

QUESTIONS ABOUT DEATH

There are few topics that cause us to question so much what is real and what is not real as the topic of death. When one we love dies, it is natural for us to not only grieve, but wonder about what goes on with them beyond the grave. We hear all kinds of things from well meaning people who want to help. But much of what we hear has no real basis in the Bible at all. The only one that really understands death and can tell us about what is beyond the grave is the Lord. He died upon the cross and was raised from the dead on the third day. He has been through it and knows what it is like. We should be especially intent on hearing His message about death. Let's look at some of the questions that are asked at the death of someone we love and see what God's answers are on the subject.

IS THIS THE END OF IT ALL?

Death seems like an end doesn't it? But the Bible doesn't picture death that way. When Stephen was stoned to death in Acts 7 he looked up into heaven to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He pleaded with the Lord to receive his spirit. When Jesus was dying on the cross He told the thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise." He certainly didn't see it as the end. It was the beginning of a whole new and different existence.

IS DEATH A SLEEP? DO WE SLEEP BETWEEN DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION?

The Bible does talk about death as a sleep. In I Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul said, "I don't want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep in Jesus." But we need to keep in mind that man is both body and soul. The body sleeps between death and the resurrection. But the soul or spirit of man doesn't sleep. Notice in that same text he said, "Those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him when He comes." At the second coming of Christ the body will be raised from the dead no longer corruptible and no longer mortal. The soul will return with the Lord as He comes. Body and soul will be joined together at that time and so shall we ever be with the Lord. The only sense in which the soul sleeps is that it rest from the labors on this earth (Revelation 14:13). In Revelation 6 those who had been murdered for their faith in Jesus were pictured under the altar crying out, "How long O Lord, holy and true, do you not avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" In chapter 7 these are in white robes and are pictured as those who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. The Father is there comforting them, wiping the tears from their eyes and leading them by everlasting fountains of water. This doesn't sound like sleeping. They are being comforted from the time they leave this world.

DO THE DEAD KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN HERE?

The person who has died still has their same mind. In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus both of whom died. When Lazarus died he was carried by angels to a place of comfort where Abraham took him into his arms and comforted him.

The rich man died, was buried and lifted up his eyes in torments, being tormented in the flames of hell. Many have tried to take away the clarity of this story by saying it is just a parable. But it doesn't say it's a parable. It doesn't have the characteristics of the other parables. It even has Abraham answering that the five brothers still on earth have Moses and the prophets, indicating it was during Old Testament times. It wasn't after the resurrection since his brothers were still on earth. The truth is that it is much more likely a true story of something Jesus had seen before He came into this world as a man.

Notice, both the rich man and Lazarus were still the same people. They knew who they were and what their lives had been like on the earth. He even knew his brothers hadn't repented of their sins. They both knew who Abraham was. Identities hadn't changed and their minds were still in tact. In Revelation 6 the dead knew how they had died and that those who killed them hadn't been punished yet. It seems obvious that the dead have at least some knowledge of what goes on in this life. We don't know how much they know.

WILL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

Certainly we will know each other and know ourselves. Otherwise the whole crowd would be strangers and we wouldn't feel any reward since we wouldn't remember how we had lived. When Moses and Elijah came back to see Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration they were recognized immediately by Peter, James and John. The rich man recognized Abraham and Lazarus. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 Paul described a man caught up into the third heaven whether in the body or out of the body he didn't know. But he knew that he heard unspeakable words that are unlawful for a man to utter. Think about being in heaven and not being able to tell if you were in the body or not. But he knew where he was and what was going on. He even knew he wasn't supposed to tell what he had seen when he came back to earth.

Some have said, if we know each other in heaven, won't we be broken hearted if we see some of our friends didn't make it? But how would we feel if we didn't know each other and thought none of our friends made it? What about Jesus saying that in heaven we would be like the angels and not marry or be given in marriage? Doesn't that mean we won't know who was our husband or wife in heaven? No it doesn't. It just means that in heaven we won't be sexual beings any more. We will know who our wives and children were. But they won't be in the same relationship any more.

WILL ONE IN HEAVEN GRIEVE OVER THE HURTS OF HIS FAMILY ON EARTH?

The fact the Bible says that God will wipe away all tears from our eyes implies there are tears shed. We will hurt over many things. But God will comfort and sustain us so that we get over that pain soon. Heaven will be so wonderful that we will be overwhelmed by it even though we miss those we love. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5 Paul tells us the view we should have about life and death. Don't focus on the temporary but on the eternal. The things we go through down here work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory so we no longer look at the things that are seen but the things that are unseen.

For the things seen are temporary and the things that are unseen are eternal. He said, “We know that if our earthly tent is destroyed, we have a building with God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven. We groan for that house. We don’t want to be unclothed but further clothed that mortality may be swallowed up by life. He that prepared us for this very thing is God who has given us the deposit of the Holy Spirit. Every hurt we go through down here will be rewarded in heaven in ways that are far better than we could have even imagined.

WHAT WILL WE DO IN HEAVEN?

People have pictured heaven in some interesting ways. Some think of heaven as a constant worship service. I’ve heard others say that if heaven is like being in church all the time, I don’t think I want to go there. What is it like? Think about some things the Bible says that give us some hints of heaven. In the story of the master giving talents to the different servants the two who used the money well were told, “Well done you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many. Enter into the joys of your Lord.” Notice it will be a place of joy and responsibility. Some will have rule in some areas. Later in Matthew 25 he pictured the judgment and the Master saying to those on the right hand, “Come you blessed of My Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth.” In Revelation 14:13 it is said that we will “Rest from our labors and our works will follow us.” Heaven is pictured as a bride adorned for her husband. Those there serve the Lord day and night in His kingdom.

The Bible doesn’t give us a detailed lesson on what we will do in heaven. It pictures it as a wonderful place of joy and celebration, of service and rest, of worship and praise, as a glad reunion day with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit and all the redeemed of all the ages. Just as certain as you can trust God for salvation, you can trust Him to prepare heaven in such a way that it is exactly right and you will love and enjoy it forever more. I don’t know what all we will do. But I know it will be the most amazing and wonderful place and people ever. Its beauty is a paradise. Its rivers are pure. The tree of life is in the middle of the city. Its leaves are for the healing of the people. It will be better than any get together you’ve ever thought about on this earth.

I know this doesn’t answer all the questions. But I hope it gives you a taste of that wonderful home that awaits and makes you want to go there with all your power.

Leon Barnes