

Afterlife — What Happens One Minute After You Die?

August 6, 2017

Welcome to the CrossWinds Spirit Lake Campus. If you are a visitor, it is great to have you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This morning we begin a new series called Afterlife: What does the Bible say about life after death? Pastor Jordan and I can't answer all of the questions you have about life after death in this series but we plan to cover many important ones.

At the end of the series, we will have a special week or two called Build Your Own Sermon Sunday. If you check your bulletin, you will see a card with some popular questions about life after death that we will not have a chance to cover in this series. Each Sunday you get to vote on the three questions on the card. Each week we will tally the votes and the most popular questions will be the ones we preach on for that final week. That week, you will have built the sermon. Fill in your card and leave it in the pew for the ushers to pick up after the service.

We all need to face it. Unless Christ returns, every one of us will die — 55.3 million people die a year. While I am preaching this message, 4,500 will take their final breath. No matter how many vitamins we take or how much we exercise, death is coming and often in an unexpected way. For instance, did you know 150 people will die this year from falling coconuts? More people die every year from falling coconuts than sharks. It is safer in the water than on the beach! Four hundred fifty people will die this year by simply falling out of bed. Did you know that each year an average of 24 people die from popping that champagne cork? Popping a champagne cork turns out to be an effective way to turn a celebration into a funeral.

While none of us knows how we will die, there is an equal amount of ignorance on what happens to people after they die. While the body goes to a morgue, what happens to the person? This morning — using the Bible as our guide — we will peek behind the curtain of death and glimpse beyond the grave.

To let the Bible give a good answer, we need to begin by taking a trip to the Old Testament, and I need to introduce you to an important term: *Progressive revelation*. While that sounds big and complicated, it is actually simple. It simply means that God reveals more of himself and his plans over time. It is like a dating relationship. When you meet someone, even if you enjoy them, you really don't know them. It takes times to learn more about one another. The more time you spend with your date and the more of life you live with your date, the more you know your date. In a similar way, God doesn't reveal everything there is to know about him and his plans for eternity in the book of Genesis. As the Bible progresses, God reveals more and more about what happens beyond the grave. Let's start in the Old Testament to see how God begins to answer the question, "What happens one minute after we die?" In the Old Testament the answer is a little fuzzy, but by the time we get to the New Testament, things snap into focus.

Sheol - Afterlife in the Old Testament.

The most important word that describes life after death in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word Sheol. Unfortunately, the old King James Version of the Bible from 1611 didn't translate this Hebrew word into English consistently or accurately. Thirty-one times it translated Sheol as hell. Thirty-one times it translated it as grave. Two times it translated it as pit. All of these translations are only partial representations of what Sheol means in Hebrew. This has created a

lot of biblical confusion about life after death that is still with many Christians today.

1. Sheol is not hell.

Hell isn't introduced in the Bible until the New Testament. Hell is also called the Lake of Fire. It is the final resting place of the devil, fallen angels and all who die as sinners apart from Christ. Hell is the final place of punishment at the end of history after Jesus judges everyone. Technically, nobody is in hell today because everyone has yet to stand in front of Jesus for final judgment.

2. Sheol is a place of conscious existence in the afterlife.

In the Old Testament, Sheol is a place of conscious existence in the afterlife. This is why translating Sheol as grave is misleading. Sheol in the Old Testament is a place where everyone who died has a continuing conscious existence of life after death. Nobody ceases to exist. While everyone's body went in the grave, everyone's spirit continues to exist in this temporary place after death called Sheol.

Some modern translations follow the old King James and translate Sheol simply as grave or hell, which is misleading. Since there is no equivalent English word for Sheol that fully encapsulates Sheol's meaning, some modern translations simply use the word Sheol in the English text to avoid being misleading. Let me show you an example.

The NIV uses the word grave for Sheol in Genesis 37:35 but Sheol means more than grave so to not be misleading, the ESV simply translates Sheol into English in that same verse.

All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.” So his father wept for him. Genesis 37:35 (NIV)

All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. Genesis 37:35 (ESV)

3. Sheol was a place for both the righteous and the wicked.

A moment ago, in Genesis 37, we saw Jacob — a patriarch — was convinced he would go to Sheol, which means the place of the dead in the afterlife. Jacob was not a perfect man but he was a righteous man. Sheol was clearly a place for the righteous dead. As we continue tracing our fingers through the Old Testament, we see Sheol was also the place for the wicked dead. For example, Korah led a rebellion against Moses during the Exodus. When he died, he was also sent to Sheol.

So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. Numbers 16:33 (ESV)

4. All who went to Sheol did not have the same experience.

For some, Sheol was a place of comfort. For others, it was a place of torment. Job spoke of some experiences in Sheol after death as a life of pain.

The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering. Job 26:5–6 (ESV)

The patriarch Jacob’s experience of Sheol was very different. It was not a place of trembling but a place of reunion with his ancestors.

When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people. Genesis 49:33 (ESV)

For the Psalmist Asaph, he expected to see the glory of God after death in Sheol.

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. Psalm 73:24–25 (ESV)

There are hints in the Old Testament, such as in Deuteronomy 32:22, that Sheol had two different regions often called an upper and a lower region. The reason there were two different regions in Sheol is because Sheol had two different kinds of inhabitants, the righteous and the wicked. While the division in Sheol between the righteous and the wicked was not explicitly stated in the Old Testament, rabbis at that time taught that Sheol had two compartments.

5. The righteous hoped for rescue from Sheol.

Even though Sheol was a place of reunion and a place where Old Testament saints expected to see God, it was not a place they wanted to stay.

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah. Psalm 49:15 (ESV)

It is interesting how the Psalmist used the word ransom. Even in the Old Testament God was forecasting that one day he would pay a price that would free the righteous from the power of death in Sheol.

If the door to the afterlife is open only a crack in the Old Testament, it is throw wide open in the New. In the New Testament we have detailed descriptions of what happens to both the righteous and the wicked after death which helps us answer the question, “What happens one minute after we die?”

Hades — Afterlife in the New Testament.

While Sheol was our key word in the Old Testament, Hades is our key word in the New Testament. The Old Testament was written almost exclusively in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek. Just before the time of Christ,

Greek Jews were getting rusty on their Hebrew so they made a Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament that was exceedingly popular in the days of Jesus and beyond. It was called the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, every time the Hebrew words Sheol occurred, they translated it using the Greek word Hades. Hades became the Greek word used in the New Testament to describe the temporary realm of the dead called Sheol in the Old Testament. Sheol in the Old Testament and Hades in the New Testament are the same thing.

Many people, and even some Bible translations, refer to Hades as hell. That is not true. They are different. Remember Sheol and Hades are the temporary resting place of the dead while they await final judgment by Christ. Hell is the lake of fire which is the final resting place for the devil, his angels and those who die in their sin after Christ's final judgment. Currently nobody is in hell. Everyone is in Sheol, or as they say in the New Testament, Hades.

Knowing this, we can see how the New Testament pulls back the curtain on what happens to people one minute after they die. The New Testament gives many details about what happens in Hades.

1. There is suffering in Hades.

In Luke 16, Jesus told a parable to emphasize to greedy Pharisees how their fortunes may be reverse in death. In this story, Jesus endorsed the rabbinical understanding of Sheol and Hades that existed in his day. That is the belief that Hades (Sheol) had two compartments, a compartment for the righteous and a compartment for the wicked. People had very different experiences in those compartments based on which one they entered.

Before we look at Luke 16, I want to prepare you for something that may throw you off. If you have the NIV, it will use the word hell in this passage. In the original Greek, it is not the word hell. It is the word Hades. In my opinion, that is a poor translation choice by the NIV.

The context of Luke 16 is a rich man who habitually dressed in purple and fine linen. He lived in splendor every day until he died. His soul was taken to Hades. A Christian beggar named Lazarus, that laid at the rich man's gate every day, also died and was carried to Hades. The experience of these two men was very different after death because each one was in a different compartment of Hades. Let's begin by looking at the rich man.

...and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." 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. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us." Luke 16:23–26 (ESV)

1. The rich man had a body that could experience pain.

And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." Luke 16:24 (ESV)

Rather than passing out of existence after death, the rich man was very much alive. He had his memory. He could recognize Lazarus as the beggar who sat outside his door for many years. He had some kind of body because it tells us he had a tongue and Lazarus had a finger. He was very much alive and in agony. While his family was reading a well-crafted eulogy, he was in agony.

Incidentally, while Lazarus and the rich man have bodies, the bodies they had were not their final resurrection bodies. They were in some kind of temporary body that theologians call the intermediate state. Next week, we will study our resurrection bodies. Never-the-less the bodies they had were real. These temporary bodies have many of the same characteristics as our current bodies even to the point of making them recognizable. Another example of these temporary bodies was Moses and Elijah when they appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Notice Moses and Elijah were recognizable in their temporary bodies.

The rich man and Lazarus both had temporary bodies in Hades which were recognizable and could experience pain. Even today, thousands of years later, the rich man has still not been removed from his suffering.

2. There was no chance for change.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us. Luke 16:26 (ESV)

After the rich man's funeral, relatives moved on with their lives. The grandkids went back to their baseball games. Aunts and uncles returned to work. While the lives of everyone at the rich man's funeral moved on, change was the one option taken off the rich man's list in Hades. Once we pass through death's door, we cannot pick up our suitcase and move out because we do not like the accommodations. As we will see in the weeks to come, there was one change left for the rich man in the future. He still has to face Jesus for final judgment. He still has to be assigned to hell, the lake of fire, which will be the eternal and just

response for his sins. The Bible never says there is a second chance after death. There is not such thing as purgatory.

3. He knew the agony he endured was fair.

And he said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house — for I have five brothers — so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Luke 16:27–28 (ESV)

The rich man complained about the pain he endured but he didn't complain about the justice. He knew his agonies were deserved.

Sometimes we think Hades or hell will be a time of reunion with our old friends. The one thing the rich man didn't want was for his friends and family to join him in torment. What did his brothers need to do to escape his experience of Hades? They needed to repent of their sin. They needed to confess their sin to God and place their faith and trust in Jesus to forgive their sin. The rich man was suddenly interested in outreach and missions. The rich man was willing to never see his family again if it meant they were able to avoid the place of torment in Hades.

4. He knew what he was missing.

...and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. Luke 16:23 (ESV)

This may be the greatest agony of Hades. Apparently the rich man could see Lazarus in comfort while he was in agony. To me, knowing what you forfeited by rejecting Jesus and knowing there was no second chance to accept Jesus, would be worse than any of the physical agonies the rich man endured.

Some of us might feel I am pulling too many details from Jesus' parable about the afterlife. Let me remind you what Jesus did in this parable. He

reinforced the rabbinical understand of Hades that existed in his day. If Jesus wanted to debunk it or correct it, this was his chance. He didn't debunk it. He reinforced it.

In addition, there are other passages of Scripture that reinforce what we just learned about Hades having a place of torment.

...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment..., 2 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

Notice the wicked do not pass out of existence after death. They are kept under punishment until the day of judgment when they will be justly judged by Jesus and given a just response to the sin in their lives for all eternity in hell, the lake of fire.

Paradise - There is peace and joy in Hades.

Lazarus was also in Hades, but he had a very different experience from the rich man. For Lazarus, Hades was not a place of agony but a place of comfort. Sometimes the Scriptures call the place of comfort in Hades Abraham's Bosom. As we get into the New Testament, Abraham's Bosom is sometimes called Paradise. The Bible doesn't give us as many details about this portion of Hades other than to say this is where the saints of the Old Testament went after death. It was a place of comfort and companionship. It was place of reunion with the ancestors who lived before us.

One of the reasons the Bible doesn't offer many details about Paradise is because Paradise was radically changed when Christ rose from the dead. When Christ died on the cross, he left the compartment of the righteous in Hades,

returned to earth and eventually returned to heaven. When Jesus left Paradise in Hades, he apparently took the Old Testament saints home to heaven with him.

Speaking to the thief on the cross Jesus said...

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43 (ESV)

While Jesus went to paradise after he died, he didn't stay in paradise.

...he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. Acts 2:31 (ESV)

After three days Jesus rose from the dead, leaving Paradise, the compartment of the righteous in Hades. Forty days later he returned to heaven where he sits at the right hand of God the Father. The Bible leads us to believe that when Jesus left Paradise, he did not leave alone but he took the righteous from the Old Testament, bringing them home to heaven with him.

We find this emptying of Paradise to heaven prophesied about in the Old Testament. David said, speaking of not just Christ but of himself:

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol.. Psalm 16:10 (ESV)

Psalm 49 is another of many Psalms that carry the same theme of God one day releasing the righteous from Sheol or Hades. This Psalm specifically says that God will one day pay a price to release souls from Sheol, which is exactly what Jesus did.

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah. Psalm 49:15 (ESV)

In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews talked about the Old Testament saints being perfected with us by the resurrection of Jesus.

...since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:40 (ESV)

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul wrote of an experience in his life where he was caught up to Paradise. Notice that the compartment of the righteous after Christ's resurrection was no longer in Hades but it was in heaven.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 (ESV)

To understand this passage, you need to know there are three heavens in the Bible. The first heaven is the atmospheric heavens. It is spoken of in Isaiah 55:9-10 and it says rain comes from the heavens. The second heaven is the place of the sun, moon and stars. As God says in Genesis 1:12, "Let there be lights in the heavens to separate the day from the night."

When the Bible talks about the third heaven, it is talking about the place where God dwells. That is where Paul said Paradise now resides. Those who were in the Paradise of Hades are now relocated to the Paradise of heaven because they followed Jesus from Hades to heaven. This is why Paul said about death:

Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)

This is also why Jesus said in Revelation 1:18 that he conquered death and Hades.

...and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Revelation 1:18 (ESV)

Today, when a Christian dies, he or she goes directly to heaven to be with Jesus. In heaven will also be the Old Testament saints who were brought home

from the Paradise of Hades to the Paradise of heaven. The wicked still reside in the compartment of torment in Hades while they await final judgment.

What is heaven like?

There is a lot we could say about heaven. I will reserve most of it for a future message. Stripping away all the glorious details, it boils down to this. Heaven is being with Jesus.

In heaven, we will we have a massive reunion with our relatives that died in Christ before us. In heaven, there will be unspeakable joy. Beyond the joy and friendships will be the joy of seeing Jesus face to face, feeling his embrace and hearing the words, "I love you. Welcome home."

In heaven, I believe we will have much greater comprehension of the punishment we deserve for our sins. I also believe that in heaven we will have much greater comprehension of the price Jesus paid on the cross for our sin. Every day in heaven we will be overwhelmed with wave upon wave of gratitude to Jesus for dying for our sin and bringing us home to be with him. Being with Jesus in heaven is the pleasure that will trump any other joy that can be found in heaven. When Paul prepared to die, being with Jesus after death was the one thought that captivated his attention.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:23 (ESV)

Imagine the moment you close your eyes in this world and open them to see Jesus in heaven. Imagine the sudden realization that you are the most blessed being in the universe and instead of enduring the never-ending agony of

justice, you are blessed with the never-ending mercy and grace of God's love. Imagine the tears of thankfulness that will flow down your face for eternity.

What about purgatory?

Some of you have heard of purgatory. Hades is not purgatory. The doctrine of purgatory is not found in the Bible. It was a tradition developed by the ancient Catholic church because it had a faulty view of salvation. The church believed Jesus paid for most of our sin but the Catholics couldn't believe the good news of the Bible that Jesus actually paid for all of our sin. They reasoned that Christians surely need to suffer for a few years or even a few million years to pay for the sins Christ didn't take care of before entering heaven.

The Bible says something different.

[If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 \(ESV\)](#)

The Bible tells us that when we ask Jesus to forgive our sin, he doesn't just take away our sin but he gives to us the purity and perfection of Christ. This is why we can be confident that if we have asked Jesus to forgive our sin when we close our eyes because of death in this life, you can be guaranteed to open our eyes in heaven to see Jesus, not because we are so good but because Jesus is so good.

Many of us this morning have a hard time believing Jesus paid for all of our sin. When we confess our sin to Jesus, we often won't forgive ourselves. We punish ourselves even after God forgives us. In punishing ourselves, don't we create a little earthly purgatory to make us feel like we are paying for some of our sin when in reality, the only way to be forgiven is for Jesus to pay for all of it.

When someone sins against us and they confess their sin, while we may say we forgive them like Jesus forgives us, don't we have a tendency to keep reminding them of their sin to make them suffer? We create a little earthly purgatory rather than forgiving them completely and fully like Jesus forgave us.

My friends, the gospel is good news. The old hymn says it well, "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow." If Jesus so completely paid for our sin that there is no heavenly purgatory, let us not create little earthly purgatories in our relationships with other people. As we have been fully forgiven, let us be fully forgiving.

Conclusion

This morning, we are going to celebrate the Lord's supper. We practice open communion. That means if you are not a member of CrossWinds, but you trust in Christ as your savior, we invite you to celebrate the Lord's supper with us. We simply ask you would hold the bread and the cup until they are passed so we can celebrate the Lord's supper together.

While the bread and cup are passed, I ask you ponder the great goodness and completeness of Christ's love for us by paying for all of our sin. When we close our eyes in this life we are guaranteed to open them and see Jesus, not purgatory, in the next life because Jesus loves you so much he paid for all of our sin. Worship him for that.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 tells us to not eat of the bread or drink of cup in an unworthy manner. That means we should examine our hearts for sin which we often ignore before we take communion. While the elements are passing, I want you to examine your heart specifically for little earthly purgatories you may have

erected in your relationships with others. Do you say you forgive others like Christ has forgiven you but then keep reminding them of their sin to put them in a little earthly purgatory to make them suffer for their sin.

Let's pray before the elements are passed.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for telling us in your Word what happens one minute after we die. Thank you for being a just God that punishes sin. There is no murderer which gets away with his crime. There is no rapist or thief that can escape your justice. Even more than we thank you for your justice, we thank you for your mercy and grace through Jesus. Jesus, thank you for taking all of the punishment we deserve while you hung on the cross. Thank you for giving us such full and complete forgiveness that to make ourselves continue to suffer for our sin or to make others continue to suffer for their sin is actually to make a mockery of the greatness of your cross. So as we have been completely forgiven, help us to be completely forgiving. Amen.



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