

14 – What Happens When You Die?



1

Is there life beyond the grave?



2

In 1956 the Belgian Congo was caught in the grip of a vicious civil war. Dr. Paul Carlson's hospital was taken over by rebel forces. Many hospital employees were killed.

Unfortunately, Dr. Carlson was among them.

When his body was found a few days after his senseless murder, there was a New Testament in his jacket pocket. In its pages the doctor had written the date.

It was the day before he was shot, and he penned a single word, "Peace."

Peace in the face of the worst of circumstances.

Peace in the face of death. What gave Dr. Paul Carlson such peace?



3

Is it possible for us to have this incredible peace when we face death? What can keep us from falling apart when death strikes? There are so many unanswered questions regarding death. What really happens when a person dies?

Is it heaven? Or hell? Or nothingness?

You know what's happened to the physical body, but where is the person who lived in it?

When people die, do they totally cease to exist or do they live on somewhere?



4

The pain of death is so searing that we want desperately to believe that there just **MUST** be some way the ones we love are not really gone—and that if we just search, we'll find a way to talk with them still.



5

Does the Bible have anything to say about what happens when we die? The answer is an emphatic **YES!**

In fact, our search leads us right to the very heart and hope of the early Christian Church.

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6

After Jesus died on the cross, His friends placed His body in the tomb.



7

The Roman Governor Pilate sent a guard, and his soldiers sealed the stone covering the mouth of the tomb with a Roman seal. Now no one could take His body. No one, that is, except Christ's Father.



8

Early Sunday morning while it was yet dark, a brilliant angel descended from heaven, rolled back the stone that covered the door of that tomb, and called Christ forth.



9

The risen Savior stepped forth in complete and total victory over death—a mighty conqueror. The soldiers were struck down as dead men by the glory of the angel.



10

The story of Christ's resurrection was the driving power of the early Christian church. Their confidence in the resurrection stood in bright contrast to the beliefs of the pagans who had no hope beyond the grave. The Christians had a message of truest hope. The grave was not the final end. Those who died "in Christ" would someday live again!



11

The catacombs under the city of Rome show the difference between the pagan's death in those ancient times—and that of the Christians. Notice the epitaphs on the tombs of those who died in pagan hopelessness.

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12

Over and over again are inscribed these words of sorrow: Goodbye forever—or, Goodbye for eternity.

Then notice the inscriptions on the tombs of the Christians:



13

Goodbye until we meet again—or, Goodnight until the morning. Their tombs were inscribed with hope and courage, looking forward to a day of resurrection.

Their hope and courage in death was founded in the resurrection and promise of the Savior:



14

(Text: Revelation 1:18)

“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.



15

And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” Revelation 1:18
The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the Christian’s hope!



16

Paul argues persuasively that there is life after death – but only after the resurrection. He clearly states that if there is no resurrection, then there is no future for the Christian.



17

(Text: 1 Corinthians 15:16-18)

Notice what He said:

“If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen,



18

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

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Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”
1 Corinthians 15:16-18.



20

But to understand why he says what he did, we must understand what the Bible teaches about death itself.



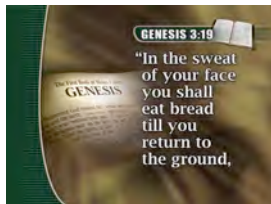
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Death came upon mankind because he was separated by sin from God, the source of life.



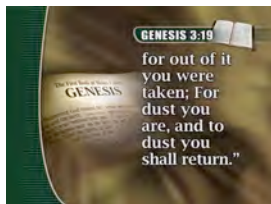
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(Text: Genesis 3:18, 19)
God told Adam after his fall:
“ . . . You shall eat the herb of the field.



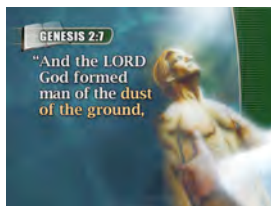
23

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground,



24

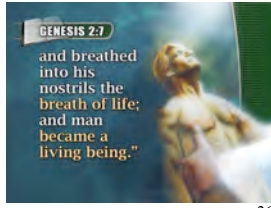
for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:18, 19
Here is the key to understanding what death is all about. The Bible says that man in death returns to the dust from which he was taken.



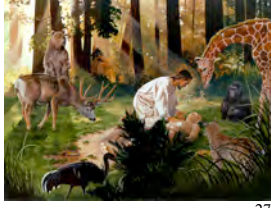
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(Text: Genesis 2:7)
Notice how God created Adam: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground,

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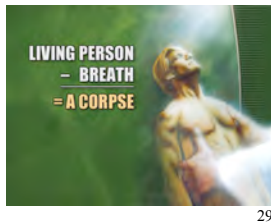
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”
Genesis 2:7.



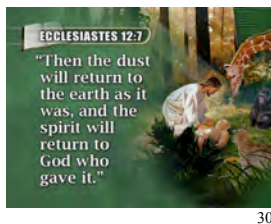
God took the elements of the earth and made a body for man. When He was finished fashioning the body for man, He had only a lifeless corpse—only a body. It took something more to make him a living being. The Bible says here that God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life—and man became a living soul.



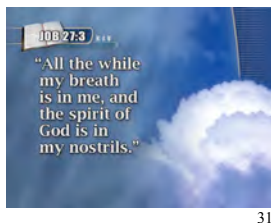
We might make an equation like this:
Body
+ Breath
= A Living Soul.



Or for death, we might write
Living person
- Breath
= Corpse.

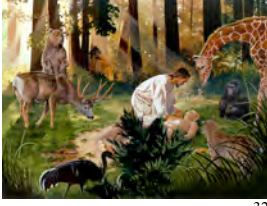


(Text: Ecclesiastes 12:7)
That is what the wise man said in Ecclesiastes: “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”
Ecclesiastes 12:7.
This is essentially the same thing that the Book of Job has to say about death.



(Text: Job 27:3)
“All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils.”
Job 27:3.

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32

That breath is what God put in man's nostrils when He created him.

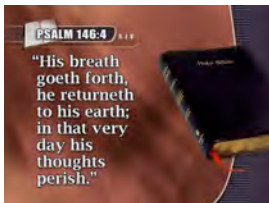
Let's look at what the Psalmist wrote about death:



33

(Text: Psalm 146:3, 4)

“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.



34

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

Psalm 146:3, 4.



35

King David reveals the truth about death when he says that the breath leaves the body and returns to the earth. Man dies. His conscious thoughts stop.

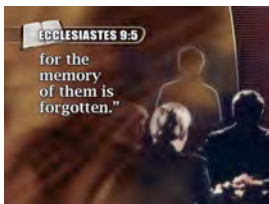


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(Text: Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6)

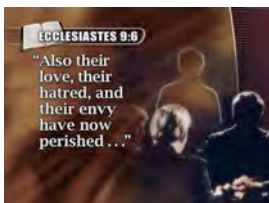
This harmonizes with what Solomon said:

“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward,



37

for the memory of them is forgotten.



38

Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished...”
Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6.

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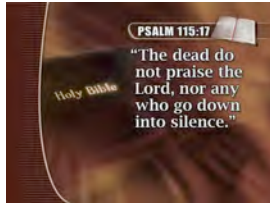
39

He knows nothing!

Nothing! Does nothing mean something?

NO! It means Nothing!

This is in keeping with what the Psalmist wrote, that not even the righteous dead are heaven praising God!

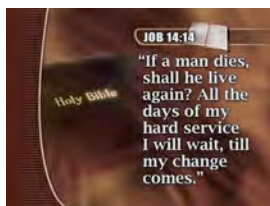


40

(Text: Psalm 115:17)

He makes it quite clear: "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence." Psalm 115:17.

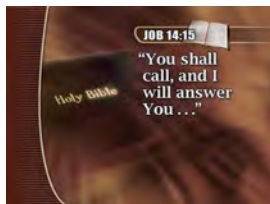
Yes, the Bible is quite clear that the dead simply wait until the resurrection day. Job says,



41

(Text: Job 14:14, 15)

"If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes."



42

You shall call, and I will answer You . . ."

Job 14:14, 15.

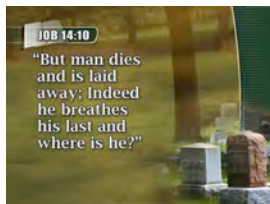


43

(Text: Job 17:13)

And again: "If I wait, the grave is mine house. I have made my bed in darkness."

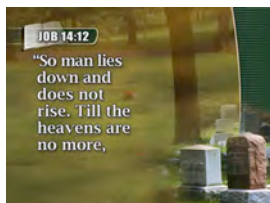
Job 17:13, KJV.



44

(Text: Job 14:10, 12, 13)

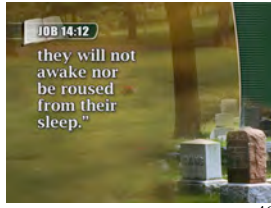
Notice how death is described: "But man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? . . ."



45

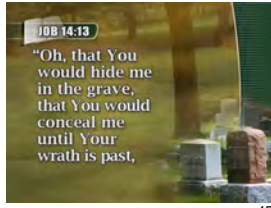
So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more,

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46

they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep.



47

Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You conceal me until Your wrath is past,



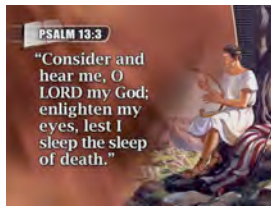
48

that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!”
Job 14:10, 12, 13.



49

Notice that Job used the term “sleep” in talking about death. Other Bible writers describe death the same way.



50

(Text: Psalm 13:3)
David wrote: “Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”
Psalm 13:3.



51

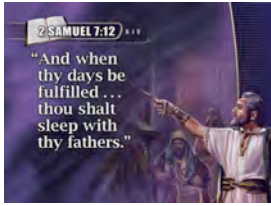
(Text: Daniel 12:2)
Daniel tells about the dead who will be raised:
“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.”
Daniel 12:2.

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52

The prophet Nathan told King David what would happen to him when his time to die came.



53

(Text: 2 Samuel 7:12)

“When thy days be fulfilled, . . . thou shalt sleep with thy fathers.”
2 Samuel 7:12.



54

Jesus Himself called death a sleep.

He used the same descriptive term to describe the death of His dear friend, Lazarus.

There was a home in Bethany that Jesus often visited-the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.



55

(Text: John 11:5)

The Bible says, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” John 11:5.



56

One day when Jesus and His disciples were out by the Jordan River, He received an urgent message from his three friends in Bethany that Lazarus was very ill. But Jesus stayed where He was two more days.



57

(Text: John 11:11, 12, 14, 15)

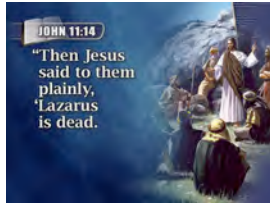
Then Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”



58

The disciples were pleased, they said, “if he sleeps he will get well!”

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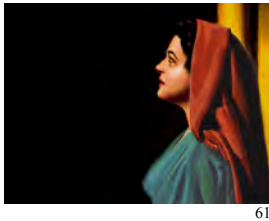


"Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.'"

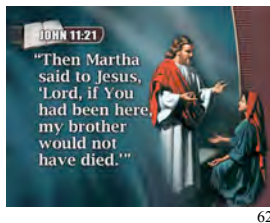


"And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

John 11:11-15



They went their way to Bethany where the family lived. As they approached the city, Martha came running to meet them.



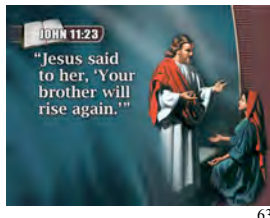
(Text: John 11:21, 23, 24)

As she met Jesus, she said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

John 11:21.

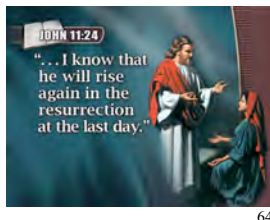
No doubt she was right about that! Jesus was known as the great healer.

But, Jesus had a plan.



He said, "Your brother will rise again."

Now notice carefully Martha's response:

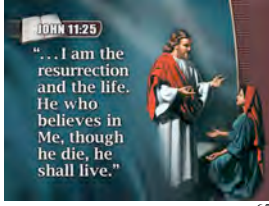


"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

John 11:23-24.

Martha assured Jesus that she expected to see Lazarus in the resurrection at the end of the world. However, Jesus was about to give a dramatic preview of that event.

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65

(Text: John 11:25)

Jesus then said plainly: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”

John 11:25.



66

As Jesus came to Lazarus’ tomb, John tells us



67

(Text: John 11:35)

that Jesus wept!

He was not weeping for His friend Lazarus.

He knew He was going to raise him to life.



68

He was weeping for the grief the family and friends were experiencing and for all those through the ages who would sorrow and grieve when they lost loved ones.



69

Jesus asked that the stone sealing the entrance be



70

taken away.

Concerned by such a request, Martha objected:



71

(Text: John 11:39)

“...But, Lord, ... by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

John 11:39.

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72

But the stone had been rolled away, and Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “LAZARUS, COME FORTH!”
And he did! The one who had been dead for four days heard the voice of the Lifegiver!



73

What a day that must have been for the three friends in Bethany!
What rejoicing and joy!
Friends, that was an exciting day in Bethany,



74

but it was only a small preview of the glory and excitement that will occur when Jesus comes again and all the graves of His other friends who have accepted Him as their Savior are opened—and they rise to meet Him in the air! This is the message of comfort that the apostle Paul shared with the early Christians:



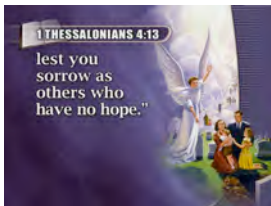
75

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep,

(Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16)

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep,



76

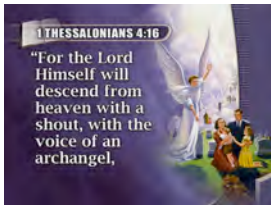
1 THESSALONIANS 4:13

lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”

lest you sorrow as others who have no hope!”

1 Thessalonians 4:13.

Paul tells us what Jesus will do when He comes the second time:



77

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel,

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel,



78

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16

and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16.

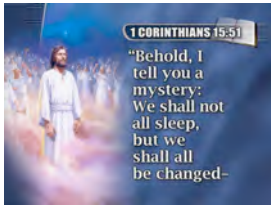
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79

One of the most comforting truths in God’s Word is that when a person dies, he or she rests quietly, undisturbed by the problems of life until the call of the Life-giver.

This is why the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the righteous, was anticipated by the early church as the “blessed hope”! Paul describes in detail the events that will occur on that day:



80

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51
“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

(Text: 1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—



81

1 CORINTHIANS 15:52
in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.



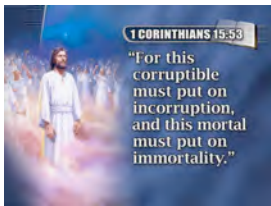
82

1 CORINTHIANS 15:52
For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

1 Corinthians 15:51, 52.

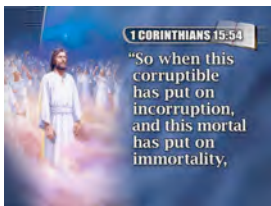
Then Paul tells how we will be changed:



83

1 CORINTHIANS 15:53
“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality.

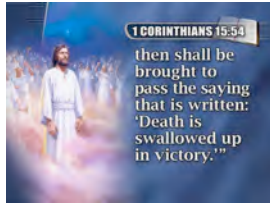


84

1 CORINTHIANS 15:54
“So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality,

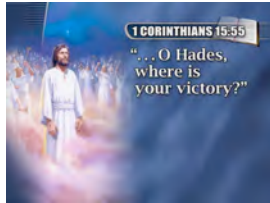
So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality,

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85

then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written Death is swallowed up in victory.



86

O Hades, where is your victory?"
1 Corinthians 15:53-55.



This passage by Paul is in complete harmony with what the Savior told His disciples:



88

(Text: 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



89

and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life,



90

and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."
John 5:28, 29.



Think for a moment: If people went to either heaven or hell at death, why would there be any need for the resurrection of either the righteous or the unrighteous?
Why would Jesus make this statement as He comes back the second time?

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92

(Text: Revelation 22:12)

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”

Revelation 22:12.



93

It seems so plain!

When people die, they are sleeping, they are resting from their labors and troubles until Jesus comes.



94

What is He coming for?

He is coming to resurrect and be reunited with all of those who have accepted His sacrifice on their behalf.

Jesus also comes to welcome those who are His faithful followers at that time. Just listen to this good news!



95

(Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:17)

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”



96

And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

1 Thessalonians 4:17.



97

We have seen that all of the saved will have a glorified body just like Jesus, and they receive immortality (eternal life) so that they will be with the Lord forever.



98

Someone may ask, “What about the story of the thief on the cross? Didn’t he go to heaven with Jesus on the same day he died?”

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99

Let's see what the Bible really teaches about that thief and the promise Jesus gave him.
Jesus was crucified between two thieves.



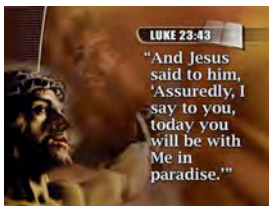
100

The book of Mark says that at first, both of the thieves taunted Jesus and said that if He really had power, He should deliver Himself and them.
Then one of the thieves became repentant and called out for salvation.



101

(Text: Luke 23:42, 43)
He said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."



102

And Jesus said to him, assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."
Luke 23:42, 43.



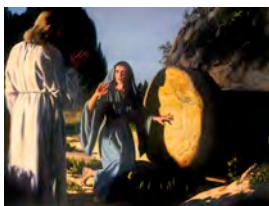
103

Some think that Jesus was promising the thief he would go immediately to paradise. But Jesus Himself did not go immediately to Paradise when He died.



104

The Bible tells us that He died on that day, Friday, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.



105

On Sunday morning, Jesus appeared to Mary, and she wanted to worship Him, but He restrained her because He had not yet ascended to heaven. Listen to what He said:

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(Text: John 20:17)

“...I have not yet ascended to My Father...”

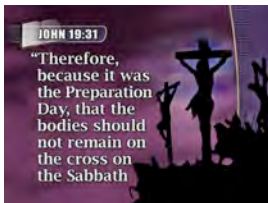
This was Sunday morning, and He said He had not yet ascended to His Father! John 20:17.

Jesus could not have been in paradise on Friday!



107

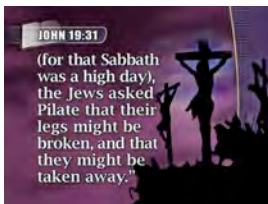
The Bible tells us that the thief was not in Paradise on Friday either.



108

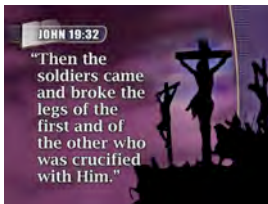
(Text: John 19:31-33)

“Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath



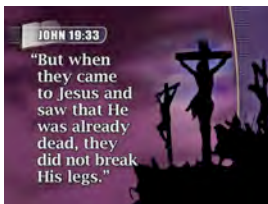
109

(for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” John 19:31



110

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.



111

But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.” John 19:31-33



112

Here we see that they broke the legs of the two thieves so they couldn't escape,

14 – What Happens When You Die?



113

but they did not break Jesus legs because He was already dead on Friday.

So, neither Christ nor the thief were in Paradise on Friday.

So why *did* Jesus say what He said to the thief?



114

(Text: Luke 23:43)

We remember that in the original Greek there is no punctuation. The English translators added it where they saw best. But if we simply move the comma over one word, the meaning is completely different. Jesus was actually promising that *on that day* the thief could have the assurance of being with Him in paradise. What a wonderful assurance to the dying thief! When there was no hope for him. When all he could see was a darkness that terrified his soul, Jesus could promise him hope beyond the grave.



115

Jesus promised that thief in that very hour, “Today I am telling, or right now I am telling you, “you will be with me in Paradise.”

Yes, friend! Today, right now, you and I also can have that assurance. In Christ there is assurance.



116

The greatest gift that God can give to mankind is eternal life, victory over death!

All other gifts are meaningless without it!

And it is yours for the asking!



117

When we lose a loved one we are comforted by the hope of the resurrection. We are comforted by the promise of being reunited with them at the second coming.



118

Understanding the truth about death is so very important. The devil is a great deceiver, and a great impersonator. Many have believed his deceptions because they didn't understand what happens when a person dies.

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119

A well-known international evangelist tells the story of a missionary family in Africa. It was in an era when travel wasn't easy – it took months for them to reach their mission territory.



120

Tragedy struck when their six-year old son contracted malaria and died. The parents were heartbroken. Their joy was gone, their house was quiet. Their hearts ached.

But the work of the mission had to go on. One day the wife was working alone in her home. Her husband was visiting distant villages. While working in the kitchen she heard the screen door open behind her.



121

Turning around she was startled to see the form of her little boy coming toward her. “Mommy! Mommy!” he cried!

Everything in her wanted to believe that this was her son, but she knew better. She knew what the Bible teaches about death. She knew this must be a deception.

“You can't be my son,” she said. “The Bible says that the dead know not anything.”



122

As she mentioned the Bible, the figure before her changed. Instead of her son, she saw an evil angel, which then disappeared. As she related the story later she was confident she saw with her very eyes the demon that had tried to deceive her. Though she misses her son, she has even greater confidence today in the blessed hope of seeing him on the resurrection morning. God's word is true! His promises will not fail!



123

Perhaps you've wondered about death. Perhaps you've lost a loved one, and longed to be reunited. The good news, my friends, is that the Bible's teaching on death is clear. The dead aren't aware of the passing of time. They're not having to watch us suffer and go through difficulties and hardship. They're resting. They're sleeping. They're waiting for the resurrection morning when the voice of Jesus, the Lifegiver, will pierce the tombs and they will come forth.

I'm so thankful for Jesus, aren't you? Aren't you thankful that He

14 – What Happens When You Die?

has conquered death, that He came victorious from the grave?
Wouldn't you like to recommit your heart to the Lifegiver tonight?
Why don't you just stand with me as we pray.

[Suggested Prayer]

“Dear Father in heaven,

We are standing before you tonight, thankful that in you we can find life – eternal life. We're thankful that we don't need to fear death, for you have already conquered it. We're thankful that Jesus rose triumphant from the tomb, and that you've promised to give eternal life to those who will come to you. Tonight we're coming and once again asking you to give us the gift of life through Jesus. We're asking you to give us new hearts and new minds and to make us new creatures in Christ Jesus. Thank you for making it clear in Your word what really happens after death. Please keep us safe from deception and falsehood. Please comfort the hearts of those who grieve with the truths of your word. Please fill us with hope for a better tomorrow, an eternity where there will be no more death, no more dying, no more sickness, and no more pain. Please bless us tonight and keep us faithful to you until that day, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.”
