

“...concerning the resurrection.”

- Matthew 22:23-33

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at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on August 6th, 2017

23 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, 24 saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 25 "Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. 26 "Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. 27 "Last of all the woman died also. 28 "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. 31 "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." 33 And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.



This account is once again an attempt to trap and/or discredit Jesus. He was posed this question by a Sadducee, and the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection or the afterlife, hence the old joke that that is why they were “sad you see!” Like many folks, it is highly doubtful that this man was legitimately seeking an answer, but rather looking for a way to throw Jesus ‘under the bus.’ It was all and always about ‘pecking order’ and power. It was never about theology and doctrine, excepting the use of such as ammunition.

The question has been asked since the beginning of time. Perhaps you could even say such has haunted mankind, plagued humanity, and affected the path of every individual who has ever lived. What other subject can claim that? It has driven decisions, altered the course of history and been the source of soul searching and intellectual justification by untold millions that have passed on before us as well as those who walk the streets of America every day:

“What happens after we die?”

There is a story involving the life and death of Alexander the Great. Alexander, after conquering many kingdoms, was returning home. On the way, he fell ill and it took him to his death bed. With death staring him in his face, Alexander called his generals and said, “*I will depart from this world soon, I have three wishes, please carry them out without fail.*” His generals agreed to abide by their king’s last wishes.

“My first desire is that,” said Alexander, “My physicians alone must carry my coffin.” After a pause, he continued, “Secondly, I desire that when my coffin is being carried to the grave, the path leading to the graveyard be strewn with gold, silver and precious stones which I have collected in my treasury. “My third and last wish is that both my hands be kept dangling out of my coffin.” Alexander’s favorite general said “O king, we assure you that your wishes will all be fulfilled. But tell us why do you make such strange wishes?”

At this Alexander took a deep breath and said: “I would like the world to know of the three lessons I have just learned. I want my physicians to carry my coffin because people should realize that no doctor can really cure anybody. They are powerless and cannot save a person from the clutches of death. So let people not take life for granted.

The second wish of strewing gold, silver and other riches on the way to the graveyard is to tell people that not even a fraction of gold will come with me. I spent all my life earning riches but cannot take anything with me. Let people realize that it is a sheer waste of time to chase wealth.

And about my third wish of having my hands dangling out of the coffin, I wish people to know that I came empty handed into this world and empty handed I go out of this world.” Alexander’s last words were “*Bury my body, do not build any monument, keep my hands outside so that the world knows the person who won the world had nothing in his hands when dying*“. With those words, the king closed his eyes as death conquered **him** and he breathed his last.

It’s not like we are hearing a lot from the other side...those who have gone on ahead of us. No, man has endlessly sought for those answers from the ‘firsthand viewpoint’ but have yet to get that phone call. The great magician Houdini, who seemed to be obsessed with death and the occult left a secret message with his wife Beth that he would...if he could...try to communicate from the “other side” if he died before her. *But alas*, he never called.

In Acts 26:8, Paul the Apostle...a prisoner bound for Rome, was still ‘about the Father’s business.’ While defending his teaching as a prisoner bound for Rome, He made an interesting statement to King Herod Agrippa II: “*Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?*” (Acts 26:8). It’s a question that could easily be posed to our modern world today. The irony of such a premise is that today our secular world regularly embraces all sorts of ‘mind-over-matter’ concepts that have no basis or evidence in available science or proof, and yet will quickly and resoundingly reject the concept of the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul of man. Perhaps it’s just that we don’t care for the secondary ramifications of such if it is true?

Steven Hawking said that “The belief that heaven or an afterlife awaits us is a ‘fairy story’ for people afraid of death. In a dismissal that underlines his firm rejection of religious comforts, Britain’s most eminent scientist said there was nothing beyond the moment when the brain flickers for the final time.”

Yet Paul clearly believed that he himself would also “rise from the dead.” His statement to Herod was "Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, *that He would be the first to rise from the dead*, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." He obviously believed others would follow Jesus...

Paul stated in Philippians 3:20 that “... *our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*” And we have the whole of 1Corinthians 15 as well, in which he speaks in some detail concerning our resurrection after the death of these bodies. It is there we read concerning the nature of this resurrection: “It is sown a natural [physical] body, *it is raised a spiritual body . . .* And as we have borne the image of the earthy, *we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.* Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...” (1 Corinthians 15:44, 49-50).

Well, where *are* we then after we stop breathing? What’s happening out there? Several passages in the New Testament make it clear that man’s conscious existence is endless. Matthew 27:52 does indeed tell us “And the graves were opened; and many *bodies* of the saints which slept arose. But please note that the scripture says that the “bodies” slept, and the *bodies* arose. Jesus said: “*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.*”. . . *Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.”* (John 11:11, 14).

Death to Jesus was never anything more than sleep. It is a figure of speech that the Bible uses for there is never a pause in our consciousness. It was the **body** of Lazarus that was dead. It was his **body** that Martha said stinks:

“for he hath been dead four days.” When Jesus said plainly that Lazarus was *dead*, He could mean only his body, for when He added: “I go, that I may awake Him out of sleep,” He did this by raising the *body* of Lazarus from death and the grave.

Since the soul of man never dies, and the soul is as much a part of man as is his body, then we in essence are able to say that the dead are actually alive. Think for a moment of our Lord’s last words as He hung dying upon the Cross. He said: “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.” (Luke 23:46). Only a little over three decades before, Christ had come from the presence of the Father, His spirit having taken its abode in the body prepared by God in the womb of the Virgin. He came to bring life and reveal the reality of immortality to the world through His Gospel: *to show man that he could have everlasting life.*

It was His words, “Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit,” that expresses to us the doctrine of immortality. Christ was teaching the world the survival of the spiritual part of man after his physical body has died. Death to Jesus was but a passage into the presence of God, not a cold unconscious condition. He knew all about life and death, and He left us with divine assurance that only the body dies. The spirit continues to exist in a conscious state.

Further, it was there on the day of His own crucifixion that he spoke those words to the thief on the cross next to him that have echoed down through the millennia: *“Today you shall be with me in paradise...”* Not 3000 years from now after centuries of ‘soul sleep’, but that day...at the moment of his bodies ‘death.’ They were indeed killing his body, but Jesus promised him that there would be no time of waiting, no pause of sleep or unconsciousness of the soul. Jesus assured him that before that very day would come to a close, he would still be alive and with Him in Paradise. Jesus once said : “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (Luke 12:4). It is that surety of immortality and eternal life that empowers the servants of Jesus Christ to deal with suffering, face opposition, and even die if they are called upon to do so. The enemies of Christ can never cheat us out of the presence of our Lord and the place that He has prepared for us.

So what will eternity be like for us and what will *we* be like in eternity?

Well, much of the details of life on ‘that side’ is indeed unknown. We know it will be wonderful, but perhaps God left out the particulars because He wanted us to ‘finish our meal before we worried about dessert.’ We have much to do and pursue on this plain of existence before we start meditating on packin’ it in and headin home. But if you imagine sitting on clouds playing a harp, I think you are gravely mistaken.

Yes, we will recognize our loved ones in heaven, although they may look somewhat different. Mary didn’t recognize Jesus immediately after His resurrection and neither did those boys on the Emmaus road...until Jesus ‘open their eyes.’ We will no doubt still have our emotions...*albeit significantly changed and purified*, for scripture speaks of our active and consistent worship and our attendance to the ‘wedding feast’ that awaits us. Such leads us to grasp that we will still appreciate beauty, wonder, awe, passion and pleasure (and the taste of food!)

I do not pretend to understand every nuance of life on that plane of existence. One wonders how we cannot be pained by the eternal loss of those who died apart from God. I do not know. Perhaps because scripture tells us that *“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”* (1Co 13:12) In my understanding will come clarity, and with my clarity will come understanding. And the Bible tells us that there God "will wipe away every tear from my eyes." (Rev. 7:17)

We know that heaven will be forever, and that’s hard for us to comprehend because we are such liner time creatures. It’s nearly impossible to grasp a God who ‘has no beginning and has no end.’ Maybe we are thinking about wrong. Perhaps the key is rather that *there is no time there.* The past, present, and future are all before us,

and that certainly fits with the power of God to see and know all things. We must however also add here that hell also is eternal, and we will not just “cease to be” like that of the teaching of annihilationism.

Jesus declares in Matthew 25:41 that the destiny of the unsaved is “*the eternal fire prepared for the devil.*” Matthew 25:46 uses the same adjective, ‘eternal,’ to describe the fates of the lost and saved: “eternal punishment” and “eternal life.” Jesus depicts “hell” as a place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47–48). Paul’s reference to “eternal destruction” in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, indicates a figurative devastation that the damned will experience forever in hell, separated from the Lord’s presence.

We will not be bored in heaven. Simply on a note of observation, I noticed that God made the earth and everything in it in 6 days, and then when he left 2000 years ago Jesus said “*I go to prepare a place for you.*” (John 14:2-3) *Hmmm...* He made some pretty cool stuff in 6 days! What could He do with 2000-plus years? A place as perfect as the Garden of Eden. A place where God physically walked with man “in the cool of the garden.” (Gen 3:8) Wow. Talking a walk with God...