tired. It has to have sleep. It is prone to illness and disease. It breaks down. It wears out. But who you really are is inside that body. Like Paul said, we’re just living in this earthly tent. Your soul and your spirit, your personality is inside that. Someone once compared it to a spacesuit, except it’s an earthsuit. We wear it for perhaps 70 or 80 years in this environment, but it’s going to die and be buried. The moment you die your earthly body ceases to exist but your soul and spirit immediately go to be with Jesus. Paul says later in 2 Corinthians 5, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

b. Heavenly body

Number two. That’s when we receive what I call the heavenly body. You move out of one body and you move into another body. Why did I say it takes 10 seconds? That’s just an arbitrary number—I think it happens in 10 nanoseconds. When you die your on God’s time, no longer human time. It’s not *chronos*, in God’s time, it’s *kairos*, which means time is totally different. I think in the split instant after you die you will be with Jesus in your new heavenly body. Some of you have heard the epitaph:

SOLOMON PEAS.
PEAS IS NOT HERE,
ONLY THE POD.
PEAS SHELLLED OUT,
WENT HOME TO GOD

That’s exactly what happens to a Christian when they die. Who you really are departs and you receive a heavenly body.

c. Resurrection body

I call body number three the resurrection body. Put an asterisk beside that. For those of us who are alive when Jesus comes back, we’ll skip number 2—we’ll immediately be changed into this resurrection body.

My father died in 1982. The moment he died, his soul, spirit went to be with Jesus and he has a heavenly body right now in heaven. Paul makes it clear that we are not going to be naked in heaven—we’ll have a body. There is so much misinformation. You are not going to become an angel when you die. You’re not going to be a spirit floating around playing a harp in the clouds eating Milky Way candy bars. You’ll have a heavenly body as my father does right now. What about his earthly body? It’s in a grave in Panama City Florida. What is it doing? To be honest, it’s decaying. That’s what it says 1 Corinthians 15:54. “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory.” In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Paul says, “God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” The soul and the spirit will be reunited with that eternal resurrection body. God will take what is left of that earthly body, reform and reshape it into a resurrection body. What about those Christians who were cremated or died at sea? Those of you who study physics understand nothing in this universe is ever lost—it may be converted from matter to energy or energy to matter—but it is never lost. Don’t worry. The God who created the universe won’t have any problem at the second coming of Jesus Christ to speak the word and poof! All the molecules that he needs will come back together and form that resurrection body.

Philippians 3:21 says, “Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” You will have a body for all eternity, not exactly like the one you have now, but a new improved version. It won’t hurt. It won’t get tired. It won’t get sick. And it will never ever die. One of the things I love about heaven is according to Revelation 21:4, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” Never again in heaven will you ever go to the hospital to visit a loved one. Never again in heaven will you ever attend a funeral service, because in heaven you will have a new resurrection body. That leads us to number three.

3. Fellowship with other believers

Ten seconds after you die you will fellowship with other believers. I believe we will know each other in heaven. The Bible indicates this. For instance, the rich man in hell looks up into heaven and says, “Send Lazarus.” He didn’t have to say, “Who is that beside you?” He recognized Lazarus. And if someone in hell can recognize someone in heaven, I think those of us in heaven will recognize each other in heaven, even better than we know each other right now. There will be no name tags in heaven. You’ll be able to fellowship too.

I’m often asked if those in heaven are aware of us on earth right now. I believe the answer is yes, because this man in hell was concerned about his five brothers who had not repented. Hebrews 12:1 says, “We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” These witnesses are the saints who have already died. One of the reasons I try to leave the holy, pure life, is because Jesus wants me to, but also I believe my mom and dad are aware of what I’m doing. I don’t want to displease them. My father in the ministry, Dr. Louis Armstrong, is in heaven and I don’t want to displease him either. I honestly believe we are being watched and when we die we get to fellowship with them.

I look forward to seeing Paul, Jonah and the others. Of course, more than anything, we look forward to seeing those in our families who have died before us. Next week we’re going to look at the verse where David talks about his child “He cannot return to me but I can’t go to him.” You can go to those who have died and fellowship with them.

4. Be face-to-face with Jesus

Finally, you’ll be face-to-face with Jesus; as much as you want to see that loved one who has died—that desire will pale in comparison with your desire to see Jesus. The Bible says, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12) In other words, right now spiritual truth and spiritual reality is like looking into a foggy mirror. But even looking through that poor mirror, I get so excited I just shout! I feel like I’m running without touching the ground. But when we see Jesus face-to-face it’s going to be so much better!

Last week we talked about Betty Eadie and her book *Embracing the Light*, where she said she walked up to Jesus and hugged him. When you see Jesus you are going to fall on your face before him, because he is King of King and Lord of Lords. If Governor George Bush walked in here today, we’d all stand up. If President Clinton walked in here we would all stand up. But if the Lord Jesus Christ walked in here, we’d all fall on our faces. When you fall on your face before the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe he will say to you like he did to the apostle John in Revelation 1, he’ll reach down and touch you and say, “It’s me. Stand up.” That’s when face-to-face with Jesus he’ll take us in his arms.

Don’t you feel a longing in your heart that is drawing you toward heaven? I believe that is a divine homing instinct God has put in every person’s heart.

CONCLUSION

Every year, Monarch butterflies descend upon Pacific Grove, California. There they lay their eggs in the pine trees and then fly away to die. When the larvae develop into butterflies, they eventually fly away, only to return to the same place—and entomologist believe to the very same tree. How do they do that? They don’t have navigational instruments. It’s instinct God has given them. I believe God has placed within each of us a desire to be drawn to our Creator. That longing can only be fulfilled in Jesus. There are only two destinies: Everyone is going to die and either go to hell or heaven—the choice is yours. No one has to go to hell. You choose to go. God offers a free gift of eternal life and as powerful as God is, there is one area of the universe where

God has voluntarily restricted his omnipotence, and it is in the area of your will. He will not force you. You are not some computer where he pushes the “enter” key and you fall on your knees and repent. He wants you to choose to do it. It’s up to you. But it’s the most important choice you’ll ever make.

OUTLINE

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1. Torment
2. Awareness
3. Memory
4. Regret

II. THE AWESOME DEATH BENEFITS OF A BELIEVER

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2. Be furnished with a new body

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- b. Heavenly body
- c. Resurrection body

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes