

Life after Death

Luke 23:32, 39-43 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³² *Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.*

The Crucifixion

³⁹ *One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"* ⁴⁰ *But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"* ⁴¹ *And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."* ⁴² *And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"* ⁴³ *And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*

Introduction

COVID-19 has changed many things in our 'normalcy' as we know of. One thing that fundamentally affected us is this: we have become very much aware and even afraid of viruses, particularly, this one. When exposed to it, some fear that they are going to die (although overall death rate is 3% in America). To keep ourselves safe from the infection, we do everything such as social distancing, wearing masks, disinfection, and so forth. It also made us face straight the life's solemn truth: anyone can die of disease.

The fact that anyone can die is nothing new. We all die at some point of time. We just don't want to die of this COVID-19. I understand.

As we go through this crisis, one thing I wanted to do for our church as pastor is this: to prepare my people ready to meet our Heavenly King. Not that I want you to die today, but that I want you to get yourself ready for Heaven. I know, most of us don't want to think about death. However, think this way: for the life of 80 years on earth, you do anything possibly you can think of to stay alive on earth, don't you? How much more preparation, then, do you need or have you done for the life thereafter, that will last eternally?

Today and next Sunday, I am going to do a two-part series on life after death with a clear intention to prepare you ready for Heaven. By the end of my series, I want everybody to know that death is not final. I want to assure everyone with the hope of resurrection in Jesus Christ so that you and I will be in the presence of God forever. Let me say it again: let's get ready for our life eternal. The life that lasts forever and ever in the presence of God.

Content

Whenever we talk about the life after death, we must begin with death first. Without death, the life after death is meaningless. The word ‘death’ appears 1379 times in the entire Bible (*die, died, dies, dead, dying, death*).

For your comparison, ‘Jesus’ (1264 times—*Jesus and Jesus*) and ‘Life’ (591 times—*life and life’s*).

Here’s what I mean by physical death.

The Oxford Dictionary defines death as “*state of being dead.*” To be ‘dead’ means “*no longer living*”(of plants, animals, and persons). To be ‘living’ means “*alive now, existent.*”

Therefore, death means, *no longer alive now or existent*. At least, physically. For some folks who prefer clinical definition of death: *No breath, No heartbeat, No brainwave*. Here’s my final definition of death: *no longer breathing, no more heart beats and no brainwave*. That’s our physical death.

Here’s our next question: What happens to us after we physically die? In fact, this is an age-old question. People in the past asked that question. They still do and will. What does await us on the other side of death?

Three beliefs on life after death:

1. Death is final. Nothing afterwards (e.g. atheists, naturalists who don’t believe in supernatural things).
2. Don’t know at all (e.g. Steve Jobs: it’s like electric switch:50-50).
3. Death is not final. Something exists after death. (e.g. A Japanese man who wanted to buy a plot next to Marilyn Monroe’s grave paying 4.6 million dollars, National Public Radio, 8/27/09).

How do the major world religions address this question? They all believe and teach that there’s life after death.

Buddhism, Hinduism—Reincarnation. Endless cycle of death and rebirth.

Christianity— Resurrection. Eternal life. Every one will be resurrected to face the Last Judgment of God (Hebrews 9:27).

Let’s check it out a little further what the Bible says about resurrection.

The word ‘resurrection’ (αναστασις) appears 41 times (all in the New Testament). ‘Sheol’ (the place for the dead to go down) appears 65 times in the Old Testament—however, the concept of rising again from the dead is weak, if not none.

Here are some examples from the Bible:

God is the God of the *living* not of the *dead* (Mark 12:27). In other words, no one is dead in God's eyes. Both the living and the dead are all living in God's eyes.

The Bible also calls '*the dead in the Lord*' are not really '*dead*', but '*fallen asleep*'--in the same way as you expect yourself to rise every morning after the night's sleep, those who died physically are asleep now, not dead, and will be eventually awakened and resurrected one day (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). As one Christian says, "when we close our eyes in this world, we will open them to Jesus in His arms" (the Voice of the Martyrs, September 2009).

Jesus calls Himself the resurrection: *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,* (John 11:25). He was the first fruits of resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20) and we will follow. He demonstrated His own resurrection by rising from the dead on the first Easter morning.

His disciples constantly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus after they had witnessed Jesus' resurrection with their eyes and hands: ³³*And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,* (Acts 4:33).

Sadly, some people, in the name of science, refuse to believe in Jesus' physical resurrection. Even some pastors and churches do not proclaim the body and historical resurrection of Jesus, either. E.g. "Three-Self Church" in China. It is the government sanctioned and controlled church in China. Three-Self stands for self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation (not relying on foreign missionaries). They have weekly services. They pray. They sing hymns. They hear sermons. They even collect offerings. They have all the outside looks like any ordinary church. Yet, crucial pieces are missing in their message, faith and practice. For instance, no proclamation of Christ's resurrection and second-coming. No faith in Jesus Christ is required for salvation). With no talk of resurrection, how can they prepare their people for the life after death?

One more thing in the Bible on resurrection:

There shall certainly be a resurrection of the dead, both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:15). Resurrection is for everybody.

Here's a quick summary on resurrection in the Bible. **Two deaths and two resurrections.** First and second death. First and second resurrection. **First death, first resurrection, second resurrection, and second death in that order.**

The physical death is called 'the first death' in the Bible. This is for everybody. At the first death, our soul and spirit are separated from the body.

The 'first resurrection' is, not for every dead, but for the believers who died in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:12-26, 51-58, John 11:25-26, Revelation 20:5). Resurrected at the first resurrection, the believers will reign with God for 1,000 years.

When the 1,000 years are ended, there comes the ‘second resurrection.’ This is when the rest of the dead will come to life (Revelation 20:5). At the second resurrection, those souls who didn’t participate in the first resurrection will be resurrected and stand before God’s throne and be judged according to their deeds and faith (books of deeds and the book of life will be opened)—Those whose names are recorded in the Book of Life will go into Heaven and those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is the ‘second death’ (Revelation 20:14). What makes your name recorded in the Book of Life? Your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, not your own merits. Let’s make sure of it.

Let’s check out the criminal in today’s text: Luke 23:43.

Jesus answered the criminal, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Paradise (3 occurrences in the Bible)—(Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, Revelation 2:7)—Paul believed Paradise as Heaven. So did John. It is God’s very abode where the tree of life is located, and all the saints will be there as well. The criminal was admitted to Paradise not by his own good deeds but by believing in Jesus. So will we be in Heaven not by our own goodness but by our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

Conclusion

Rest assured that you and I have eternal life in Jesus. We do have a hope to be in the presence of God forever. We are called to be the citizens of Heaven.

Live out your life as worthy citizens of God’s Kingdom. You represent the Heavenly King here on earth.

Live out your life from eternal perspective. Let your eternal life dictate your life on earth. God will hold us accountable for our words and deeds.

Live out your life with gratitude (because whatever time is given to you is a gift from God). Love the Lord with all your heart and mind. Love your neighbor as Christ has loved you. Amen.