

What Happens When We Die (Part 2) – 1 Cor 15:23-28

Email testimonies (:35)

- We're in the middle of a mini-series regarding what happens when we die (**Title**)
Based on 1 Cor 15:23-28 (p.961)

This is Part 2 of a 4 or 5 part series – b/c there's so much to say about death, and so much fear of death

And the platform for our understanding of what *happens* when we die, is Paul's general timeline of history here in v23-28 (**Review**)

In the midst of making the point that *those who belong to Christ*, will *rise* like Christ – he provides a framework or timeline, for how it's going to happen

Saying at the end of v22 – *In Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order* [we'll be made alive in this order]: *Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."*

That's the general timeline he lays out, for what happens when we die; Starting with . . .

The resurrection of Christ – *Christ the firstfruits* (23a)

Then, the return of Christ and the resurrection of his people

Then, the reign of Christ in v25 – during which he destroys every rule and authority

Then comes the end – the end of life as we know it, and the beginning of life for all eternity (**Summary**)

But the details of how it all works, and what to expect right *now* when we die . . .

What to expect before Christ *returns* – is found elsewhere in the Bible

And it's critical to understand, b/c for many people, eternity weighs in the balance

Maybe even you; Especially if you don't know the truth, or reject the truth, about what happens when we die

- The first part of which, from 2 weeks ago, is that . . .

1. The souls of **believers** go immediately to **heaven** (2 Cor 5:6-8; 1 Th 5:10; Phil 1:23)

When you die, your soul, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ – will leave your lifeless body, and go immediately to life-giving presence of Jesus

- **A place where Old Testament believers already are** (Heb 12:22-24)

The assembly of the firstborn, and the spirits of the righteous made perfect

Which means . . .

- **There's no such thing as soul-sleep**

Some nebulous state of unconscious existence until Christ returns . . .

- **There's no such thing as purgatory**

A place where the souls of believers go, to be further purified and punished for sin until they're ready to be admitted into heaven; And . . .

- **There's no use praying for the dead**

Their destiny is sealed as we'll see in a few minutes

All implications of the fact, that the souls of believers go immediately to heaven (**Summ**)

A truth that you can/should rest in, with a quiet confidence and blessed assurance (:42)

That said, the 2nd truth isn't so comforting; Namely, that . . .

2. The souls of **unbelievers** go immediately to **hell** (Lk 16:19-26; 2 Pet 2:9)

In between the time when Jesus rose again, and when he returns – right now . . .

The souls of believers go immediately to heaven, and the souls of unbelievers go immediately to hell – a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked

And I say *immediately*, b/c that's what's implied by the fact that there's no soul sleep . . .

And that to die, is to be absent from the body

- But it's even more apparent in Lk 16:19-26 (p876)

This is where Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees in a parable, condemning them for their religious posturing and errant views on wealth

Pointing out, that it will do them no good when they die; That's the main point

But embedded in it, are some truths about the plight of unbelievers when they die

19 *"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side* [which indicates that he was a believer, b/c he went to heaven; and did so as soon as he died].

The rich man [meanwhile] *also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades* [or hell], *being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side* [indicating that the rich man was an *unbeliever*, b/c he went to *hell* when he died].

And before I get to the immediacy of it, I want you to understand 2 things about hell

- 1. Hell is the destination of those who reject Christ

Jn 3:18 says – *Whoever believes in him* [Jesus] *is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

Condemned, as in, pronounced guilty, and sentenced to punishment

Punishment that's described by Jesus in Mt 25, as an *eternal fire* (41)

Or, in Mt 5, the *hell of fire* (v22); Or in Heb 10, a *fury of fire* (v27)

The point being, that unbelievers are *condemned to hell* when they die*****

- 2. Hades and hell are the same place – they both describe the same thing

Hell, coming from the Greek word *Gehenna*, which is derived from the Hebrew word *Gehinnom* – which is the name for the valley outside of Jerusalem . . .

Where, in OT times, child sacrifice took place among some of the pagan cultures

And by the NT era, it was a smoldering garbage dump

All of which is part of the reason that *hell* is synonymous with sin, condemnation, fire, and loathing

Meanwhile, *hades* translates the Greek word – *hades*

And Jesus seems to use both words, interchangeably

Referring to a place of suffering/punishment, after death, for sin/unbelief, in life

Which is a bit different than the distinction some people make between the two (:49)

Some people say that *hades* is a *temporary* place of suffering where the souls of unbelievers go; While *hell*, is the *permanent* place of suffering for unbelievers And while that's not necessarily *unbiblical*, I don't think it's necessarily implied And it's certainly not explicit

Rather, I think Jesus is simply using two terms to refer to one place

A place where the *souls* of unbelievers suffer emotionally, spiritually, and mentally . . . While awaiting their resurrected *bodies* – to suffer emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and *physically*

2 terms, for 2 types of suffering, in one place; I think that's the gist of the Scriptures

- And it starts immediately upon death for the unbeliever
The first indicator of which comes fr v22-23
Where Jesus says – *The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes*
His death, burial, and presence in hell – are all tied together; like it's one event
Just like burial follows shortly after death, so does hell; That seems to be the implication

Which fits the analogy of a *believer's* immediate presence in *heaven* upon death

If death as a *believer* means to be absent from the body and present in *heaven* . . .

It seems likely that death as an *unbeliever*, means to be absent fr the body/present in hell

- And it's reinforced by **2 Pet 2:9**, which says – *The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment*
The day of judgment referring to the Great White Throne judgment in Rev 20 . . .
When everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, will be reunited with their bodies, and judged according to what they've done

The result of which is that believers will receive the reward of *life*, *despite* their sin – b/c Jesus already paid their punishment . . .

And unbelievers will receive the punishment of *death*, b/c of their sin

Punishment in the Lake of Fire, *another* name for hell, where they suffer in the *flesh*

The point being, that God keeps the unrighteous as Peter says, the unbelievers – those who haven't been declared righteous in God's eyes . . .

God keeps them under punishment when they die, until the day of final judgment

Implying, when you combine it with Luke 16, that the souls of unbelievers go *immediately to hell* when they die

- **And suffer for all eternity (Rev 14:11; Mt 25:46)**

Suffering, b/c of words like punishment, torment, anguish, and flame – **Lk 16:24**

And he [the rich man] called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue [Jesus is presumably using physical descriptors here, to describe spiritual/emotional suffering], for I am in anguish in this flame [that's suffering; extreme suffering].'

25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish [there it is again, suffering].

Suffering that goes on for all eternity (:56)

26 And besides all this [Abraham continues in the parable], between us and you a great chasm [a great divide] has been fixed [IOW it's permanent], in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able [in their desire to show mercy], and none may cross from there to us [in their desire to escape].'

The suffering can't, and won't, be alleviated; It goes on for all eternity

Made explicit in passages like **Rev 14:11**, where an angel in heaven says – *The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.*
Referring to the unbelievers who will die in the Great Tribulation, and indicative of all those who rebel against God; All those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
The smoke of their torment, their punishment, will go on for all eternity

It's the same thing Jesus said in **Mt 25:46**, referring to those who live for themselves, as opposed to those who live for him
These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Eternal punishment that Jesus describes elsewhere, as a place of *darkness*, where *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 25:30)

That is, sadness, anger, and frustration – in an *unquenchable fire* he says, where *their worm does not die* (Mk 9:44,48)

Where their degradation, their ruin, their humiliation – never ceases; Just like garbage in a *dump*, never ceases to be violated by worms that feed on its decay

And as uncomfortable as that is, it's eternal*****

Which rules out annihilationism – the belief that the souls and the bodies of unbelievers, simply cease to exist after a time of punishment

Some people advocate that b/c they can't bear the thought of eternal suffering

But it not only runs contrary to the nature of God – who's as perfect in his justice as he is in his love; It's also contrary to the explicit words of Scripture we just saw

Words like *forever and ever*, and *eternal*, and *does not die*

The souls of unbeliever go immediately to hell, and suffer for all eternity

The worst part of which, is that it's . . .

- **Apart from God's presence (Mt 7:23; 25:41)**

Which Jesus was adamant about in **Mt 7:23**; Saying to those who did religious things, but without his heart . . .

I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness; Depart from me

As in, I don't want to be anywhere near you; Get away from me

And in **Mt 25:41**, referring to the same group, he linked it to hell, saying – *Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

Once again, go to where I'm not

The consequences of which, are dire*****

Apart from God's presence, we no longer enjoy the provision and protection of his *grace* – the common grace of God that every living thing lives under right now

His grace of holding all things together in Christ; His grace of heavenly sunshine to warm us, but not bake us; His grace of rain to sustain us, but not drown us

His grace of beauty to inspire us; His grace of love to fuel us (:03)

It's all enjoyed by every living being, but *none* of it exists in hell

Apart from God's presence – there's no saving grace, there's no common grace, there's no mercy, and there's no good; None
Only bad; Only evil

- **With no second chance (Heb 9:27; Lk 16:26)**

There are no second chances in hell

Heb 9:27 says – *It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*
After death, comes an irreversible decision by God, as to where you'll spend eternity

Irreversible b/c of what we saw in Lk 16:26

Where a great divide permanently separates heaven and hell, and no one can cross it – not even temporarily

When unbelievers die, their souls go immediately to hell – and suffer for all eternity, apart from God's presence, with no second chance*****

- And if that's disturbing to you, you're in good company
And if you're saved, it should not only give you cause for great thanks, that you don't face that future – but cause for great *zeal*, to reach those who do
Spurring you on to love and good deeds; Stirring your heart to *pray*; And increasing your *boldness* to speak
Be disturbed, and but don't be complacent

And if you're *not* saved, if you don't believe in Jesus, the only Son of God – you're in dire straits; You're condemned as I speak, and headed to hell
To an eternity of suffering, apart from God, with no second chance

Which means that what you decide now, what you believe now – makes all the difference later; Whether you decide to repent of your sin and believe in Jesus now . . .
Makes all the difference in your eternity (**Summary**)

- And I'm going to give you an opportunity to do that as we pray
An opportunity to repent, believe, and receive – receive God's free gift of forgiveness, and salvation, and life

I'm not talking about feeling bad about your sin, I'm talking about turning from your sin
From your way of living and thinking, to his way of living and thinking

Nor am I talking about belief for the purpose of fire insurance – a cheap kind of get out of hell free card

I'm talking about belief for the purpose of *living* for him – for his purposes and *his* glory; Belief to the point of doing what *he* wants you to do, and being like *him*

That's the kind of belief and repentance I'm talking about

So that you can receive his forgiveness, and salvation from condemnation, and life forever *with* him

If you need to do that, if you're facing hell – I'm going to lead you in a prayer right now
A prayer to repent, believe, and receive (:10)

- **Prayer** – God, I believe; I believe in Jesus, your Son; Who paid the infinite price of dying for my sins, so I wouldn't have to pay the infinite price of hell
I believe, and give you my life; I'm ready to live your way, do what you want, and accomplish your will

So I repent of my sin and sinfulness; I repent of my rebellion; I repent of my waywardness
Please forgive me, and wash me, and save me from the consequences
I receive you into my life as Lord and Savior – so that where you are, I may be also
I repent, I believe, and I receive

- **Pray** – God, bless them, protect them, grow them, and keep them
I know you will; And love you for it, Lord

And as we give of our tithes and offerings – we do so as an *act* of our belief
An act of our worship – for all you've given us, salvation included (no amen) (:13)