

Five Minutes After Death

If You Are SAVED

[This mss is transcribed from a tape of a sermon delivered at the Rogersville Church of Christ in April 2001]

Sometime back there was a sermon going around entitled, “Five Minutes After Death.” Various preachers had lessons on this theme. And it is a very interesting topic because all of us are concerned about death and what awaits us afterwards. I want to give this lesson today with this purpose, and we will try to emphasize it again as we come to the close of the lesson, to help us to understand the great victory we have in Christ. One of the great blessings we have in Christ is that we don’t have to fear death.

When our Lord came he came to destroy him who had the power of death; the one who was holding death in his clutches. Today that power belongs to Jesus and that there are great blessings to his people today.

There are some fascinating stories about death and near death experiences. And to be honest with you, I don’t know how understand or how to explain some of them. Because we certainly believe, as the scriptures teach, that the Christian is made up of an outer man and an inner man. The scriptures sometimes speak of him, as in **2 Corinthians 4:16** “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” *KJV* And **Ephesians 3:16** “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” *KJV*

So definitely the scriptures speak of us being a two-fold being. The outer person that everyone can see, and the inner spirit that dwells within this body. And we understand that death is the time when the spirit leaves the body.

But also there are passages that speak of man as being triune. Not just a dual being, but triune – spirit, soul, and body. Such as when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in the verse 23 of chapter five, **1 Thessalonians 5:23** “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” *KJV* In that book to the Thessalonians Paul wrote about the Lord coming back and the resurrection that would take place at that time, but Paul wrote to them saying. “that may you be living, ‘spirit and soul and body’ until you see that day when Christ does comes back.” You see, Paul didn’t know just when that day was going to be.

Usually when we speak of man as being triune, the scripture is talking about the 1) body, 2) about breath or that part of the body that give its physical life, and 3) then the spirit that dwells within the man. Remember back in Genesis 2 when the Lord formed man; the body he fashioned and formed out of the dust of the ground. And then Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed into the nostrils the breath of life. That is, God then gave physical life to this form that he had created and that life became a living soul. So at that time, physical life came to that being and he also became a spiritual being. God is spoken of as the father of our spirits and as the one who retrieves the spirit after we pass from this world.

So it is very interesting, because I believe that certainly we have the inner man and the outer man and

sometimes you will read of those who have had experiences, and I don't know how to take it except to take their word. And they say they had an experience where the spirit left the body and they could look down on their body, or on the hospital scene and everyone gathered there, or something like that. And they could tell you about the things that were happening all around, and I don't know how to explain that. But I do believe that when the body comes to the point where it can no longer sustain this physical part of life, the breath part of life, that the spirit can no longer dwell within the body and the spirit returns to God who gave it [Eccl. 12:7].

LUKE 16

But what is going to happen “Five minutes after we die?” Well, I don't know how long it may take, I don't know how long the spirit may dwell around. But we are talking about what does happen after we die. There is a very interesting story that Jesus tells in Luke 16. Beginning in verse 19 he tells the story, or the parable, of Lazarus and the rich man. We are not told that this is a parable. It may well have been a true incident that our Lord knew about. If it is a parable, it stands distinguished from all other parables in that the Lord uses a proper name. But his point about parables, a parable is always true to life. A parable is not like a fable. But a parable is something true to life. If it was a parable it was a true-to-life experience.

Jesus told about a poor beggar by the name of Lazarus who was sitting at the gate of a rich man. And he was sitting there daily, he was not cared for, the rich man didn't have any special pity on him at all. And the scripture says that Lazarus died, and that the angels carried him away to the bosom of Abraham. Now I think there may be another passage with a reference like that but here we get the impression, or the idea, that perhaps when we die the angels of God will be there to escort us on our journey as we return to God. That is a very comforting thought. It is interesting to note that when the rich man died in that story that nothing is said about angels or anyone else escorting him. The Bible just simply says that he died. And then in torment he lifted up his eyes in Hades.

There have been several movies produced in the last few years about death and the afterlife. You may recall that in the movie “Ghost” when the wicked character died, there were the demons that appeared to escort or drag his spirit away. I don't know if that might happen or not. Since Lazarus was escorted by the angels, perhaps Satan's demons will be there to escort the wicked, those that are his into his realm; it just may be, but I don't immediately think of a passage that would indicate that. In that particularly movie there were the flashing star-lights, angelic beings I suppose, that appeared to escort the righteous to heaven. There were many things of course about that movie that are not scriptural.

There's a movie also called “City of Angels” that came out recently. It is based upon an erroneous biblical concept. Jude tells us that some angels left their first estate, and went to another realm that God had not assigned them. And there are some who understand that Genesis 6 in speaking of the “sons of God” who took to themselves “daughters of men” is referring to angels as “sons of God” and they interpret that the angels left their heavenly habitation, their celestial estate, and came to earth and took up marriage with women of this world, and that this was the “fall” of angels. That particular movie is based upon that assumption. Another very popular movie today is called “The Sixth Sense,” and while it may be an entertaining movie I don't know of anything that is scriptural at all about it when it talks about the afterlife.

But we want to talk about what the Bible has to say about the after life and not follow the

misconceptions in the entertainment world. So we see so far, that there is this abode of the dead. It is referred to as the hadean world, or in the Old Testament as sheol. And in the parable, or the story that Jesus told, he pointed out that there was a great gulf between the place where Lazarus was and on the other side where the rich man was in torment. And the rich man was crying, oh if Lazarus could only dip his finger in water and come and put a drop on my tongue– but the Lord said that is not possible. There is the great gulf fixed between the two places.

The Lord's Victory

We also read in Acts 2:27 of a prophecy made about the Messiah, the son of God who would come. The prophet said **Acts 2:27** “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” *KJV* And then on down in verse 31, **Acts 2:31** “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.” **32** “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.” *KJV* You notice that the KJV uses this term “hell.” and it indicates that when Jesus died he went to hell and then that three days later he was resurrected.

The term here for hell however is the term “hades” and many of your modern translations will read that he went to “hades.” The Greek term “hades” is equivalent to the O.T. term “sheol” which means the grave of the soul, or of the spirits of men. When Jesus was resurrected he indicated to Mary Magdalene who was trying to hold on to him, “I have not yet ascended to my father,” but he had been dead for three days. The question is, where was Jesus during that three days? The scripture says he was in hades, but he was not where the father was. Yet he had said to the thief on the cross, “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

So Jesus had gone to hades, or to paradise, and it was a place where the Father was not. He had not yet ascended to the Father. And so we have this picture, that as sinners and saints pass over into death there was a place called paradise, or Abraham's bosom where the righteous were comforted, and a place of torment, that is also called “Tartarus” in 2 Peter 2:4, where the wicked were consigned. Those angels we mentioned that had sinned, Peter said of them that “God spared not those angels that sinned but cast them down to hell [tartarus] and delivered them unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto the judgment.” So there was a place of torment, a place of darkness, where evil angels and wicked men were held in reservation for the judgment.

Now then, we noticed that our Lord went to the hadean world. He also said that he came for the express purpose of destroying him who had the power of death. In Hebrews 2 there is a great passage to notice. **Hebrews 2:14** “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil’ 15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” *KJV* Now one of the reasons why Jesus did not take on the form of an angel is expressed here in this chapter, because he was going to die, and men die. And men, since Satan's appearance to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, had been dying and living in fear of death, and subject to the bondage that death brought, where man was held in bondage in that hadean world. But the Scripture says that Jesus came to destroy that, to change the picture, to be victorious. We know that Jesus ascended from the grave victorious. He took dominion over principalities and powers. We also know that when Jesus entered into that hadean world, that he came out with the keys of hades itself, Rev. 1:18. And so Jesus took that power, that control, that authority over the hadean world away from Satan.

Now let's notice a passage from the O.T. In Isaiah 53 we have the wonderful passage that speaks of Christ as the suffering servant. It speaks of him coming to die, being bruised for our iniquities, chastised for our sins, oppressed and afflicted, verse 7. And yet he opened not his mouth. In verse 9 his grave was assigned with wicked men, he was with the rich in his death. We know how that Jesus was crucified between thieves, criminals, poor men. Yet we know how he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Armathea. So Jesus was associated with the rich and the poor in his death.

Look in verse 12, as prophet continued to speak of the Lord and his death, God says, **Isaiah 53:12** "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil ["booty" NASV] with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." **KJV** If you recall earlier when Jesus was accused of healing and performing miracles by the power of Beelzebub he said to his challengers, "How could this be, first of all a man would have to enter into the house of the strong man and bind him." And of course, this is just exactly what Jesus did. He entered into the house of the strongman Satan and God said in Isaiah 53:12 that he divided the spoil, or the booty with him. Satan has those that belong to him, the wicked. And Jesus has those that have been redeemed and atoned; those that are righteous with God. Those saints of the Old Testament time. And up until the time our Lord entered into that hadean world.

But then also Ephesians chapter 4 speaks of Jesus' death and entrance into the grave. In this particular passage it is speaking of him coming down from heaven to earth, to the mission that God had given him to do, and descending down into the depths of the earth, that would be into that hadean world. It reads in **Ephesians 4:8-9** "Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high [ascending back to heave then] , He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?)" **NASB** These gifts that the Lord gave when he got back to heaven are those spiritual gifts that he mentions on in verse 11. "Some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and pastors."

But now Paul parenthetically stops, and in verse 9 and 10, he explains about Jesus coming here to earth and ascending back to the Father. And so, in parenthesis, if you have it, "(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)" **KJV**

Verse 8 said that when Jesus ascended upon high he led captivity captive. Those that had been held in that hadean world, the righteous, that he took back with him to heaven. And we are going to show you other passages that you have got to consider.

So what we are saying then is that with Jesus' great victory over the grave, those righteous who had been in that hadean world, after the Lord's death they accompanied him back to heaven and became a part of that world where Jesus is today himself.

With regard to Jesus' victory over the grave and his opening up the gates of death and hades, there are some things about it that we don't understand. There is a passage in Matthew 27 that I just don't understand. Vs. 51-53 reads, "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent [that's talking about the time when Jesus died, and the great effect of his death upon the physical universe, but there was an even greater effect upon the spiritual side of the universe]; 52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept

arose, 53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” *KJV* Now to be honest with you, I don’t know what all that involved, or means. I would kind of like to think that what it is saying, is that after Jesus’ resurrection, notice that they did not come forth until after He did, he led the way; that many of these ascended to the holy city and I would like to think of that holy city as being heaven. But that just doesn’t seem to be the tone of it. It seems that when he opened the gates of that hadean world that some of those saints, whose bodies were perhaps still capable of sustaining life in some way, came back to life and were seen in Jerusalem. I’m sure to die again, if they remained visible very long. Perhaps they went on with him to heaven. I admit I don’t understand it. There are many things that we don’t understand, but this is something to notice and to observe, because the inspired writers have put it there.

But let’s look at what Paul has said in writing to the Philippians, Paul is in prison at Rome, he doesn’t know whether there is going to be a sentence of death upon him, or whether he is going to live. And he says in verse 23, “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” *NASB* Paul says, I am ready to die. I’m ready to go and be with the Lord, or I’m ready to stay here if he wants me to continue working.

Now notice that Paul indicated that to die is to “be with the Lord!” Today for the saints to die, it is not to go to the hadean world, separated somehow, someplace from God, in Abraham’s bosom or in paradise. But it is to go to be with the Lord.

Also he said in 2 Corinthians 5:6 writing to the Corinthians, “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:” *KJV* His indication is then that when we leave this body, writing to saints, it means that we will be with the Lord, where the Lord is. And the Lord is there in heaven at the right hand of God! Not there in some part of the hadean world today.

When Stephen was stoned in Acts 7:58-59, he knelt down and he prayed. **Acts 7:59** “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” *KJV* He looked into heaven and he saw the Lord standing there looking down at him. And he said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

In the book of Revelation, John is carried away into heaven. And while he is there, he sees some saints that are there. In Revelation 7 he is asked, “who are these who are clothed in the white robes, and from where have they come?” Notice that the spirits of the departed are not pictured anywhere as yet having a body because they do not receive that body until they come back with the Lord for the resurrection. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 says that the Lord will bring the saints with him. So there is another indication that they are with him there in heaven. And he is going to bring the dead saints with him for the resurrection of their bodies. And while they are in heaven, they are bodiless. John is asked about who these are that have these white robes. And John says, no, I don’t know. And so John is told, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.”

Also earlier in chapter 6, with the opening of the 5th seal. “ I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: ¹⁰And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that

dwell on the earth? ¹¹And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled.” Again then, John saw these souls that had been beheaded, been martyred, and they were given white robes.

Some have taken the position, and understood that: Well then, it is those who are martyred for Christ who go directly to be with Christ and with God, such as Stephen and Paul, and others who are killed for the Lord’s sake. Those that are martyred. That was an early view in the church. And the Islamic faith picked up on that little belief, and Mohammed carried it over into his construction of the Islamic religion. Mohammed took a little bit of Judaism, and a little bit of Christianity, and in the sixth century he combined these various elements and tried to make a syncretistic religion to unite the Arabs together in a national cause. And So Mohammed said that those who die in the cause of Ali in a jihad, that is, in a holy war, get to go immediately to be with Ali. And this has become one of the strong fundamental doctrines of Islam. To die a martyrs death so one can go straight to be with Ali.

Well there were some early Christians who had thought from the book of Revelation, that if you were to be beheaded you got to go to be with God immediately. But if you look at it closely, you observe that it is those who had been beheaded who cry out for vengeance. It doesn’t say they were the only saints there with God. This passage is speaking about other saints. But the ones who were crying out for vengeance were those who had been beheaded for the Lord.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said to them that to be present in the body was to be absent from the Lord. That’s not an indication that only those who are martyred for Christ get to be with the Lord. But there is the indication in that passage that all of those who are God’s people, who are righteous and holy with them, that when we leave this world we go to be with him. Perhaps escorted by the angels to be with him and to wait with him, until the time of the second coming and we come with Christ back for the resurrection of our bodies.

Now, we indicated earlier, that we wanted to point out the real blessing of the Christians in this. That Christians today don’t have to fear about dying and going to someplace where Satan any has any kind of power or any kind of control. Christians today get to share in the victory that Jesus had over the grave. Because when we die, we don’t have to go to that hadean world, to the world of Satan’s dominion. We get to go and be with the Lord.

There will be the time, after the resurrection, when we have our new bodies, that we all be assembled before God at the judgment where he condemns the wicked to eternal hell, and we will be escorted into eternity with God in heaven. Men will be with God in heaven, or with Satan in gehenna hell, and that hell is different from hades.

But Jesus’s great victory encompasses such things as found in Colossians 2:15, that the Lord “spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” *KJV (Colossians 2:15* When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. *NASB*)

John says in **1 John 3:8** “the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” *NASB*. What ever all things “works” included, it included death. You see, the great blessing for the

Christian, is that now we don't have to worry about the sting of death. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 speaks about the resurrection of the body from the grave. And Paul points out how the Lord has taken the sting out of death for those of us that are his.

In the Revelation letter one of those passages we love to read at funerals is **Revelation 14:13** "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, [this is John, he has been transported into heaven, and he is instructed now, "write this down John"] 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them." *NASB*. Now I think it was a blessed thing to die right with God even before the Lord's resurrection and victory over the grave. It was a blessed thing to be able to be there in Abraham's bosom and to be comforted there. But how much more blessed we are now to be able to go right into the presence of the Lord Jesus and to be with him when we die. Read that again. Revelation 14:13, "Write, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from **henceforth**. yea saith the spirit, that they may rest for the labors and their works do follow."

The lesson is this: That those of us who are in Christ should not have any fear of death. Because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The Lord has taken the sting of death away. And we are blessed when we understand this victory of Jesus over the grave, what he conquered, and for us to realize that we participate in that victory, and that when we die we pass from here to go and be with the Lord. What a blessing God has given to us through Jesus Christ. I hope that you will be comforted with this message.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians saying, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." And I hope that you will make a study of these things and be blessed. Many people's understanding is muddy on this. Many have questions. We wonder, "Where are the dead?" "What is going to happen when we die?"

Jesus spoke in Luke 16 of the way that it was then, before he died. Many assume that this is still the way it is today. But this story is about how things were before his victory over the grave. We have a greater blessing today, if we die in the Lord we can go and be with him.

Now the closing thought is, are you with the Lord tonight? Are you are part of his flock? If you were to be called to leave this world, what kind of an exit would you be making? Would you be going home to be with the Lord? Do you have hope of seeing the angels there to escort you?

If you are not right with Him please take advantage of this opportunity this service to confess your faith in Jesus as the Son of God and be baptized into Him for the remission of your sins and to live to his glory and honor.