

WHAT HAPPENS TO US WHEN WE DIE?

By Conrad Barrett

Dying is an experience which everyone must encounter and it can happen any time and at any age. It is not a respecter of persons and sometimes invades our space unannounced. The young as well as the aged are touched by the same visitation, but all are touched.

Dying does not mean a termination of life. It is simply an ending of an earthly human body, as we now know it. Human bodies are mortal and are, therefore, subject to become ill or to be injured and in their present form are not eternal. This status, however, will be changed at the time of the resurrection when they become immortalized.

The soul of human beings is eternal and will never sustain the same treatment as the body. Jesus made that very clear when He talked to Martha and Mary in John 11. In this context Jesus spoke about two different things: one was body resurrection and the other was the eternal aspect of the soul. Specifically, He said **“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”**. This statement references the resurrection of the body. The other statement references the soul. It reads, **“Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”**. No doubt, this is one of the greatest statements made by Jesus. He is simply telling us that if we believe in Him we shall never die. What a promise! What a hope! It’s ours for simply believing in Him. Death, then, is not a dreadful apprehension for the Christian. Instead, it is a doorway by which we go from this world to the next. None want to go through that door, however, and we seem to avoid it at almost any cost. Our human nature cries out for life and breath. We are fully human even though we believe and accept the promise of God. Our world on earth is the only one we have known and the thoughts of an eternal change becomes uncomfortable for us. Simply said, we like it here because it is all we know.

Upon leaving this life one does not go into a grave or an intermediary state where fear, darkness, discomfort, uncertainty and anxiety exist. Christians go directly and immediately to our Lord. Jesus told us in the New Testament story of Lazarus and the “rich man” that we can expect immediate entrance into heaven or hell depending upon whom we have served in this life. In the case of the rich man and Lazarus, the “rich man” went into one place and Lazarus went to another place. One should read carefully that story in Luke, Chapter 16. Both men went directly to their particular places. The angels escorted Lazarus into “Abraham’s bosom”. “Abraham’s bosom” is a place of peace and comfort. The Bible describes it as such. Since Abraham means father, no doubt Jesus had our heavenly Father in mind instead of the earthly man, Abraham. In any case both Lazarus and the rich man went directly and quickly to their respective places in eternity. Both men had their earthly cognates, too. Some contend the story in Luke 16 is a parable, but in this case it is not described as a parable.

The apostle Paul taught us to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. This indicates we are in His presence when we leave this world. What could be more exhilarating than to be with our Lord, and since He is in heaven, we will be there with Him.

Leaving our earthly human bodies is a traumatic experience which many try to avoid. None seem to look forward to such a change. If, however, we know the Lord, there is nothing to fear when the change does come. It is like moving from one state to another and the anxiety of the move comes by not being familiar with the change process, or in not being certain where the change takes us. For the Christian, the change is a promotion from earth to heaven and we are not alone in the moving experience. In Lazarus' case, God dispatched the angels to be with Lazarus during the process. No doubt, that is one assignment which angels have. They are "upper takers". The word death and dying do not relate directly to the Christian based on what Jesus said to Martha and Mary. Instead, moving seems to be a better term.

The Bible teaches it is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment, but we know that death in this verse is a reference to the body, not to the soul because the soul is eternal and is fully cognizant after death and the judgment. An exception to the rule of death is the coming of Christ when Christians living on earth will be changed instantly. I Cor. 15:51.

At the original creation of man, God made Adam from basic dirt and he was lifeless until God breathed into him His life and then Adam became a living soul. That breath was eternal, meaning from that time forward Adam and his descendents would live forever, either in the body or out of the body.

Our bodies are important to us and they have been engineered by God to accommodate us while living on earth. There are certain things we can do in our bodies but they have been designed with limitations. It's when we press them beyond their capabilities that we sustain problems. It's the body, not the soul which has a fleeting dimension. Remember, we are spirits plus bodies.

We have been instructed by the Lord to care for our bodies and God has told us not to defile them; and if we do, He will destroy us. For whatever length of time God allows us to live on earth we should be careful about the Divine charge to care for our bodies even though at times we may not like them.

When our bodies die, what happens to them? **They revert back to the earth in one form or another and will be resurrected at the appropriate time.** The Bible tells us there is more than one resurrection. We are told that the dead in Christ will rise first at the next coming of Christ. This means that people who have moved out of physical bodies into heavenly bodies will come back with Christ and their souls will unite with their earthly bodies. The resurrection of the body will result in a glorified body. The mortal will take on immortality which means we shall never sustain physical death nor suffering nor sorrow again forever.

The Christian has nothing to fear when physical death comes. David in Psalm 23 said, "**The Lord is my shepherd**" and "**even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me**". We should be aware that even though we walk through the valley and in the shadow of death, neither can hurt us. Shadows are not to be feared. The strongest statement in Psalm 23 is that "**thou art with me**". Our consolation is in the presence of God being with us even at the time of our departure from this life. Jesus in the New Testament told us He is with us even to the end of the world. Matthew 28:20. There can be no greater assurance than knowing that our Creator, Master and Lord is with us.

When we, or a loved one approaches the departure time and we are about to go to heaven, remember God loves us and will be there with us. Crossing over to a new horizon is a promotion rather than a fearful experience. **“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”, Paul tells us;** therefore, “we look beyond the grave to the provisions of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”. God is life eternal and He has shared it with us so we will not have to be afraid when our change comes.

Jesus has full knowledge of our world and the world beyond. He knows well the doorway which separates both and He knows how to lead us from the here and now to the there and then because He has walked this same pathway. He has gone through the doorway, too. He has promised to be with us and He will.

“The Path”

**Why should we fear a different path
Where we have not walked before?
This one on which we find ourselves**

**Will end at heaven’s door.
And there we reach another world
One filled with joy and peace
Away from grief and sorrows here
It’s our promised home of sweet release.
So let us look beyond the vale
Toward heaven’s bright and happy shore
Where God and man and angels stand
In love and peace forevermore.**

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