

One Minute After You Die – Where are they now?

Sign Title: One Minute After You Die

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If you are new to Faith E Free, I would like to welcome you. My name is Pastor Kurt and we are in the second week of our summer teaching series on *The Mysteries of Heaven*. If you were here two weeks ago, when we began this study, I showed you the epitaph from an old Trucksess family gravestone. In keeping with the epitaph theme, I want to begin by sharing one from a gravestone in Indiana.

“Pause, stranger, when you pass me by:
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be.
Prepare for death and follow me.”

A thoughtful person came along and scribbled his own words beneath the poem.

“To follow you, I’m not content, until I know which way you went.”¹

What happens after we die? When we go to a funeral there is a body in the casket, but what happened to the person? What would we see if we could glimpse into the afterlife? This morning, using the Bible as our guide, we will take a glimpse beyond the grave.

To give a good answer to this question, we need to take a trip into the Old Testament then return to the New. When we finish, you will know what happens one minute after you die. Let’s begin.

Two weeks ago I introduced a big term, *Progressive Revelation*. While it sounds big, it isn’t complicated. All it means is that **God reveals more about**

¹ Ron Rhodes, *The Undiscovered Country: Exploring the Wonder of Heaven and the Afterlife* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1960), pgs. 39-40.

himself, his plans and our eternity over time. It is like a dating relationship.

The more time goes by, the more you know the person. The more time passed, the more God revealed about himself and what happens to us after death.

Abraham and Moses in the Old Testament couldn't tell us as much about the afterlife as Paul could in the New. Let's start in the Old Testament and see how God unfolds this mystery.

Sheol - Afterlife in the Old Testament

The most important word that speaks about life after death in the Old Testament is the word Hebrew word *Sheol*. Unfortunately, the old King James Version of the Bible translated this Hebrew word into English in 1611 very inconsistently and inaccurately. Thirty-one times, they translated it *hell*, thirty-one times they translated it *grave*. Two times they translated it as *the pit*. As we will see, all three of these are bad translations. This created a lot of confusion about life after death that is still with us today. What went wrong in 1611?

1. **Sheol is not hell.** There is a different word for Hell. In the New Testament it is called Ghenna. Hell and Sheol are different places.

2. **Sheol means more than grave.** Sheol means a lot more than to be buried in the grave like your pet dog or hamster. There is a different word in the Hebrew for grave called *kever*. In the Bible, to go to Sheol after death was not to be buried in the grave but *to experience a conscious afterlife*.

3. **English doesn't have a good word for Sheol.** English doesn't have a good word in to describe a conscious afterlife. This is probably why the King James translated it grave, because they didn't know what else to call it. To clear

things up, some translations, Like the ESV and NASB just translate the Word Sheol directly.

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)

4. **Sheol was a place of the righteous and wicked.** As we just saw in Genesis 37:35, righteous Jacob thought he would go to Sheol, but so did people who were wicked. Korah and his rebellious followers were 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)

5. **All who entered Sheol did not have the same experience.** For some, it was a region of gloom; but for others, it was a place of comfort. There are hints in the Old Testament that Sheol had different regions. Both the wicked and the righteous went to Sheol. Some ancient rabbis consider Sheol to have an upper and a lower region.

For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. Deuteronomy 32:22 (ESV)

The Old Testament makes a sharp distinction between the wicked and the righteous and there is the clear implication they have separate destinies in the afterlife. Even though it was clear the righteous and the wicked had different experiences in the afterlife in Sheol, I found almost nothing in the Old Testament where Godly people were positive about being in Sheol.

6. The righteous hoped for rescue from Sheol.

In fact, a common hope is that God would eventually rescue the righteous from Sheol.

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

This is why the writer of Hebrews talked about everyone, even Godly people living in fear of death.

and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
Hebrews 2:15 (ESV)

What happened after the Old Testament? There were 400 years between when the last Old Testament book was written until the appearing of Christ. During that time the Rabbi's tried to piece together what happened in the afterlife. The Rabbi's taught that the afterlife consisted of two compartments in Sheol, one for the righteous and one for the wicked. The afterlife experience was very different for people based on how they lived. The key thing for us to remember is that Sheol is the realm of the dead and there was little understood about it other than how you lived affected where you ended up.

While the door to the afterlife was only open a crack in the Old Testament, it is thrown wide open in the New Testament. Here we have a detailed description of what happens after death.

Hades - Afterlife in the New Testament.

While the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek. When the Septuagint, a Greek copy of the Hebrew Old Testament was translated slightly before Jesus was born, every occurrence of

Sheol in the Old Testament was translated using the word Hades. Every Old Testament quote in our New Testament, that has the Hebrew word Sheol in it, was translated using the Greek word Hades. Sheol in Hebrew and Hades in Greek are the same thing.

Knowing this, we can see how the New Testament pulls back the curtain on what happens to people one minute after they die because we are given some very specific details about what happens to people in Hades.

In Luke 16, Jesus tells a parable to emphasize to greedy Pharisees how their fortunes may be reversed in the world to come. In this story Jesus endorsed the Rabbi's understanding of Hades and Sheol that existed in his day. That is, the belief that Hades (Sheol) had two compartments, a compartment of the righteous and a compartment of the wicked. People had a very different experience in the afterlife depending on which compartment they went to.

Let's look at Luke 16 and see what we can learn. Before we do that, I want to prepare you for something that may throw some of us off. If you have the NIV, it will use the word Hell in this passage. In the original Greek, it is Hades. This is a mistranslation in the NIV, which followed the old King James. This is one reason we will some day replace our pew Bibles with the ESV, a more precise translation. Incidentally, nobody is in hell, the final resting place of eternal punishment, until Revelation 20. We will learn more about this in the weeks ahead.

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 beggar named Lazarus who lay at the rich man's gate every day also died and was carried to Hades. The experience of these two men was very different. 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)

First of all, realize this man's riches did not determine his eternal destiny, it was the choices he made in his life. We will talk more about those choices later in the sermon but for now, let us focus on the fate of the rich man. While his family was enjoying potato salad at the after funeral luncheon, look what was happening to him.

The rich man was alive and in agony.

Rather than passing out of existence one minute after we die, we are very much alive. The rich man said

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)

The rich man had his memory, he could recognize Lazarus as the beggar who sat outside his door for all those years. He had some kind of body because it says he had a tongue and Lazarus is said to have a finger. He was also very much alive and in pain. While the rich man's family was reading his eulogy, he was very much in agony.

There was no second chance.

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 a funeral, relatives move on from the mourning. Maybe they go out to dinner or turn on the ball game. For this man, all options for change were gone. Once we have passed through the door of death we can’t pick up our suitcase and move out because we don’t like the accommodations.² As we will see in upcoming weeks, this agony was only the beginning of his eternity. The Bible never talks about a second chance after death. There is no such thing as purgatory. It doesn’t exist.

He knew he deserved it.

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)

I want you to notice, this man says nothing about how unfair it is for him to be there. He complains about the pain, but he does not complain about the justice. He also knew exactly what his brothers would have to do if they were to avoid his own fate. They needed to repent of their sin. They needed to place their faith in God to forgive their sin. This man suddenly became interested in Reaching His Region and Knowing His Neighbors! He realized the most loving thing he could do was to keep anyone else from joining him. You think he would look forward to the friendship of his brother’s being with him. Instead, he

² M.R. DeHaan

desperately hopes they never come. He was willing to never see them again as long as they weren't with him.

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 all. The rich man could see Lazarus in comfort while he was in agony. That has to be one of the worst experiences, especially when you know there is no longer a second chance.

The unrepentant rich man was in a place of suffering, where there was no escape and he could see what he was missing, experiencing punishment he knew he deserved and from which he desperately wanted the people he loved most to avoid. Hades was not a pleasant experience for him one minute after he died.

Some of you may think this is a lot to pull from a parable. I would normally agree with you if it wasn't for the fact that Jesus was endorsing the Rabbinic view of the afterlife that existed in his day. If he wanted to debunk it, this was his chance. Secondly, there are other clear passages of Scripture that support what we just learned.

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 that the wicked do not pass out of existence. They are kept under punishment for the day of punishment. This is the present, active, infinitive form of the verb which means the wicked are held captive in punishment continuously until the day of judgment when they are finally consigned to hell.

What about Lazarus?

Lazarus was in a place of comfort called Abraham's bosom. This would be known as the compartment of the righteous in Sheol or Hades. It was also called *Paradise*. The Bible doesn't give us as many details about this portion of Hades. Apparently it was a pretty nice place. It is a place of comfort and companionship. So death for those who in faith trusted God to handle their sin was a good thing.

Why do you think Scripture doesn't offer us more details about Paradise? I think there are scant details about what Paradise was like because the Bible hints that Paradise changed dramatically when Christ rose from the dead.

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)

Apparently, when Christ died, he went to Hades but he didn't stay there. I don't think he went to the place of torment, being sinless, he wouldn't go there. He went to the place of comfort. But he didn't stay there. He rose from the dead, came back to life and after forty days ascended to heaven. Scripture leads us to believe that when he left this compartment of Hades, he did not leave alone, but took those who were in the compartment of the righteous with him to heaven when he left.

In the Old Testament we find the hope that one day God would take the souls of the righteous out of Paradise and into heaven. David writes,

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

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

The writer of Hebrews also talked about this. It seems the Old Testament saints didn't experience what God planned for them until Christ came and rose from the dead.

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

When Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, he assumes that Paradise, the compartment of the righteous, is now 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, you need to know there are three heavens in the Bible.

The First Heaven - The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven. This is the domain of the clouds and the birds.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth... For as the rain comes down... from heaven.” Isaiah 55:9-10

The Second Heaven - This is the domain of the heavenly bodies. It is the domain of the sun, moon, stars and planets. It is outer space.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, Genesis 1:14 (ESV)

The Third Heaven - When Paul talks about the third heaven, we know it is beyond the earthly heaven and the domain of the outer space heaven. It is the place where God dwells. The important thing for us to see is that Paradise, the home of the righteous dead, is now in heaven. So apparently the dreams of the Old Testament Saints were realized. It wasn't bad being in a place of comfort,

but it is much better to be in heaven. It seems they followed Christ there. For those who have trusted Christ, one minute after they die, the angels of God will also carry them to the presence of Christ in heaven.

What is heaven like?

There is a lot we could say about what heaven will be like. But stripping away all the technicalities and specific details, it boils down to this: Heaven is where Jesus is. That is the most important thing. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said

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)

He wasn't excited about going to heaven, he was excited about being with Jesus.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians he didn't say he couldn't wait to get to heaven.

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)

What makes heaven worth being there is Jesus. He is the only reason we have heaven. Every good thing we have for eternity, being saved from our sin, being honored and loved for eternity; it is all because Jesus chose to love us. We don't deserve any of it. Imagine the moment we see him and know we deserve eternal punishment because of our sin, but we are present in heaven and even honored in heaven not because we deserve it, but because Jesus loves us, Jesus died for you, so we can be in heaven with him. Imagine the beauty of heaven and the tears of thankfulness as we fall into firm embrace of Jesus and he says, "Welcome home, I love you."

Heaven is where Jesus is, wherever Jesus is, that is where we want to be.

How can I be sure to be with Jesus?

The Bible says that one minute after we die, the path for our eternity is irrevocably sealed. Either we begin our fully deserved eternal punishment for our sin against an infinite God or we are welcomed into heaven purely because of all Jesus has done for us that we don't deserve.

The prospect of spending eternity with Christ in is powerful, but it requires a decision on your part today. Those in heaven are there because

1. They have asked Jesus to be the savior for their sin through his death on the cross.
2. They have asked Jesus, who is the king of everything, to be the king of their life.
3. The greatest joy in their heart is that Jesus loves them. After all, if Jesus loves us, what else do we really need?

As I close in prayer, if you haven't made the decision to have Jesus as your savior, king and joy, I invite you to make that decision now and join me by praying with me in your heart.

Prayer

Father, I know I deserve punishment for my sin. I deserve to be like the rich man in Hades. I thank you Jesus for not leaving me there but for loving me. Thank you for dying for my sin. Right now, I ask you to be my savior, my king and my joy. Amen.

This is an exciting Sunday because heaven is an exciting place. Did you know there is a time when heaven will be better than it is now? Join us next week as we learn about when heaven gets even better. See you then.



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