What Happens Beyond The Grave?

Death is not a subject anybody really likes to think about. But it is a part of living. For the believer in Christ, living and dying are realities that both have blessings and benefits.

Heb. 9:27 “It’s appointed to a man once to die; but after this the judgment.”
Ecc. 3:1-2 “There is a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die.”
1 Cor. 15:50 “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.”

There was a man walking through a cemetery who paused and read on a tombstone:

“Pause now stranger as you pass by-
As you are now, so once was I –
As I am now, so you will be –
So prepare for death and follow me.”

The man thought about the words for a moment and then responded:

“To follow you is not my intent –
Until I know which way you went!”

In this message, I’d like for us to see what our loved one[s] are experiencing beyond the grave & what do we have to look forward to when it’s our appointed time.

Only those who are prepared to die are really ready to live!

- Research has told us that those who have thought deeply about death and the afterlife live longer.
- Those who believe in life after death have been proven to live healthier, longer, they have better marriages and less stress and make greater contributions to their fellow man.
- 84% of Americans today believe in the afterlife.
- 82% believe in heaven.
- 70% believe in hell.
- As we get older, we tend to think about the afterlife more because our body is not as responsive to what our mind wants to do. The mind says GO – the body says NO!
- One thing that really tethers you to the afterlife is when you have someone who is close to you - die. Especially when it is sudden or unexpected.

So there is some good news and bad news:

1. A statement of fact: After the grave, you continue to live!
   - Death is not the end; it’s a continuation of existence in another place.

2. Good news: If you are a Christian, that place is heaven, then after that, heaven will come to earth and we will live forever worshiping and serving the Lord with our loved ones who have died in faith. John 14 – Heaven is a place.

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Questions about the afterlife:
1. What happens right after we die?
2. What kind of a body will we have in heaven?
3. Will we know one another in heaven?
4. Will we remember anything about earth?
5. Do people in heaven know what is happening on earth?
6. Are they able to watch us?

What does Jesus say about what happens beyond the grave?

John 5:25-29  “Most assuredly I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God: and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and He given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

Truths from this text:
1. Death is not the end of existence.
   - Every human being is an eternal creature. Non believer or believer.
   - The soul lives on forever.
2. There is a final judgment.
   - Acts 17:30-31 “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”
   - Psa. 75:2 “God says: I have chosen a time for judgment, and I will judge fairly.”
   - 2 Peter 2:9 “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment…”
   - Matt 12:36 Jesus said: “but I say to you that for every idle word men may speak they will give account of it in the day of judgment.”

No question, there is a day of judgement coming!

The fact that there is a future judgment assures us that ultimately God is fair.
- This coming judgment should satisfy our inward need for justice in life.
- Why? Because bitter things happen in this life that are unexplainable and need an answer and justice to be metered out: Acts of violence, terrorism, criminal acts of which we say: How can a person do such things as that and get away with it.
• The answer is that they won’t get away with it – God is in charge and He keeps very accurate books & records and says “The wrong doer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality.”

• Col. 3:25  “Remember that anyone who does wrong will be punished for that wrong. And the Lord treats everyone the same.”

• A medical fact that should encourage us to not bear grudges and unforgiven-ness says that those who forgive and don’t hold grudges live longer; the opposite is true for those unwilling to forgive.

• **If you want to live longer/healthier – prepare for the afterlife and forgive people.**

  Romans 12:19  “Beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.”

• You might say, ok I’ll forgive them for what they have done; but it’s not right that those people who do those horrible things will get away with it.

• Truth is: they won’t get away with it – every wrong in the universe will ultimately be paid for:

  - Either paid for by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross, and the offender repents of their sin and puts their faith in Jesus & they will be forgiven. **OR**
  - It will be paid for by the non-believer at the day of judgment for those who do not know Jesus as Savior.

3. **There are two forms of existence beyond the grave**–

  - John 5:28-29  “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

  - According to scripture, there are two resurrections:
    1. The resurrection of the **just**.
    2. The resurrection of the **unjust**.

The unjust is speaking of the **unbeliever**, the just are those who have put their trust in Jesus as Savior.

Rev. 20:4-6  “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

What is the first resurrection?

  - This is the resurrection that **true believers** will experience.
  - When a Christian dies, their soul and spirit go immediately into the presence of the Lord.
    The physical body awaits the resurrection day.
  - 2Cor. 5:8-9  “We are confident that, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”
Paul taught that to be in the presence of the Lord is what he was looking forward to; not going
to take a long nap – soul sleep; or in suspended animation or purgatory.

The thief on the cross cried out to Jesus asking to be remembered when Jesus came into His
kingdom: Jesus’ response was “This day, you will be with ME in Paradise.”

Immediately, not later.

Death died when Christ rose:

1 Cor. 15:55-57 “O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?
The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us
the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. **What kind of body will we have when we get to heaven?**

   1 Cor. 15:42-43 “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown/buried in corruption; it
is raised/resurrected in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in
weakness; it is raised in power.”

   - It means there are differences and similarities between your body on earth and your new body
   God will give you.

   **Differences:**
   - If you are disabled on earth, you will not be disabled in heaven.
   - If you are suffering through the aging process on earth, you won’t be struggling with that in
heaven. No one knows the answer to how old we will be in heaven – but we will be in a
   glorified state.

   **Similarities:**
   - Heaven is the life of the believer glorified and perfected.
   - It will be like a radically upgraded version of you.
   - Our resurrection body will be like the resurrection body of Jesus Christ - our first fruits
   Resurrection Lord.
   - 1 John 3:2 “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we
shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as
He is.”
   - Christ’s resurrected body was a physical body:
     - His body bore the wounds of the crucifixion.
     - He asked for fish and ate it.
     - He didn’t float around, but was able to enter and exit through doors and the clouds in this
   new body.
     - His resurrection body could ascend-fly?

5. **Will we know one another in heaven?**

   - Why would we be more ignorant in heaven than we were on earth?
   - 1 Cor 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but
then I shall know just as I also am known.”
   - We will know more in heaven than on earth, but the desire to sin will be gone.
   - We will still have love – it will all be pure and even stronger than on earth.
   - Heaven is the reunion or reconnection of where we were separated from our loved ones.
   - Death breaks ties on earth; but they are renewed in heaven.
   - We will be the same people – just in a glorified and perfected state of being.
• You are still you – **just perfect you**. As God originally intended for us to be.
• Luke 24:39 Jesus’ resurrected body – “Behold My hands and My feet, that **it is I Myself**, handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

6. **Do people in heaven know what is happening on earth? Are they watching us?**
   • This is a sensitive subject – because many have close loved ones they have lost.
   • Many people have been told their loved one is watching over them.
   • We need to be careful with this because the scriptures warn us about communicating with those who are deceased.
   • **Duet. 18:10-11** “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or separatist or who consults the dead.”

1. Our loved ones do not speak to us from heaven.
2. They don’t guide us or offer direction or suggestions.

Do they know what is happening here with you on earth or are they completely oblivious to earth’s happenings?

• There are several Scriptures that indicate they may be more aware of earth’s events than we know:
  o **Luke 15:7, 10** Jesus says it twice: “There will be joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than the ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.”
  o That shows a connection between the two worlds. It happens in the presence of the angels, but the indication is that saints in heaven would be the ones rejoicing.
  o It may be that the rejoicing is by those who played a part in that person coming to Christ?

  **Heb. 12:1** “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”
  • They are not so much spectators watching us as their lives are testimonies to us to encourage us to run the race as they did.

7. **When is the first resurrection?**
   **Rev. 20:6** “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the **first resurrection**. Over such the **second death** has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”
   • The first resurrection is the **rapture/catching away** of the Church.
   • **1 Cor. 15:51-52** “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

When a Christian dies – they [spirit and soul] go straight to heaven.
   • But you have not yet received your glorified body.
   • That happens at the rapture.
   • If you die before the rapture, you don’t have your glorified body yet.
   • We all get the glorified body at the same time.
   • So, what kind of body do we have before then?
     o The Bible doesn’t give an answer for that – some type of intermediate body.
8. **Once we’re in heaven, will we see our loved ones again?**

- The rapture or catching away is about a reunion.
- 1 Thess 4:13-18 “I do not want you to be ignorant, concerning those who have fallen asleep-died, lest your sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep-dead. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first – [those who have preceded in death]. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And then we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”

- We will see our loved ones as we are caught up in the rapture together with them – our loved ones who have gone in death before us.
- We will be receiving our resurrection bodies at the same time.
- Death is the great separator; but Jesus is the Great Reconciler.
- It will be a great family reunion in which we will be in Christ’s image.
- We are all glorified.

Death does not have to frighten us. We should long for heaven as a homing instinct to draw us to heaven.

- **In heaven there is:**
  - Reunion with loved ones.
  - Eternal joy in the presence of the Lord, feasting and rejoicing.
  - Praising and serving the Lord.
  - There will also be a judgment – not a judgment determining if you get to heaven; but a judgment taking place in heaven for Christians for rewards sake.
  - 2Cor 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad.”
  - 1 Cor. 3:11-15 “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear, for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so a through fire.”

- There could be the realization when we get to heaven and this judgment process burns up what we thought was good works for the kingdom – that would be upsetting.
- **That is why we are to be aware of what and why we do the things we do.**

**There will be an award ceremony in heaven.**
There are rewards for those who obey the Lord and overcome and use the talents He gave us for His glory. Bema Seat Judgment – Awards.

You will receive rewards if you are faithful to God and use the gifts He’s given you.

**God has given to every Christian three things:**

1. Time
2. Talent
3. Treasure

Some are given more than others, some have less than others.

That is not what is to be focused on.

**You are responsible to take what God has given you,** for you will be accountable for what He has given you and what you do with it to multiply and bring glory to Him.

9. **When is the second resurrection?** This resurrection is for the non-believer.

**Rev. 20:6** “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

- After the rapture/snatching away we go to heaven for 7 years, during which the Tribulation period is happening on the earth.
- After the 7 years, we return to earth to reign with Christ for 1,000 years.
- After the Millennium, there is a second resurrection – Rev. 20:11-15
  “Then I saw a Great White Throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens led away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw, the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.
  The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.
  Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

- If you believe every word of that, it should affect the way you live daily.
- It should cause you to want to reach as many people as you can with the message of God’s mercy and love through Jesus Christ.
- There should be an urgency in the way we live and speak to people because of the severity of being lost for eternity.

If you’re born once, you will die twice [once physically then spiritually].
If you’re born twice, you will die once – only the physical death, then you will live forever.

There is a generation of people that won’t die the first death, they will be caught up in the air and go be with Jesus forever without facing the physical death.

Are we the generation, perhaps so!
Will you be among those who are caught up and don’t have to face the second death?