

WHAT HAPPENS TO A PERSON WHEN THEY DIE?©

By Pastor Greg Hooker

There are various beliefs and confusions concerning where a person goes after death. 1) Some believe the soul 'sleeps' in a dream state and will eventually be resurrected. 2) Then there are those who believe the soul immediately is judged and goes to their final destinations of Heaven or Hell upon death. 3) There are some who believe the soul is transported to a 'temporary' holding place upon death to await the resurrection, judgment and final destination. While there are numerous views concerning the events of a person after death, we have only one reliable source for an answer – the Bible.

To gain a perspective on this important subject, we have to divide people into two main categories: 1) Those who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior; and 2) Those who have not received Jesus Christ as Savior.

I. WHERE DO PEOPLE GO WHO HAVE 'RECEIVED' JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR: *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"* (II Corinthians 5:8).

Notice what the Apostle Paul teaches us in this passage: *"absent from the body" – "present with the Lord"*! Faster than you can take your last breath, our soul departs and arrives in the very presence of the Lord. There is no 'waiting period', no 'stop off point' – we are simply in the body one second and with the Lord before the next second arrives.

We see this same scenario in Philippians 1:23, where again Paul states, *"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better"*. Paul knew it would be far better to leave this life of sin and heartache because he would immediately "be with Christ". He would instantly arrive in the presence of joy, peace and ultimate fulfillment.

While there is no doubt the soul/spirit of man immediately depart to be with the Lord upon death; what happens to the body – that earthly tabernacle of flesh and blood. According to I Corinthians 15:50; our physical bodies cannot go to Heaven, *"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."* It's because of the corrupt and sinful nature of our bodies that they are prohibited from entering the pure and sinless confines of Heaven –

the abode of God Himself. If God were to allow our sinful and corrupt bodies to enter glory, Heaven itself would be tainted.

Therefore, our earthly bodies of flesh and blood are returned to the earth from whence they came, awaiting the resurrection when our souls/spirits are once again reunited with the new and glorified body, like unto the Lord Jesus Himself. *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”* (Thessalonians 4:14). At the coming of the Lord, He will bring those souls/spirits that are with Him in Heaven having left this world through death, their corruptible bodies will then be resurrected from the earth, changed to incorruptible glorified bodies and reunited together with their souls/spirits.

We may also add; there will be a great multitude still alive when Jesus comes in the clouds to reunite the souls/spirits of man with their resurrected and glorified bodies. What will happen to those still living upon the earth? The Apostle Paul describes this event as a mystery, *“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [die before the coming of the Lord], but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality”* (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

At the precise moment the bodies of those planted in the ground come forth to be reunited with their souls; those alive and remaining will receive a new body also. Then *“together we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air”!* This will happen, *“in the moment and twinkling of an eye”!* From the time it takes for a person to blink their eyes, we will receive our glorified bodies and be with the Lord! Those left behind will never see it happen it will be so fast!

In summation, where do those who have received Christ as Savior go at death? They will immediately arrive in the Father’s good care where they will await the time when Jesus brings them back, resurrects and glorifies their bodies and reunites them. Then together with those still alive, *“shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* This is what we refer to as the ‘rapture of the church’, a doctrine clearly taught in the Bible through “comparing Scripture with Scripture”.

II. WHERE DO PEOPLE GO WHO HAVE ‘REJECTED’ JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR: *“...And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments...”* (Luke 16:23).

As was the case of the believer being in a 'temporary' state with the Lord awaiting the final resurrection and glorification of their bodies, so it is with the person who rejects Christ as their Savior. According to Luke's account, the unbeliever dies and immediately lifts their eyes in torment. They close their eyes in death only to open them in horrific pain and punishment. This temporary abode is called 'hell', or 'hades'. Ultimately 'hell', along with 'death' will be cast into 'Gehenna', the "Lake of Fire" following the Great White Throne Judgment.

Revelation reveals what will occur when unbelievers, too, will be resurrected to the final judgment, *"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Revelation 20:11-15).

In stark contrast to the glorious resurrection of the saints, sinners will be resurrected and subjected to a dreadful judgment from whom the earth and Heavens will flee with fear. A Great White Throne sets the stage and He who sits upon it will cause terror in the hearts of those summoned to stand before Him. This judgment is for unbelievers and is not to be confused with the 'Bema', or Judgment Seat of Christ where believers will be judged according to their works in order to receive rewards (Romans 14:10-12, II Corinthians 5:10).

There will be two kinds of books opened at the Great White Throne Judgment for unbelievers: 1) *"The books will be opened"*, most likely the 66 books of the Bible; and 2) *"another book was opened"*, most likely the Lamb's Book of Life. It is from these books that those without Christ will be judged from – the Bible to condemn them of their evil and wicked ways, and the Lamb's Book of Life as convicting evidence that their names are not in it! *"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*

CONCLUSION: What happens when a person dies? It really all depends on whose side you are on – whether on the side of Jesus and His forgiveness, or on the side of Satan and his deception. If you know Jesus as your personal Savior, accepting His sacrifice for your sins; then you have nothing to fear. You

will close your eyes in death one day, only to awake in the arms of Jesus. On the other hand, if you continue to ignore and reject the saving grace Jesus offers you, you will lift your eyes in torment and be punished in everlasting fire and brimstone. The choice is up to each individual, so choose wisely!