

# Paradise and Hades

John 14:1-4 and Luke 16:19-31

## Intro

International musician Sting has won 16 Grammy Awards and sold over 100 million records. But in a interview for Rolling Stone (Dec. 2016), the 64-year-old admits that he spends a lot of time thinking about death. In the interview he said, “I have been thinking about death since I was a kid. I get a kind of spiritual vertigo. I was brought up in a religious background with ideas of eternity, eternal torment or eternal heaven ... I became obsessed with it, maybe morbid about it.”

More and more people wonder what will happen after they die. Many don't know exactly what will happen to them after they kick the bucket. The majority have a fear of death and what will take place after they die.

In his award winning book *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker observes that the feat of dying lies behind much of our effort in life. He says, “The fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else. It is a mainspring of human activity, activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man.” No matter how much we deny death or try to avoid thinking about it, we are never quite ready for it.

What can we do to escape death and its impact? Can we live forever? Well in the Bible we find the answer.

## Paradise – Father's House

In the beginning of chapter 14 in John's Gospel Jesus assures believers of what will actually take place when they die. Jesus has absolute authority over the issue of life and death. There are so many worldviews and world religious views about what happens after death BUT Christ has the ultimate and final teaching on this important subject.

Let's look at this passage of John 14:1-3.

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

*Don't let you hearts be troubled.* Jesus knew that the disciples' hearts were troubled because of the events leading up to this passage. In John 12 Jesus predicts His death to His disciples and in chapter 13 He predicts His betrayal and predicts Peter's denial. You can imagine the disciples' confusion and concerns.

Confusion and concern wondering how it is all going to end is a common experience with practically every human being. But Jesus here is telling us, His followers not to be troubled. Why? Because He is going to prepare a place for us in His Father's house.

Father's house is another name for heaven and paradise. Jesus says to believe Him that he will certainly go to prepare a place for His followers.

But notice in John 14:3 what Jesus says next, *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* WOW! That means that He will personally escort us into His Father's house, heaven.

The moment when a believer gives his or her final breath Jesus comes to take us to be with Him. A believer never, never dies alone! We are personally taken by Christ to be in heaven with Him.

### This truth is taught in Scripture

Remember when Jesus was crucified between two thieves? One mocked Jesus while the other said, *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* Jesus answered him, *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:42-43). That moment when that thief believed and died went immediately with Jesus to paradise.

The Apostle Paul knew this truth too. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 he says, *"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."*

In Philippians Paul said, *"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."* (Philippians 1:23-24).

The Apostle John had a vision of heaven and he writes in Revelation 6:9, *"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."* John sees believers who had died and now they are in heaven under the altar of God.

It is very clear from these passages that the believer goes to be with the Lord immediately after physical death. Also it is very clear that the soul does not sleep as some people believe. It's the body that goes to sleep while his or her soul goes to be with the Lord in heaven waiting for the resurrection of their bodies. This will happen when Jesus comes for His church, the believers whose bodies will be resurrected and the believers who are alive will be taken suddenly to meet the Lord in the air.

Look with me at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, *According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words* (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

This passage states that those Christians whose bodies have fallen asleep will come to life in a new resurrected body to join their soul and spirit with the Lord. AND those believers who are still alive will be raptured to join the Lord in the air. This will happen when Christ comes down from heaven to meet

His precious bride, the church, in air to take them with their new bodies into heaven. From that point on all the believers will be with the Lord forever.

What a glorious ending for all the true believers in Christ. Jesus declared, *“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*(John 11:25-26).

### **Hades**

But this will not be the case for nonbelievers and the wicked. It will be a very sad and terrible ending after they physically die. Jesus spoke of this in His parable of Lazarus and the rich man found in Luke chapter 16:19-31. In this passage Jesus teaches about Hades. Hades is the place where the wicked dead reside and are punished.

In the parable the rich man experiences torment in Hades. This is the intermediate state, for the bodily resurrection and the final judgment for nonbelievers. It will happen in the future at the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15. Jesus' point is that Hades foreshadows the rich man's final judgment. But Lazarus, a righteous man, rests at Abraham's side, in paradise ( Luke 16:23 ).

This differentiation between the wicked and the righteous dead continues throughout the New Testament. The righteous dead are "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8), "in paradise" (Luke 23:43), or in the presence of God (Rev. 6:9; 7:9). The unrighteous are held in punishment waiting the terrible day of the great judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

### **Hades or Sheol** (The place of the dead)

In the Old Testament Sheol is the Hebrew name for the place of the departed dead or spirits. Hades is the New Testament word for the same place as Sheol. Sheol and Hades are identical, one in the same. Sheol or Hades is the realm of the dead, the netherworld. It is an intermediate state where the wicked await the judgment. It is also a place of punishment and retribution for the unrighteous.

### **Conclusion**

The outcome for the nonbeliever and the wicked is horrible and very dreadful. BUT I don't want to end this message on a negative note. I would like to share with you a powerful incident that happened in the life of a very committed Christian as he was facing death. It's the story of Stephen found in Acts chapter 7. The religious Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy because he preached about Jesus the Messiah.

We pick up the story in Acts 7:54-60 and we read, *When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on*

*his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit; he gazed intently into heaven and he saw the glory of Jesus. In verse 56, Stephen says, *"I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* Often Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father but here He is standing. Why is Jesus standing? He was standing to welcome Stephen. He stood up to receive one of His guests, one of His own, one of His beloved followers.

Whenever a believer dies, the picture here is of the Lord standing to receive him or her. That's exactly what Jesus said in John 14:3, *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

This is an incredible promise. "I'm going away to prepare a room for you in My Father's house, and I'm going to receive you into that room when your time comes. Wow, what an amazing promise!